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HISTORIETTES OF THE RESTORATION \*\*\*

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# COURT BEAUTIES OF OLD WHITEHALL

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***Elizabeth Hamilton***  
*Countess of Gramont.*  
*from the picture by Lely.*

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COURT BEAUTIES OF  
OLD WHITEHALL

HISTORIETTES OF  
THE RESTORATION

BY

W. R. H. TROWBRIDGE

WITH THIRTY-TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

"A Court without fair women is like a year without a spring, a spring-time without flowers."  
*A Sigh of Francis I., when prisoner in Spain*

LONDON: T. FISHER UNWIN  
NEW YORK: CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS  
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TO  
ETHEL AND HERBERT NICOL

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# Preface



IF we may believe so eminent an authority as M. Emile Bourgeois, whose "Le Grand Siècle," is a fascinating proof of his statement, "the age we live in delights in inquiry into the private lives of the great and into the spirit of society of the past. It loves to interrogate them directly, so that it may get at the secrets of their passions and find out their state of mind at different periods. This curiosity is not culpable. 'It almost ceases to be curiosity,' said Voltaire, 'when it has epochs and men who attract the gaze of posterity for its object.'"

Such an epoch in English history is *par excellence* the Restoration. It is a subject on which an immense number of books has been written. Of the eight beautiful women whose extraordinary careers are described in the following pages, the names of all are probably more or less familiar to the reader, while some—such as "Madame" and the Duchess of Portsmouth—have provided several historians with themes that have elevated them to the proud height of classical authority. Forneron's "Louise de Kéroual" is not only a monumental study of the English Restoration, but a fascinating romance and a work of real literary merit. And many distinguished writers, from the *spirituelle* Madame de La Fayette down to M. Anatole France, have found in the life of "Madame," the most brilliant of all the Stuarts, a constant source of inspiration.

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To enter, therefore, into competition with such a galaxy of talent would seem almost presumptuous, more especially as this book makes no claim to literary erudition or grace. On the contrary, my object has been not to paint finished portraits of beautiful women, but rather to popularise characters who helped to colour one of the most memorable periods of our history. From this point of view the Restoration will be found to be a mine containing a vein from which ore may still be extracted—the ore of amusement from the vein of curiosity.

As regards the illustrations, I am especially obliged to—

The Duc de Guiche for obtaining for me the permission of his father, the Duc de Gramont, to engrave his portrait of Armand, Comte de Guiche. This portrait is, I believe, the only one of the Comte de Guiche known to exist, and is now published for the first time.

I am also indebted to Earl Spencer, the Earl of Sandwich, Dr. G. C. Williamson, and the *Strand Magazine* for their courtesy in granting me permission to reproduce the portraits respectively of the Countess of Shrewsbury, the Duchesse de Mazarin, "Madame," and the medals of the Duchess of Richmond.

[11]

\* \* \* \* \*

A list of the principal sources from which the information necessary to compile this book has been gathered is herewith appended:—

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Pepys' "Diary."

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*Tatler* No. 50.

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Countess of Shrewsbury.

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Forneron's "Louise de Kéroual."

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Reresby's "Memoirs."

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"Dictionary of National Biography."

W. R. H. TROWBRIDGE.

LONDON, *February, 1906.*

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*Photo.*

*Gouffier.*



**HORTENSE MANCINI, DUCHESSE DE MAZARIN.**  
*From the Portrait by Mignard, in the  
possession of the Earl of Sandwich.*

# HORTENSE MANCINI, DUCHESSE DE MAZARIN

## AN ADVENTRESS OF THE RESTORATION

IT was the dream of Richelieu, as everybody knows, to make the French monarchy independent and absolute. This dream was only half realised when the Cardinal died, but as he was too astute not to foresee that after his death there would be a violent reaction against his policy, he had sought a successor who would be capable of finishing what he was obliged to leave undone. He found the man he wanted in an obscure Italian, who proved in the end to be even more subtle and slippery than his Eminence Rouge himself. It was not so much hatred of Mazarin that inspired the civil war with which France was rent during the childhood of Louis XIV. as inarticulate hatred of Richelieu's statecraft. The Fronde was the *dernière espérance* of a proud and turbulent nobility bent on reducing their King to the condition of a Venetian doge. This revolt against the throne ended with the complete triumph of Mazarin—a triumph embellished by the passion with which he inspired the haughty, treacherous Anne of Austria. There are men who on finding themselves in his shoes would have given free rein to ambition and desire. The sly Italian adventurer, however, apparently considered himself sufficiently recompensed by amassing the greatest fortune in Europe and winning the heart of a queen. Having "arrived," as we say nowadays, the Cardinal sent to Rome for the children of his sister, Hieronima Mancini, to come to France and share his prosperity.

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Five little girls and a little boy, perfectly beautiful children, according to all accounts, on receipt of this invitation were got ready as soon as possible, and sent off to the Palais Mazarin in Paris, where they had a king and his brother for playmates. Few children ever had more splendid advantages—certainly no children in that day—and none ever benefited less by them. Perhaps it was not altogether their fault, for though affectionate and intelligent they were afflicted with an incurable spiritual infirmity. The Mancinis altogether lacked the moral sense. Furthermore, the system of education to which they were subjected, with its espionage and inducements to deceit, coupled with the demoralising mixture of indulgence and severity with which their uncle treated them, was anything but calculated to correct the faults of nature. These quick-witted, wilful children were, as retribution for his sins, said his enemies, constantly dashing the hopes and outraging the feelings of their uncle, whose life within the splendid walls of the Palais Mazarin they caused to resemble that Fronde with which he had battled so desperately in the State.

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"At least," he used to plead when they objected to hearing Mass, "if you don't hear it for God's sake, hear it for the world's."

But the Mancinis never showed the slightest aptitude for learning lessons in hypocritical respectability; vice with them was ever naked and unashamed.

The Cardinal had intended, as was but natural, to leave his immense fortune and his name, which he desired to perpetuate, to his nephew, Philip, on whom he had already bestowed the title of Duc de Nevers. But this young man, who had as little brains as he afterwards lacked importance, took it into his head one Good Friday to celebrate Mass over a pig, an enormity that cost him Mazarin's name and fortune. In other respects the Duc de Nevers was a harmless nonentity and turned out well—for a Mancini. He seems to have spent the greater part of his useless life in composing doggerel verses which he addressed to his sisters. The names of these celebrated beauties were Laure, Olympe, Marie, Hortense, and Marie Anne. The Cardinal married the first to the grandson of the "Charmante Gabrielle" and Henri IV., by whom she had a son destined fifty years later to win renown in the Marlborough Wars as the Duc de Vendôme, a man whose memory Saint-Simon has preserved for us in vitriol. Laure was the only one of Mazarin's nieces on whom there is no slur. She died young.

The youngest, Marie Anne, became the Duchesse de Bouillon. She had the ready wit of all the Mancinis, and her repartees in the "Poison Affair," the *cause célèbre* of the reign of Louis XIV., should still be remembered, as well as her patronage of La Fontaine. Her life was, on the whole, decorous enough, according to the seventeenth-century standard of propriety, but, while more or less eventful, extremely uninteresting by contrast with that of Olympe, Marie, and Hortense. It is these three that one means when one mentions Mazarin's nieces. They gave Europe much to talk of in their day, and have given it much to write about since.

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It was lucky for Olympe that she was not born in the present century; if she had lived now she would probably have spent the greater portion of her career in prison and died on the gallows. But with over two hundred years between her and us she seems rather picturesque. Brought up in the same nursery, so to speak, with Louis XIV. and his contemptible brother, Philippe d'Orléans, Olympe Mancini aspired to be Queen of France. This splendid destiny seemed possible of fulfilment, for the young King was smitten and the Cardinal was favourable. But if Anne of Austria was ready enough to be Mazarin's mistress, she objected to marrying her son to Mazarin's niece. Anne was a Spaniard and a Hapsburg; she could stomach anything but a *mésalliance*. The result of Olympe's aspirations was, we know, such a *mauvais quart d'heure* with Anne for the Cardinal as to terrify him. Olympe, however, was *intrigante*, and waged a sort of Fronde of her own in the Palais Mazarin, till Louis, who had never been very fond of her, fell head over ears in love with her sister Marie. Then she suffered her uncle to marry her to a younger son of the House of Savoy, the Comte de Soissons. One of their sons was afterwards world-famous as Prince Eugene of Savoy. But marriage did not, unfortunately for her, "settle" the Comtesse de Soissons; plotting and mischief-making generally, mixed up with a *liaison* or two, kept her busy

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till the bursting on society of the "Poison Affair," in which she was implicated. The order for her arrest was issued, but Louis, glad to be rid of her, gave her the chance to flee the country. She lived henceforth the shadiest of lives wandering about Europe.

Quite as chequered was the career of Marie. The harassed Cardinal, who had no intention of incurring a second time the displeasure of the Queen Mother, no sooner discovered the attachment of the young King for his lovely niece than with all possible haste he sent her back to Rome, where she eventually married the Constable Colonna. Her parting with Louis is celebrated; it has inspired poems, novels, essays, and plays. For the sake of the story it is a pity that he should have treated her so shabbily years after when she appealed to him in her troubles. As these were mixed up with those of her sister, Hortense, with much *éclat* at a later period, we will defer their description and hasten to introduce our heroine, the most beautiful and best known of the famous nieces of Mazarin. [22]

Hortense's intelligence and sweet disposition had from the first made her the Cardinal's favourite, and after his nephew had offended him he decided that she should be his heir. The report that she was to inherit the Mazarin millions naturally induced many splendid offers for her hand, which her own dazzling charms quickly coloured with a passion for herself. "The destiny," she declared in the memoirs she dictated, "that has rendered me the most unhappy of my sex began by dangling a crown before my eyes." It is a notorious fact that Charles II., *roi sans couronne*, twice proposed for her hand, and was twice refused by the Cardinal, who was at the time the ally of Cromwell and not shrewd enough to foresee the future. In like vain manner the splendid prize was sought by the Prince, afterwards King, of Portugal; the Duke of Savoy; and the great Turenne. Her uncle finally gave her to Armand de la Porte de la Meilleraye, son of a brilliant Maréchal of that name, for no other reason, apparently, than because he was a relation of Richelieu—an evidence of Mazarin's sense of gratitude that throws a curious light on the cunning Italian's character.

It was not a bad match for Hortense Mancini, whose father was but a petty Roman knight. De la Meilleraye was rich and boasted a great name, although Saint-Simon in his caustic way makes him descend from an apothecary, adding that one of his ancestors was a porter, whence the name de la Porte—a slur to which de la Meilleraye might have replied like the witty Marquise de Créquy when some one suggested that La Rochefoucauld was descended from a butcher: "Ah," she said, "that must have been when the kings were shepherds." Be it as it may, the bridegroom got with his bride the title of Duc de Mazarin and some thirty million francs. His wedding gift to his wife was a cabinet containing ten thousand pistoles in gold, which the Duchesse, not without craft, at once proceeded to share with her brother and sisters to propitiate their jealousy of her huge fortune. But she carried this generosity to a degree that augured ill for the preservation of Mazarin's millions. For she had so little regard for money that she left the key in the cabinet that any who cared might help himself, and at last literally flung out of the windows what remained for the amusement of watching the passers-by scramble for the coins. This prodigality so alarmed the Cardinal that it was thought to have hastened his end; eight days later he died. The news of this event was received by the Duchesse de Mazarin's brother and sisters, who, though well provided for, not unnaturally resented their uncle's favouritism, by exclamations of, "God be thanked, the Cardinal's gone!" [23]

This marriage of convenience might possibly have been fairly happy, as such marriages go, but for the strange character of the Duc de Mazarin; for his wife was amiable and long-suffering, if giddy and volatile. Considering all that we have read of this man, we are almost inclined to agree with Madame de Sévigné when she says, that "the mere sight of him was a justification of his wife's conduct." Molière took him as the model of Orgon in his "Tartuffe." Religion was the subject on which his peculiarities were most offensively noticeable. He was a Jansenist, a sort of Roman Catholic Puritan, and the willing tool of the Jansenist monks and nuns with whom he surrounded himself, and on whom he, in other respects miserly, lavished enormous sums. [24]



**DUC DE MAZARIN.**

For nearly sixty years his *outré* acts of devotion afforded small-talk for the Court of France. The superb statues and pictures in the Palais Mazarin—now the Bibliothèque Nationale—in which he resided having offended his sense of decency, he proceeded, with a handkerchief in one hand and a hammer in the other, to cover up or destroy his rare marbles and subject his Titians and Coreggios to the same radical reforms. Colbert, whom the King, on hearing of this vandalism, sent to expostulate with him, arrived during the process of demolition. The Minister, who knew to a farthing what the *chefs d'œuvre* had cost the Cardinal, did what he could to save such works of art as remained undesecrated. But the Duc de Mazarin complained to the King, who, being in the habit of borrowing money from him, contented himself with deploring his aberration.

His zeal in behalf of purity did not, however, rest here. His mind, crippled with bigotry and superstition, imagined temptations in the most innocent and natural things. He wished to pull out the front teeth of his daughters to prevent coquetry; and he forbade the women on his estates to milk the cows for fear of the evil thoughts that such an employment might suggest. From conscientious scruples he likewise resigned the governorship of several provinces and the important post of Grand Commander of Artillery. Further, as the devil was ever in his thoughts, he fancied he appeared to him in his sleep, and he would wake his wife in the middle of the night to look for evil spirits by the light of flambeaux. He was, in a word, one of those mad people who are just sane enough to keep out of an asylum.

[25]

To such a man the dazzling beauty of his wife was a perpetual torment. It filled him at once with a horrible jealousy and a fear for the safety of her soul. She seemed to him the incarnation of temptation. He dared not let her out of his sight, and subjected her to an espionage as base as it was intolerable. To retain the servants she liked she was obliged to pretend she hated them; if she wished to go into society or to the play her husband preached her a sermon on the evil of the latter, and objected to the toilette a woman of rank and fashion was obliged to wear at the former. The innocent "patch," then the rage, was the cause of many a quarrel between this ill-matched pair.

"Ah," said people on rare occasions when they appeared in public together, "the Duc and Duchesse de Mazarin have 'patched' up their differences again."

[26]

For seven years their private life was the *pièce de résistance* at every feast of scandal served at Paris and Versailles. But, as if this asphyxiating atmosphere of suspicion and religious prudery that the Duc de Mazarin forced his lovely wife to breathe was not sufficient penance for her charms, he dragged her about with him from province to province in all sorts of weather and seasons, compelling her to sleep in peasants' huts and sheds, or lodge for weeks in lonely castles. Once even she was forced to accompany him two hundred leagues when she was *enceinte*.

To this vindictive religious mania he was afflicted with another for law-suits. He was said to have had more than three hundred, nearly all of which he lost.

At the end of seven years the Duchesse de Mazarin, who had borne her husband three daughters and one son, in spite of her own disregard of the value of money, became alarmed at the rapidity with which her uncle's millions were being squandered on the crowd of becowled hangers-on who directed the life and conscience of their cranky dupe. She protested on behalf of her children. The Duc de Mazarin answered by seizing her jewels, on the ground that jewels encouraged vanity and immodesty, and ordered her to accompany him to Alsace, of which

province he was governor, intending to keep her with him there for the rest of her life. After a scandalous attempt at force, witnessed by the entire domestic establishment of the Palais Mazarin, the Duchesse escaped to her brother's, the Duc de Nevers.

[27]

In this age of the emancipation of women it is amusing to read of the grave scandal the Duchesse de Mazarin caused by leaving her husband. Such an action, which to-day would scarcely cause a ripple of excitement, was then a criminal offence. It was the first step in defiance of convention that gave her freedom and deprived her of her reputation. But, considering the life she had led, the wonder is not that she did not leave her husband sooner, but that she had ever put up with him at all. Arguing, perhaps, from her indolent and easy-going temperament, which, because it had endured for seven years the vagaries of such a husband, seemed to prove an unlimited capacity of endurance, she was pestered by the Duc, her relations, and even the King himself, to return to the Palais Mazarin. But she refused to listen to all offers of reconciliation and mediation. Any fate, she declared, was preferable to living again under the same roof with her husband. He, in his exasperation, seized the power the law gave him and had her arrested and imprisoned in the convent of Les Filles de St. Marie, a sort of aristocratic home for fallen women. The Duchesse, now as alert and vindictive as she had previously been indolent and submissive, retorted from her convent-prison with a demand for her jewels, an allowance, and a separation.

[28]

As usual in a scandal of this sort, the sympathy of society was divided between the husband and the wife. For while there was no excuse for the absurd and irritating behaviour of the Duc de Mazarin, there was no doubt but that the Duchesse herself was not above reproach. The looseness of her later life is of itself a sufficient warrant for the suspicion that the corruption associated with her name was of early origin. We read of strange flirtations before her marriage, one with a handsome eunuch attached to the household of her uncle, the Cardinal; of a duel fought over her by servants; of visits paid her by the King; and of the charge brought against her by her husband of too close an intimacy with the Duc de Nevers, her poetising, godless brother—a charge which she passionately resented and denied, which we, personally, do not know whether to credit or not, and which of itself was a justifiable cause for separation.

While the case between her husband and herself was pending, Madame de Mazarin made the most of her imprisonment. Philosophic resignation is nothing to the airy indifference with which she appeared to regard her situation. Perhaps this unrepentant frame of mind could have found its vindication, if it required one, in nothing more likely to encourage it than the companionship of a young and fascinating woman who was also a prisoner at Les Filles de St. Marie. Even more talked about at this period than the Duchesse de Mazarin herself was Sidonie de Lenoncourt, Marquise de Courcelles, who was also the victim of an insupportable husband. This "Manon Lescaut of the seventeenth century," as she has been wittily called, deserves a word or two, not so much on her own account as on account of the light she casts on certain phases of the social life of her day.

[29]

Born heiress of a noble family, Sidonie, who had lost both parents in her infancy, was brought up by an old aunt, an abbess of Orleans. When she was fifteen the orphan, who was as innocent as she was beautiful, was suddenly removed from the pure life of the abbey at Orleans, by order of the King, whose ward she was, and placed at the Hôtel de Soissons, then the centre of the gayest and loosest society in Paris. The instigator of this spiritual seduction was Colbert, who, wishing to enrich and ennoble his family, conceived the idea of marrying the heiress to his brother. But at the Hôtel de Soissons the lovely Sidonie fired all sorts of ambitions. If Colbert coveted her name and wealth, Louvois lusted for her person. During the intrigues to which she was exposed she was married off-hand to the Marquis de Courcelles, a man devoid of all principle, who helped to corrupt her on purpose on the day of her ruin to get complete possession of her fortune. Surrounded by such pitfalls, it is not surprising that Sidonie fell, and fell noisily. To escape the thought of her villain of a husband, the girl flung herself into the arms of Louvois. This powerful Minister was able to protect her from the designs of de Courcelles for a time, but she sought consolation elsewhere, and got herself so talked and written about in the lampoons that deluged Paris and were said to "temper despotism," that her husband had no trouble in getting an order from the King to shut her up at Les Filles de St. Marie.

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No worse influence could have come into the life of the freshly emancipated and besmirched Duchesse de Mazarin than this captivating young adultress, whose misfortunes, though unworthy of sympathy, won it and admiration as well, by reason of the gaiety with which they were borne. "The pleasure of remaining innocent does not make up for the pain of being continually browbeaten and insulted," she said—an opinion to which the Duchesse was only too ready to agree. For three months these two were inseparable. Although Sidonie was the younger, a mere child, she was the more experienced, the cleverer. It was she who instigated the Duchesse to kill the tedium of imprisonment by filling the nuns' holy-water stoup with ink, putting wet sheets on their beds, letting loose dogs in their dormitory, and by perpetrating practical jokes continually.

At last the unfortunate nuns pleaded to be relieved of such intolerable charges. The Duchesse was transferred to another convent to await the settlement of her case, while Sidonie was herself shortly after released and went back to her husband, and more adventures. Escaping from one convent in which she was afterwards imprisoned, she met a young man who fell in love with her at sight and joined her in her flight. But she ran away from him too in the end, and many another, and finished sadly enough. The Abbé Prévost might, indeed, have taken her for the model of his Manon Lescaut. To see Sidonie was to adore her, and she was not without an agreeable wit, as her poor little memoirs, which she found time to write, testify. "I am tall," she wrote, in her gay way that suggests a wink of the eye, "I have a good figure, the best possible deportment, fine

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hair, and a beautiful complexion, although pitted in a couple of places by small-pox. My eyes are big, and I never open them completely, which, though an affectation, gives them a very sweet and tender expression. I have not much to boast of in the shape of my mouth, but my teeth are like pearls. Hands exquisite, arms passable—that is to say, they are rather thin—but I find compensation for this defect in knowing that my legs are perfect." Poor little Sidonie!

At length the Duchesse de Mazarin's suit for separation and an allowance was settled in her favour. She returned to the Palais Mazarin, and the Duc took up his abode at the Arsenal. But it was merely a truce. M. de Mazarin appealed, and fearing lest she might once more fall into his hands, the Duchesse, who had tasted liberty, aided by a friend of her brother's, the Chevalier de Rohan, fled in male attire, accompanied by her maid similarly disguised and two men-servants. The Duc de Mazarin wormed a *lettre de cachet* out of the reluctant King, and had his wife hotly chased. The fugitives, however, succeeded in getting out of the country in safety, and had a series of adventures that are very suggestive of Dumas. No one ever fled with a lighter heart or more casually, so to speak, than the Duchesse de Mazarin; and no one ever more thoroughly entered into the spirit of adventure than she.

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At Neuchâtel they took her for the Duchesse de Longueville, the celebrated heroine of the Fronde, and she received an embarrassing ovation. Only Madame de Longueville, they said, went about dressed as a man. At a small garrison town in the Alps "we were all liked to be knocked on the head, owing to our ignorance of the language," and on arriving at the village of Altdorf, on Lake Lucerne, the party were quarantined for forty days, on account of the indisposition of the Duchesse, caused by an injury to her knee received some days before. In this wretched little village she says that a farrier was the local surgeon, and that it was only with the greatest difficulty he could be got to agree that it would not be necessary to amputate her leg. Finally Milan was reached, where the Constable Colonna and his wife, Marie Mancini, the Duchesse's sister, were waiting to receive her.

At Paris the scandal caused by this flight was the talk of the town and the Court; the reputation of the Duchesse de Mazarin was torn to shreds. She considered her freedom, however, cheap at the price, and, joined by her brother, the Duc de Nevers, she and the Colonnas spent several months touring about Italy. This delightful jaunt was but a lull in the cyclone that had swept her into Italy, and was to sweep her back to France. At Rome, where she hoped to make her residence, humiliations as insupportable as any she had known in the Palais Mazarin awaited her. Penniless and *déclassée*, the beautiful fugitive was an embarrassing incubus to her Roman relations. They passed her on from one to the other, snubbing and quarrelling with her, till at last, reduced to pawning her "little" jewels, as she called them, to distinguish them from her "big" ones still in the Duc de Mazarin's hands, she decided that the fire from which she had escaped was preferable to the frying-pan into which she had fallen. So, accompanied by her brother, who was returning to marry a niece of Madame de Montespan, she went back to France with the intention of throwing herself on the mercy of her husband. Like true Mancinis, they spent six months on the journey. In the meantime the Duc de Mazarin, warned of his wife's intention, took the course that might have been expected of him.

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On arriving at the Château de Nevers, the Duchesse found the park infested with police, who had orders to arrest her and imprison her in the Abbey of Lys. But her relations were active at Court as well as her husband, and within a week the King, whose playmate she had been as a child, sent a company of dragoons to force the doors of her prison and release her. And to the mortification of her husband, and the astonishment of society, Madame de Mazarin entered Paris in the carriage of Colbert, and had an audience of Louis. The King, who arrogated to himself the right to arbitrate in the domestic squabbles of his subjects, high and low, tried to induce the Duc de Mazarin to take his wife back, but at this suggestion the emancipated Duchesse replied wittily but firmly with the cry of the Fronde: "*Point de Mazarin! Point de Mazarin!*" The King, however, concluded an arrangement, much to the stingy Duc's despair, by which Madame de Mazarin was to return to Italy on an allowance from her husband, as long as she remained out of the country, of 24,000 francs a year—a sum inadequate enough for one whose *dot* had been the greatest in Europe!

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"She will eat it at the first inn she comes to," remarked the courtier Lauzun cynically.

In much less time than it had taken her to reach France from Rome, Madame de Mazarin found herself back in the Eternal City, and once more under the roof of her sister, Madame la Connétable. Much had transpired in the Palazzo Colonna since her departure. The Constable and his wife were no longer on friendly terms. The Constable had become faithless and cruel, while Madame la Connétable was in bad odour in Roman society on her own account—mixed bathing in the Tiber, Madame la Connétable in a gauze bathing costume, and the Chevalier de Lorraine all but living in the Palazzo Colonna! When the Duchesse arrived on the scene she found her sister, egged on by the Chevalier, the handsomest and most disreputable man of his century, and whose wit, vices, and exploits are plentifully sprinkled through its literature, bent on flight. At first, seeing in such a proposition fresh trouble for herself, she tried to smooth matters. But her efforts proving ineffectual, and perhaps also from a love of further adventures, she finally determined to aid and accompany her sister.

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One night, when the Constable was visiting at a country house near Rome, Madame la Connétable and the Duchesse de Mazarin donned men's clothes and, attended by their maids in similar apparel, drove off in a coach to Civita Vecchia. They arrived there at two in the morning and, not finding the fishing-boat they had engaged beforehand, were obliged to wait till dawn in a wood without the town. "The coachman," says the Duchesse in her memoirs, "having hunted high and low without finding our boat, was fain to hire another, which he got for a thousand crowns.

While he was thus employed the postilion becoming impatient took one of the coach-horses and had the luck to meet with our boat, but it was late when he came back, and we were obliged to walk five miles on foot and go on board about three in the afternoon without having eaten or drunk since we left Rome. We had the luck to fall in with a very honest captain; for, as it was easy to see that we were women and not beggars, any other but he would have murdered us and thrown us overboard. His crew asked us 'if we had not killed the Pope?' In eight days these two extraordinary *grandes dames* disembarked from their fishing-smack at the little port of Ciotat, near Marseilles, whither they went on horseback, after one of the most thrilling journeys the Duchesse de Mazarin ever took. For their boat had been nearly lost in a storm and chased by Turkish pirates; the latter was a peril perhaps less terrifying to them than shipwreck, as it would have meant a new series of adventures.

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At Marseilles they were met by the Chevalier de Lorraine and another dazzling reprobate, and the four, who had no longer any reputations to lose—for, as the Duchesse says, "there was no fable horrible enough to be invented by the wickedness of man but was reported of us"—set out light-heartedly on a tour through Provence. The ladies, still wearing men's clothes, which mightily became them, at length reached Aix-les-Bains. Here their rank and unparalleled adventures afforded them the reception curiosity always offers to unconventionality—if it is feminine and beautiful. Some were for whipping them at a cart's wheel, others for putting them in a lunatic asylum; while Madame de Grignan, the wife of the governor, sent them proper clothing with the message "that they travelled like true heroines of romance, with abundance of jewels but no clean linen," and wrote to her mother, Madame de Sévigné, that their beauty was divine. Their stay at Aix, however, was but of short duration, for the approach of the Duc de Mazarin's police agents so alarmed the Duchesse that she abandoned her sister and slipped across the frontier to Chambéry, where one of her former suitors, now become the reigning Duke of Savoy, afforded her his protection.

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As for Madame la Connétable, she soon after fell into the hands of her ruthless Constable, who shut her up in various convents, from which she was always escaping, only to be caught again. Her last prison was a convent in Madrid, where she passed the greater part of her life—an imprisonment, however, nominal rather than real, for we find her frequently at the Spanish Court festivities. Madame de Villars, who saw her there, wrote to a friend in France that "she was even more beautiful at forty than at twenty, when Louis XIV. had loved her." But she was never happy. Of a different temperament from her sister Hortense, Marie Mancini had not the *bravade* necessary to conquer the hostility of the world. She could never live down her past, and finding herself free at the death of her husband, who begged her pardon in his will for the misery he had caused her, she returned to Italy, only to meet everywhere with a cold reception. History is not quite clear as to her last years, but it is believed that her children, at any rate, forgave her, as there is a monument to her memory in the cathedral at Pisa, where she died.

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For the first time in her career the fates were really kind now to the Duchesse de Mazarin. In Savoy she found the peace and quiet that her naturally indolent temperament craved, and for three years the infatuated Duke supported her in luxury at his Court. Pleasure, of which she was ever a devotee, was agreeably tempered by a taste for literature, art, and philosophy, which she developed at this time. Nor was love abandoned. She shared her heart between the unexact Duke and a certain César Vischard. It was to the latter that she dictated her memoirs during her stay in Savoy, and as he played for a time a rather important part in her life a word about him will not be amiss.

The Abbé de St. Réal, as he called himself, though never consecrated, was a *chevalier d'industrie* with a literary bent. Among his works, which had a certain ephemeral popularity, were a romance entitled "Don Carlos," which Schiller afterwards made use of for the stage, and a "Vie de Jésus." But he was best celebrated at the time and remembered now for the profligacy of his career. He may be said to have plumbed the bottomless pit of vice, and some of his letters which were intercepted by the agents of the Minister Louvois, whom Forneron says was a *connoisseur* in indecency, made even him shudder. Such was the man whom Madame de Mazarin now admitted to the closest intimacy, and with whom, on the sudden death of the Duke, she fled from Savoy to escape the vengeance of the jealous Duchess.

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"I learnt on arriving here," wrote from Geneva her whilom friend, the Marquise de Courcelles, with whom she had fallen out before her first flight from France, "that Madame de Mazarin had some days ago gone to Germany, I believe to Augsburg, and that because the Duchess of Savoy, immediately after the death of her husband, had ordered her out of the country. How miserable it must be for her to see herself hunted from place to place! But what is uncommon is that this woman triumphs over disgrace by follies that have no parallel, and that after having tasted shame she thinks only of enjoying herself. When passing through here she was on horseback dressed as a man and with twenty men in her suite, talking only of music and hunting and everything that suggests pleasure."

In such costume and company she arrived at Amsterdam with the lightest of hearts after passing through countries aflame with war. As if she had taken the idea to visit her former suitors in turn, she decided upon going to England, which she reached in the month of December, 1675, and where she was destined to remain till her death in 1699, twenty-four years later. The real motive of the greatest heiress in Europe, now become a pure adventuress, in going to England was, no doubt, to lay siege to the heart of Charles II. But her ostensible motive was to visit her cousin by marriage, Mary of Modena, whom she had met when that princess passed through Savoy on her way to marry the Duke of York, and with whom she had struck up a friendship. The Duchess of York, as she expected, welcomed her warmly. Charles II. fell an

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instant victim to her charms, and she entered London society with unprecedented *éclat*.

She was now thirty, and of the fourteen years since her marriage she had passed seven principally on the highway dressed as a man. This life, which would have broken the health of any other woman, had agreed with her wonderfully. Her appearance on her arrival in London may be imagined by the following description by Forneron: "The Duchesse de Mazarin was one of those Roman beauties in whom there is no doll-prettiness, and in whom unaided nature triumphs over all the arts of the coquette. Painters could not say what was the colour of her eyes. They were neither blue nor grey, nor yet black nor brown nor hazel. Nor were they languishing nor passionate, as if either demanding to be loved or expressing love. They simply looked as if she had basked in love's sunshine. If her mouth were not large, it was not a small one, and was suitably the fit organ for intelligent speech and amiable words. All her motions were charming in their easy grace and dignity. Her complexion was softly toned and yet warm and fresh. It was so harmonious that though dark she seemed of beautiful fairness. Her jet-black hair rose in strong waves above her forehead, as if proud to clothe and adorn her splendid head. She did not use scent." Though fond of it, he might have added, and unlike her uncle the Cardinal, who was always perfumed like the garden of Armida.

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Ruvigny, the French Ambassador, wrote to Louis: "She is to all appearances a finely developed young girl. I never saw any one who so well defies the power of time and vice to disfigure. When she arrives at the age of fifty she will have the satisfaction of thinking when she looks in the mirror that she is as lovely as she ever was in her life."

King Charles, in that characteristic way that made him most popular when most undeserving popularity, gave this superb beauty apartments in St. James's Palace and a pension of four thousand pounds sterling a year. The ball was at the feet of the adventuress. She at once became the centre of State intrigues, a party was formed around her. She saw herself on the point of dethroning, not the Queen, but the favourite, the all-powerful Duchess of Portsmouth. The corruption of the Court had reached the Parliament, and tinged even the patriotism of the people. The Duchess of Mazarin was chosen by Protestant England as the means of ridding the country from the harlot who had made it the satellite of France. They accepted her as the avenging champion; she at least was above-board and never resorted to trick or artifice. The situation is one of the most extraordinary spectacles in English history. Louis XIV. became alarmed. Ruvigny, honest Huguenot, was not the man to succeed in threading the maze of the foul diplomatic labyrinth in which he suddenly found himself by the success of the Duchesse de Mazarin. He suggested that, as the star of the Duchess of Portsmouth appeared to be declining, the French Court should throw her over and make terms with her rival. But the shrewd French Court was unwilling to desert a harlot whom they could trust for a harlot who had a grievance against them.

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Ruvigny was replaced by the crafty Courtin, one of Louis' ablest servants. Before going to England he went to see the Duc de Mazarin in the hope of ingratiating himself with that Tartuffe-ridden man, as well as the nation to which he was accredited, by bringing the Duchesse news that her plea for a fitting maintenance, strongly backed by Charles to Louis, was heard. But he little understood the man he had to deal with. The Duc de Mazarin, thoroughly unable to admit that he had ever given the least cause for the scandalous conduct of his wife, demanded that she should return to France and suffer herself to be incarcerated in a convent. The answer of Madame de Mazarin, who was living sumptuously at St. James's and the object of almost universal admiration, was such as might have been expected.

When Courtin arrived in London the French influence seemed ruined at Whitehall. Every night Charles visited the fascinating Duchesse, and every day on repairing to the Duchess of York, his sister-in-law, who was ill at the time, he found the enchantress at her bedside. Nevertheless Courtin paid his court to the new favourite and studied her every action. "I saw Madame de Mazarin at High Mass at the chapel of the Portuguese ambassador, who is dying of love for her," he wrote to Louis, "but could not help noticing that she betrayed disgust at the length of the service." The conversion of England to Catholicism, no less than the French influence, seemed doomed by the sway of the fair agnostic. Her position was so important that Courtin advised Louis to force the Duc de Mazarin to accede to her demand that he should allow her fifty thousand a year of the Cardinal's fortune, send her her jewels, laces, and precious furniture, and swear never more to molest her if she returned to France. The great Louis humbled himself to plead with her; even the Abbé de St. Réal, who still hung about her and talked of Charles like an aggrieved husband, was not neglected. Courtin promised him the favour of the French Court.

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But suddenly in the heyday of her triumph the fears and hopes that the Duchesse had raised to such a pitch were dashed by the Duchesse herself. She was not equal to the position; none of the Mancinis had the ambition or political instinct of their famous uncle, the Cardinal. Pleasure, not power, was what Madame de Mazarin really craved. Never had the enemies of the Duchess of Portsmouth leant on a weaker reed. As usual the Duchess let her heart get the better of her head; she flung herself, cost what it might, into the arms of the dashing Prince of Monaco, who was on a two months' visit to the English Court and stayed two years for sake of La Belle Mazarin. Her political *rôle* was over, and perhaps to no one connected with this intrigue did it give greater relief than to the protagonist herself. St. Réal, who had got together for his light-hearted mistress a good library, including such works as Appian and Tacitus, eaten up with jealousy, took the violent resolution of leaving England in the hope that she would call him back at Dover. But, as Forneron says, "she bore his absence with Roman fortitude and perhaps, like Louvois, who had perused some of his letters seized in the post, thought his room more agreeable than his company."

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As for Charles, he was furious and stopped her pension. But Charles's furies never lasted long; like the Duchesse, whose character and exciting career closely resembled his own, he was too easy-going to cherish resentment. He gave her back her pension shortly afterwards, saying, "It was in repayment of sums advanced him years before by the Cardinal," and treated her henceforth as the best of friends. But this method of repaying debts was not at all to the fancy of the Duc de Mazarin. He despatched a friend to England to tell the King that he considered such payment valueless, to which Charles replied with a cynical laugh, "Quite so; I do not ask for a receipt."

Now began for the Duchesse the happiest and most brilliant period of her life. It lasted for the rest of the reign, during which, basking in the favour of the King and the Royal Family, and worshipped by the young Countess of Sussex, Charles's daughter by the Duchess of Cleveland, she gave herself up to a life of pleasure. The consideration she enjoyed gave her great influence, which, as she detested politics, she made no use of save to increase her credit with the tradespeople. At first she did not feel the chain of debt to which she was fastened. Courtin wrote to Louvois, "If you had seen her dancing the *furlano* to the music of a guitar, which she thrummed herself, you would have been captivated." To which Louvois replied, "If I were at the English Court, I am sure that all I should do would be to feast my eyes on Madame de Mazarin"—a curious sidelight on despatches of State of that day, considering, as Forneron says, that "the only serious man at Whitehall was the French Ambassador."

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The taste that she had developed during her stay in Savoy for art and letters was now assiduously cultivated. Like a true *femme galante* of the seventeenth century, she coloured her very frivolities with an air of culture. But in the case of the Duchesse de Mazarin the cult of learning was not altogether an affectation by means of which she sought to gain the respect she had lost. She was an omnivorous reader, especially of philosophic works, and very fond of discussing what she read. If intellectually superficial, she was a brilliant conversationalist, and had the art of so disguising her thefts from the brains of the clever men whose society she really enjoyed that they were undiscovered. She could not write, but she could talk. In her *salon*, one of the first of the kind in England, all manner of subjects were discussed: philosophy, religion, history, wit, gallantry, the stage, music, art, ancient and modern literature. The use of the word "Vast" once gave rise to a controversy that was finally settled by an appeal to the French Academy. Intellectuality was the frame in which she set pleasure; for she still continued her life of aristocratic harlotry, and was sometimes among the number, from duchesses to demi-reps, that Chiffinch, the vicious but amusing *concièrge* of the back-stairs of Whitehall, smuggled of nights into the royal bedchamber. But these blots on her spiritual life, which possibly in our times in the case of such a woman might be excused by the words, "artistic temperament," required no excuse at all then. Moreover, Madame de Mazarin kept a good table and an open house—two means of silencing scandal that are not yet ineffective.

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Among the men of distinction who comprised her little court were: the poet Waller, "who had visited several Courts and was at home in none"; Vossius, the sceptic prebendary of Windsor, "understanding most European languages and speaking none well, possessing a profound knowledge of the manners and customs of the ancients, but entirely ignorant of those of his contemporaries, talking as if he were commenting on Juvenal or Petronius, and at the very time he was writing books to prove the Divine inspiration of the Septuagint, intimating privately at Madame de Mazarin's that he believed in no revelation at all"; my Lord Rochester, who needs no description; the respectable Justel, whose Huguenot faith had made him an exile; and last, but not least, St. Evremond.

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ST. EVREMOND.

Of all the brilliant moths that flitted round the beauty, charm, and hospitality of the Duchesse de Mazarin, St. Evremond was the wittiest, gayest, best educated, most popular, and sincerest. He was over thirty years her senior, a man past sixty when she came to England, and, from the day of their meeting to the day of her death, Madame de Mazarin found in him a devoted friend and a sensible adviser. He was to her father-confessor and duenna in one; while her house was his to enter at will, her society his chief happiness, and her death the one real grief that perhaps he ever knew. The relation that existed between them was purely platonic; and if there are those who see merely a psychological phenomenon in a clean, honest attachment between an upright old philosopher and a young wayward woman, we prefer in this instance to claim it as a virtue for both. Madame de Mazarin's account at least in the Book of Life is so heavily against her that, without letting her off, we can afford to credit her with so small a virtue.

She used to call him playfully her "old satyr," for he was given to satire, and his views of life were so generous as to be Epicurean. His philosophy, he declared, consisted in hatred of vice, indulgence to guilt, and grief for misfortune—a view of duty that alone was calculated to make him a favourite in such loose society as that of the Restoration. But St. Evremond had not always been a sage with "a disfiguring growth of a large wen between his eyebrows which he treated as a subject for a joke." He had once upon a time been young, good-looking, and unsteady, one of six sons in an old Norman family. In their youth, he says, his brothers were known at home by nicknames that hit off their characters well. There was St. Evremond the Honest, St. Evremond the Crafty, St. Evremond the Soldier, St. Evremond the Beau, St. Evremond the Hunter. He himself, even then, was known as St. Evremond the Wit. His father gave him a brilliant education and destined him for the Bar, but the Thirty Years' War was just then seducing all the young men of Europe to the career of arms, so St. Evremond gave up studying law and got a commission. He saw a vast amount of active service and was dangerously wounded at the Battle of Nordlingen. He who for forty years wielded the pen had previously carried a sword for thirty. In fencing he had few, if any, superiors—St. Evremond's pass was famous in the art of self-defence.

Even in those days he was noted for his sarcasms, and it was to his pen that he owed the loss of his sword. An intercepted letter ruined him. It contained a scathing satire on Cardinal Mazarin, in which he declared, with poisoned irony *à propos* of a certain treaty which Mazarin had signed, that "a Minister does not so much belong to the State as the State to the Minister." Mazarin was dead, but Anne of Austria took upon herself to resent the sneer. St. Evremond was obliged to flee in order to escape the Bastille. He arrived in England in 1661, aged forty-eight, and of all the French exiles who lived on the charity of Charles none were so worthy of it. When Madame de Mazarin came to England he had been established fourteen years in that country. His reputation was European, and among his many admirers and correspondents abroad he counted the famous courtesan, Ninon de Lenclos. Most of his friends led openly profligate lives, his was conspicuously clean. In an age of corruption he preserved his honour without earning the contempt of his companions. Over-rigid in morals, he was indulgent to others; irreligious, he respected religion. He was one of the forerunners of Voltaire, or, rather, Voltaire might have been like him had he been born a century earlier. St. Evremond's wit was Voltairean with the poison left out. Once towards the end of her long life Ninon wrote him repining she had come to the conclusion with La Rochefoucauld that "old age was the hell of women." "Don't let M. de La Rochefoucauld's hell frighten you," he replied; "it is a hell specially contrived for a maxim. Speak boldly the word Love and let that of Old Woman never come out of your mouth."

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Regarded then as one of the most intellectual luminaries of his time, he is remembered now merely as one of the flashlights that history turns on the Court and times of the last Stuarts. His place is with Pepys and Evelyn and Gramont; no book on Restoration society could be written without mentioning him. It was the age of Satire. At Whitehall the good-natured, cynical King and his courtiers enjoyed the lampoons and couplets of the coffee-houses, provided they were witty. At the Duchesse de Mazarin's the satire was refined, the banter delicate. "Ah, Monsieur Vossius," she cried, as the clerical sceptic entered her rooms one day, "perhaps you who read all sorts of good books, except the Bible, will explain a point we are discussing?" As she never cherished resentment, and detested nothing so much as dissension, it was understood that those who wished to enjoy her hospitality and friendship should leave their private spites and ill-temper at home. At no place in London was pleasure so unclouded as at the Duchesse de Mazarin's. "The greatest freedom in the world is to be seen there," wrote St. Evremond, "and an equal discretion; everybody is more commodiously served at Madame de Mazarin's than at home and more respectfully than at Court. 'Tis true there are frequent disputes, but then it is with more knowledge than heat; it is not done out of a spirit of contradiction, but only to discover fully the matters in agitation; rather to animate conversation than to inflame it. What they game for is inconsiderable, and as they play only for diversion, you cannot discover in their faces either the fear of losing or the annoyance of having lost. Gaming," adds the honest old Epicurean, "is relieved there by the most delicious repasts in the world."

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In time, however, to St. Evremond's dismay, the spirited, cultured discussions began to flag, and finally almost entirely ceased. The passion of gambling took possession of the Duchesse; with her to flee from temptation was to yield to it, desire only ceased when she had drained it to the dregs. A shady croupier, Morin by name, obliged to leave Paris, came over to London and introduced basset. This game became the rage, and Morin dethroned the whole intellectual areopagus at Madame de Mazarin's. St. Evremond protested in vain, but he could not resist lending her money when she asked for it. To show that she was alive to his remonstrances at her extravagance, he was the only one of her creditors she ever repaid. In this way the gay, thoughtless years sped by; but if the thrilling adventures of her early life, consisting chiefly of flights in men's apparel, were over, there were still many strange and dramatic sensations in store for her. The most indolent of women, she was destined from first to last to live in a whirl of excitement.

Oates denounced her as an accomplice of all the Popish plots that agitated the country. That was an anxious time for the Duchesse as to all the French at Court. But it was as nothing to the experience that followed. In 1683, when not far off her fortieth year, the Baron Banier, a handsome, romantic young boy and son of one of Gustavus Adolphus's generals, came to London, and fell in love with Madame de Mazarin. It mattered not to him that she laughed at him, he went about the town with her name on his lips heedless of ridicule. Suddenly this harmless flirtation became tragic. Her nephew, the young Chevalier de Soissons, a brother of the yet-to-be-famous Prince Eugene of Savoy and son of her sister Olympe, came at this time to pay his aunt a visit. Like Baron Banier, the Chevalier de Soissons fell head over ears in love with her. Maddened by his horrible passion, he must needs take it into his head to be jealous of his Swedish rival. The two young fellows, blind to all sense of decency, to the *éclat* of such a duel, met, and the Chevalier de Soissons left Banier dead upon the field of dishonour. The noise of such a scandal may be imagined. The Chevalier would not, or could not, flee; he was arrested and tried, and without doubt, but for the pulling of many strings behind the scenes, would have been executed. "It is fire not blood that flows in the veins of us Mancinis," he is reported to have said. Thanks to the laxity of the laws in his time, the flaming young Chevalier was suffered to go to Malta and join the Order of the Knights Templars, among whom, far from his beautiful aunt, the fates granted him a few years of obscurity in which to cool.

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"I could not have believed it possible," wrote Madame de Sévigné, "that the eyes of a grandmother could have wrought such havoc." But this shocking scandal, which called to mind the things that had been said of Madame de Mazarin and her brother years before, and made people even in that day of antique vice shudder, overwhelmed her. Shame, despair, and perhaps cunning, made her dive till the storm was spent. She closed her house, hung her *salon* in black, and saw nobody but the ever-faithful St. Evremond.

The scandal had not yet subsided when a fresh one burst over her head. Her eldest daughter, whom she had not seen for nearly twenty years, escaped from a convent, in which, in spite of her prayers, her father insisted she should take the veil, and fled to her mother. She was accompanied by the Marquis de Richelieu, a younger son, penniless, profligate, and as handsome as Adonis. The arrival of the couple could offer nothing but embarrassment to the Duchesse de Mazarin. For this elopement had attracted universal attention by the absurd behaviour of the Duc de Mazarin and the ridicule to which it exposed this strange family. Instead of removing every obstacle at once to his runaway daughter's marriage, even with so undesirable a *parti* as the marquis, the Duc de Mazarin went about consulting monks and priests all over France as to whether he should consent to the marriage or not. In the meantime the fugitives were obliged to live as lover and mistress for two years before M. de Mazarin yielded.

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Perhaps the fact of such a rake as de Richelieu remaining faithful for a period of such duration may be more mercenary than it appears. But if he counted on this unexceptional fidelity to win him some of the Mazarin millions that his father-in-law had not yet frittered away, he was mistaken. The Duc gave his daughter a paltry dowry and a pardon signed by the King—the first ever granted for the abduction of a novice from her convent. Marriage, however, spoilt the romance, for the habits contracted when she was an outlaw, and perhaps also the Mancini "fire

not blood" in her veins, prevented the Marquise de Richelieu from settling down. She climbed over a wall one night and went off with another man, to a life which, while possessing all the elements of that adventurous libertinage that history so often condones in condemning, can be described by no stretch of the imagination as anything else than vulgar prostitution. As for M. le Marquis, he went back to his pot-house companions and the bottle—the latter a liquid solace that enabled his mother-in-law as well to sustain the shafts of outrageous fortune.

For the ridicule that never made the least impression on the Duc de Mazarin was the only thing apparently that could make the least impression on his scandal-proof Duchesse. Ridicule and debt produced in her a black melancholy which she tried to drown in whisky. In sober moments the once *insouciant* beauty talked of retiring to the same convent in Spain as her still more unhappy sister, Madame la Connétable. St. Evremond was in despair and used all his powers of persuasion and influence to combat so morbid a resolution and the drunkenness that prompted it. At the same time her ridiculous husband slyly took advantage of her unnerved state to try to get her into his power; he invited her to return to his roof and submit her life to his will. But unlike the Bourbons, Madame de Mazarin had learnt something from experience. She still had the sense to refuse and the wit to reply, "*Point de Mazarin!*"

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The result of all these accumulated troubles was a serious illness, but with the recovery of her health she regained her former gaiety. To St. Evremond's delight the drink habit lost its hold upon her—for a time; her *salon* was once more the rendezvous of wit and fashion; cowed by her dazzling beauty, that nothing could impair, ridicule slunk out of her path. The last year of the orgy of the Restoration found her still basking in the sunshine of prosperity; she was one of the three sultanas who were with Charles that Sunday night in the grand gallery at Whitehall when the Merry Monarch was stricken with apoplexy. What a scene that must have been! What a terror and warning! The death of Charles in the prime of life finished the mad dance of pleasure; to none of the dancers had it been sweeter than to the Duchesse de Mazarin.

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She shed floods of tears over her royal companion to whom she owed so much happiness, and whose Queen she might have been but for a miscalculation on the part of her uncle, the Cardinal. Well might she weep, for with the passing of Charles the dam that she had so successfully erected against misfortune burst. It is true that James II. continued to her the pension his brother had allowed her; but his reign was short, and his successor, the cold William of Orange, had other uses for his money than the pensioning of beautiful exiles. Moreover, the Restoration was over; public opinion had changed; it was a disgrace to have been connected with the Stuart Court. The very people who had once welcomed the Duchesse de Mazarin as a possible and popular King's mistress in place of the hated Duchess of Portsmouth now clamoured that she should be packed out of the country. Nothing could have been more disastrous for her than an order of banishment; it meant the choice between sordid poverty in Amsterdam or Brussels, or submission to her persecuting husband and imprisonment in France. What a fate for one who had queened it for fifteen joyous years at Whitehall! Fortunately, yet strangely, her enormous debts saved her from this degradation. Her creditors noisily protested against her expulsion, which would have meant to them a total loss, and they interceded with the new King in her favour. William finally granted her a pension of two thousand pounds and his protection.

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For the next ten years, tormented by her creditors, whose prisoner now she virtually was, and persecuted by her husband, who brought a suit to deprive her for ever of any claim to her uncle's fortune, the Duchesse de Mazarin led a feverish life. "In the daytime," says Forneron, "she might be seen searching for Oriental curiosities in the ships that had freshly arrived from India. At Newmarket, she was up and out on horseback at five in the morning. On racing days there were the excitements of betting and of being jostled in the crowd on the course. In the evening there was the theatre. After the play came the oyster supper and then basset. Bacchus consoled her as she descended towards the grave." Occasionally her sisters and children visited her, and St. Evremond and a little court of admirers were ever in attendance. But her day was over, and the shadows of the everlasting night had begun to fall on her. In the summer of 1699, in her fifty-third year, her health failed rapidly; death had no terrors for her, she met it with indifference. The end to this turbulent life came at Chelsea, then a riverside village, whither she had gone for a change of air. Her sister, the Duchesse de Bouillon and her son, the Duc de la Meilleraye, had come over a few days before from Paris, and were with her at the last. St. Evremond, her constant friend for twenty-five years, was inconsolable; the famous wit followed her four years later at the age of ninety, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

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But even in death the adventures of the Duchesse de Mazarin were not finished; the corpse of the notorious beauty could not get buried. It was seized by her creditors, who wrangled and haggled over it with her husband, whom the news of her death overwhelmed with a late remorse. He was obliged to pay her debts in full before her body was suffered to leave the country. But even when he finally got possession of it he did not bury it. This strange, half-mad old man, who had so often compelled his wife when alive to accompany him on his interminable wanderings, once more set out with her when dead. "For over a year," says Saint Simon, "M. de Mazarin, who had been so long separated from her, carried her body about with him from one estate to another. Once he suffered it to rest for a short time in the church of Notre Dame de Liesse, where the peasants treated it as that of a saint and touched it with their beads. At last he took it to Paris and buried it beside her famous uncle, the Cardinal, in the church of the 'Collège des Quatre Nations'"—now the Palais de l'Institut!

The following pasquinade of the day will serve as well as another for her epitaph:—

"Ci-dessous gît la Mazarin,

Qui des femmes fut la plus belle!  
Ci-dessous gît la Mazarin!  
Ses enfants seraient sans chagrin  
Si leur père était avec elle;  
Ci-dessous gît la Mazarin,  
Qui des femmes fut la plus belle!"

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**MY LADY CASTLEMAINE.**  
**BARBARA VILLIERS, DUCHESS OF CLEVELAND.)**  
*After Wissing.*

# BARBARA VILLIERS, DUCHESS OF CLEVELAND

## A COURTEZAN OF THE RESTORATION

THE difference between Hortense Mancini and Barbara Villiers is the difference between the refinement and the grossness of vice. If we had met them in fiction we should have said that the former might have been created by Balzac and the latter by Zola. The history of Barbara Villiers is like a study of the progress of vice.

At the first glance it would seem that such a statement was calculated to cause the respectable reader to skip the following biographical account of this British Imperia. But on considering that her name must possess some powerful interest for the imagination, from the quantity of ink that has been spilt over it, and the impassioned diatribes it has inspired, we are inclined to believe that what we have to relate of the famous beauty will fire rather than extinguish curiosity. For no emotion is so pleasant to most of us creatures of circumstance as that of righteous indignation, and that is what her Grace of Cleveland usually excites. Yet it has always seemed to us one of the strangest psychological phenomena that men should fly into a literary passion over the iniquities of persons who have been dead for centuries. Personally, we have never been able, like most people, to look upon Nero as if he were a notorious criminal of our own day, whose trial at the Old Bailey filled a column or two in the morning papers. Nor can we work ourselves up to any heat over a profligate woman, who lived two hundred years ago when she enjoyed considerable public esteem, as if she were still living, when we should, no doubt, have her arrested, tried, and given the full penalty of the law. No people are more ridiculous than the literary policemen who nab historical offenders and prosecute them at the bar of a remote posterity, unless it be the literary whitewashers who defend the same criminals at the same bar. Such convictions and acquittals of the dead are like a burlesque of Justice which lacks the sense of humour. One should remember that Charles II., with all his vices so repugnant to us now, was perhaps from first to last the most popular king that ever sat upon the English throne. People talk of the whole period of the Restoration as if he personally were responsible for its shameless license, quite ignoring the well-known fact that the nation was heartily tired of the "weel-spread looves and lang, wry faces" of the Cromwellian *régime*. Instead of heaping a late ignominy upon him, it would be more sensible, if equally impractical, to arraign the British people who made him possible. He was but the crowned representative of their own unbridled vices. To us this man, who "never said a foolish thing and never did a wise one," seems, at the distance we have got from him, to be as imaginary as if he had occurred in one of Oscar Wilde's comedies. After two hundred years to treat him *seriously* is out of the question. His answer to an indignant generation he knows not might very well be his own cynical laugh.

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From this it must not be supposed that we intend to flatter the memory of Barbara Villiers. On the contrary, we should prefer to forget her, but this the period in which she lived will not permit us. No mention of the Restoration would be possible without reference to her. So, as we are obliged to consider her, we shall imagine that the "trough of Zolaism" in which we have found her is frozen, and try to skate on it without breaking through.

If Hortense Mancini was *non-moral*, Barbara Villiers was *immoral*; she was consciously, unblushingly, gratuitously vicious. There might have been some excuse on grounds of heredity and education for Hortense, but it is impossible to find any excuse whatever for Barbara. It was said of her, when created Duchess of Cleveland, that "the King might add to her titles, but nothing to her birth." She was a Villiers. From her father who died at Oxford, when she was an infant, from wounds received at the battle of Edgehill in the Royalist cause, she should have inherited all the virtues. He must indeed have been a very noble character to judge from the panegyrics pronounced at his death, even by those belonging to a party bitterly opposed to his. But so little did she resemble him, that when we first meet her we find her at sixteen in London—whither she had come to live with her stepfather on the death of her mother—engaged in an intrigue with the second Earl of Chesterfield, a young widower five years her senior, gifted with very agreeable manners and a fine head of hair. That she was allowed full control of her actions by her stepfather may be taken for granted from the following letter addressed to Chesterfield:—

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MY LORD,

"My friend" (Lady Anne Hamilton) "and I are now abed together contriving how to get your company this afternoon. If you deserve this favour, you will come and seek us at Ludgate Hill at about three o'clock at Butler's shop, where we will expect you, &c."

The consequences of such a correspondence were such as might be expected. Barbara began to look about her for a husband, and as Chesterfield, who at the beginning of this intrigue proved the quality of his passion for the beautiful wanton he was in the habit of meeting at "Butler's shop in Ludgate Hill" by marrying some one else, he was out of the question. In this extremely awkward position she had the luck to meet one of those impressionable, inexperienced youths who, under the glamour of a first and absorbing passion, fancy that nothing is so likely to ennoble, intensify, and immortalise it as the act of marriage. The name of this dupe was Roger Palmer, and he was a young fellow of respectable means and family studying law at the Temple. Where, when, or how Barbara made his acquaintance is unknown; perhaps it is not doing her memory, already sufficiently lurid, an injustice to suggest that the first meeting might have been

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in the streets when she was on her way to "Butler's shop." For Roger Palmer, excellent young man though he was, by no means belonged to the same rank or moved in the same society as Barbara Villiers. In fact, her stepfather, the Earl of Anglesea, strongly opposed the match, but as he eventually yielded it is to be supposed that Barbara's arguments were irresistible.

Having got the necessary husband, she returned without compunction to her *liaison* with Chesterfield, whom she was too much in love with to bear him any resentment. As for Palmer, poor creature, he was so blinded with love of his dazzlingly beautiful wife as to remain apparently long in ignorance of the real state of affairs of which he had been the dupe. But the "Mounseer," as his wife spoke of him in her letters to Chesterfield, was not so great a fool as not to be jealous, if still unsuspecting, of the attention Mrs. Palmer received from her admirer. He suggested that they should go into the country to live, where he might have her all to himself.

An unexpected event, however, soon rid him of Chesterfield. This nobleman—of whom Swift many years after declared "I have heard he was the greatest knave in England"—having killed his man in a duel, was obliged to flee the country, and the *liaison* was interrupted. Shortly afterwards Palmer, who was employed by the Royalists to carry messages to Charles, went to Holland and took his wife with him. Although it is not known with any certainty what sort of reception the Palmers met with at the exiled Court at Breda, there can be little doubt that Barbara, whose character experience had already begun to develop, used Chesterfield, whom she found at Breda, to serve her ends in his turn as cunningly as she had previously used Palmer for the same purpose. It was to her, as all the world knows, that King Charles slunk off privately to spend the first night of the Restoration, treating the joyous acclaim of the people, such as no King of England has ever received before or since, quite as cynically as the pompous official welcome of Sir Harbottle Grimstone, Speaker of the House of Commons. Henceforth, the career of "the finest woman of her age," as she was described by one of her enemies, emerges from obscurity and passes into the full light of history.

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So far there was nothing in her life to mark it from that of hundreds of other loose women. She had given no sign of the *chef-d'œuvre* she was to execute; "like most great artists," says one of her biographers, "she had begun her career by copying conventional methods." But now she was to show a remarkably original talent in the design of vice. Her opportunity, that "tide in the affairs of men" which the great majority of mankind are incapable of using to their advantage, had come; she was not the one to let her chance slip. That she was fully alive to the fortune that dropped on those on whom Royalty smiled is evident from her attempt to capture the favour of the Duke of York while still uncertain of Charles's. We read of a flirtation carried on in church with the heir-presumptive; if she could not be the mistress of the King, she resolved to be that of his brother. Of the necessary qualifications for playing her game successfully, Mrs. Palmer possessed a perfect self-confidence and the power to fascinate. As we do not believe that it is possible to convey any real idea of physical beauty by enumerating its component parts, we will content ourselves with saying, on the authority of her friends and enemies, that Mrs. Palmer was dazzlingly, maddeningly, triumphantly beautiful.

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At the Bartholomew Fair, to which she had the hardihood to go, the curses of a mob that threatened to wreck the carriage of the "King's Miss" were turned, at sight of her lovely face, to blessings. She was one of those women who appeal directly to the senses, a rare creature with the irresistible smile of a Circe and the temper of a Medea. Such women do not require intellect.

The siren played her part cunningly. Her husband had at the Restoration been returned to Parliament for Windsor, and lived in London in King Street, Westminster, in the house which had been the regicide Whalley's, now a fugitive in America. Next door, Pepys, as consummate a snob and gossip as he was diarist, used to hear "great doings of music; the King and Dukes at Madam Palmer's, a pretty woman they have a fancy to." It is strange to note how Pepys's admiration for her rose and fell with the King's favour. Exactly nine months after that Restoration night a daughter—afterwards Lady Sussex, bosom friend of the Duchesse de Mazarin—was born in "Whalley's house," about whose birth there was much scandal. The King, already the slave of Mrs. Palmer, acknowledged the child as his, but it was generally believed to be Lord Chesterfield's, "whom she resembled very much." But Palmer, who was either a fool or a very chivalrous man, claimed the baby as his!

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Shortly after this scandal the negotiations for Charles's marriage with Catherine of Braganza were begun. At once Mrs. Palmer, who dreaded in the unknown queen a rival to supplant her, prepared to soften her fall and at the same time to prevent it if she could. Already political factions had formed around her, but it was by relying on herself more than on others that she managed to get Charles to send the following note to Morrice, the Secretary of State:—

"WHITEHALL, 16 Oct., 1661.

"Prepare a warrant for Mr. Roger Palmer to be Baron of Limerick and Earl of Castlemaine in the same form as the last, and let me have it before dinner.—C."

Owing, however, to the hostility of Clarendon, the famous Chancellor, one of those men whose great abilities and integrity are characterised by a total absence of tact, Mr. Palmer did not become Earl of Castlemaine till the 11th of December, instead of "before dinner." In spite of this coveted honour Lady Castlemaine was very nervous as to the future. As she foresaw clearly that with the arrival of the Queen her position was at stake, she determined not to lose it without a struggle. By her termagant temper, by which strangely she held Charles as much as by her beauty, she hectored and caressed the King into appointing her lady of the bedchamber to the Queen. Nevertheless, the interval before the battle-royal began was very trying to her. She

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quarrelled with Chesterfield and threw him aside like an old glove lest his former connection should damage her at such a juncture in the eyes of Charles. Pepys and his wife saw her at this time at the play of "The French Dancing Mistress," where "with much pleasure we gazed upon my Lady Castlemaine; but it troubles us to see her look dejectedly and slighted by people already."

But nothing tried her temper more than her husband. The poor disillusioned man, thinking of her good name perhaps, if not of his own, had a child born to his wife in these days, of which Charles was undoubtedly the father, baptized as his own by a Roman Catholic priest, to which faith he was a convert. To Lady Castlemaine, hoping to hold the King by the children she had by him, nothing was more vexatious than this well-intentioned spoke in the wheel from a husband whose worth she knew in her heart and whom she had shamefully treated. She burst like a fury upon Castlemaine; had the child re-baptized by the rector of St. Margaret's; and ten days later left her husband for ever, taking with her "the plate, jewels, and other best things, every dish and cloth, and servant, except the porter"—the first indication of the rapacity for which she was later to be famous. On this day, in such a temper as one may imagine, she went to Hampton Court to kiss the Queen's hand for the first time and fight out with her royal rival the battle for which it seems both had been preparing.

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**EDWARD HYDE, EARL OF CLARENDON.**  
*After Sir Peter Lely.*

Catherine of Braganza, poor, little, lonely, inexperienced creature, had arrived in England with the fixed determination not to admit Lady Castlemaine into her presence. She came prepared to conquer the heart of her fascinating husband, and lost her own at sight of him. To receive Lady Castlemaine as her lady of the bedchamber was, as Clarendon told the King, "more than flesh and blood could stand." But Charles, who dreaded the ridicule of his courtiers if he yielded to his wife and under the spell of his passionate mistress, remained firm. The Queen was equally obstinate. She declared that rather than submit she would go back to Lisbon "in any little vessel." The honourable Clarendon, to whom such a woman as Lady Castlemaine was personally no less abhorrent than her influence in State affairs was to be dreaded, sided with the Queen, and with his customary tactlessness tried to persuade the King he was in the wrong. The hatred of Lady Castlemaine for Clarendon dates from this period; she never forgave him for "meddling in her business," as she expressed it. As she never hid her dislikes, and in the war of interest fought squarely enough, the Chancellor had much to do to keep his own position secure.

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It was she who made Charles write to Clarendon during his thankless *rôle* of peacemaker—

"Nobody shall presume to meddle in the affairs of the Countess of Castlemaine. Whoever dares to do so will have cause to repent it to the last moment of his life. Nothing will shake the resolution I have taken with regard to her; and I shall consent to be miserable in this world and the next, if I yield in my decision, which is that she shall continue a bedchamber lady to the Queen. I shall to the last hour of my life regard any one who opposes me in this as my enemy; and whosoever shows himself hostile to the Countess will, I swear by my honour, earn my undying displeasure."

The vituperative exaggeration of this letter betrays the real author. Charles merely penned what the beautiful termagant dictated to him.



Such was the state of affairs when Lady Castlemaine left her husband, plundering his house of all it contained before she went, and on the same day got herself presented at the Queen's Drawing-Room by the King himself. Catherine, who till now had never seen her and did not catch her name, received her graciously; a moment later, discovering the trick that had been played upon her, and stung by the publicity with which she had been insulted, the wretched Queen fainted, bursting a blood-vessel. Far from feeling shame at being the cause of such an indecent scandal, not to speak of the misery of a fellow-creature, Lady Castlemaine gloried in her triumph. It is true the Duchess of Richmond, unable to control herself, before the whole Court called her a Jane Shore, and hoped she should live to see her come to the same end! But the Queen's powers of resistance were broken by exhaustion. Not long after Pepys saw the "King, Queen, and my Lady Castlemaine and young Crofts (the Duke of Monmouth) in one coach." Catherine shut her eyes, and Lady Castlemaine moved to Whitehall, into apartments close to the King's.

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As for the husband she had degraded and deserted, his state of mind as well as his temperament may be imagined from the fact that he went to France to hide his shame and grief under a cowl in some monastery. This cure for his sick spirit did not, however, prove as efficacious as he had expected. He soon returned and tried a sort of political activity as a substitute, which from time to time drew him for a brief moment out of a respectable obscurity, from which but for his notorious wife he would never have emerged at all.

Great as was her victory and long as her sway lasted, we very much doubt if Lady Castlemaine's power over the King, marked as it was by plunder of the State, was ever so real as before the arrival of the Queen. For some ten years or more, it is true, she continued a sort of *maîtresse en titre*, but never before or since was such a position assailed by so many storms, or filled by a woman whose actions were so calculated to cause her to forfeit it. No royal mistress has ever treated her lover so brutally, so indecently, so faithlessly as Lady Castlemaine treated Charles, and continued to be a power. He liked wit, and she had none; he liked peace in his establishment, and she scolded him like a Xantippe; he liked flattery, and she reviled him; he dreaded ridicule, and she made him the laughing-stock of his Court and the jest of his people. Even affection was lacking between them; neither of them ever evinced the pretence of it for the other. It is true she had beauty, but others were more beautiful; and after the chain that bound him to her, many times snapped, was finally broken beyond repair, this strange couple continued on good terms. Perhaps psychologists may explain the secret of her hold over him, for never was connection between such a King and such a mistress so inexplicable.

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Her first indiscretion, which, one would think, should have proved fatal to her position, occurred shortly after her triumph over the Queen. Charles, whose affection for his numerous progeny was one of the traits of his subtly complex character, had young Crofts, his eldest bastard, brought to Whitehall and publicly acknowledged. He was a singularly handsome and attractive youth, and Lady Castlemaine, under the pretence of "mothering" him, began at once to weave her spells around him. This intrigue did not escape the King; but, instead of overwhelming both with his royal wrath, he paid his mistress the compliment of being jealous, and cynically removed his son from her path by marrying him to the richest heiress in Scotland and creating him Duke of Monmouth. The termagant took her revenge by carrying on a double intrigue with James Hamilton, the brother of the famous Anthony, and Sir Charles Barkeley. It was no secret. "Captain Ferrers and Mr. Howe," wrote gossip Pepys, "both often through my Lady Castlemaine's window have seen her go to bed and Sir Charles Barkeley in her chamber." But Charles merely shrugged his shoulders in his cynical fashion and declared himself "past jealousy." The report, the first of many similar ones, ran "that Lady Castlemaine had fallen from favour." Pepys, however, is able to state that the King still continued to visit her "four nights a week," and was told that "my Lady Castlemaine hath all the King's Christmas presents, made him by the peers, given to her; and that at the great ball she was much richer in jewels than the Queen and Duchess (of York) put together."

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It is *de rigueur*, no doubt, that the reconciliations between a monarch and his mistress should be richly lacquered with gold; but in the annals of royal tiffs there is no gilding so heavy as that which calmed the termagant outbursts of my Lady Castlemaine. If it be true that lovers often quarrel for the pleasure of "making up," how great must that pleasure have been to Barbara Villiers, whose greed of gain was only equalled by her man-hunger!

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For these two passions, money and men, consumed her between them. After one of their quarrels Charles gave her £30,000 to pay her debts; after another he made her a present of Berkshire House, a splendid property near St. James's Palace; after yet another her dukedom. But titles were of as little account to this woman with the blood of the Villiers in her veins as silver in the time of King Solomon. What she coveted was cash—cash to squander upon her pleasures, cash to pay her huge debts, cash to stimulate her lovers. As Burnet says of her, "she was enormously ravenous"; so the Customs were farmed for her benefit to the extent of ten thousand a year; likewise she mulcted the revenue derived from the tax on beer of a similar sum, and the Post Office of half this amount annually. But this great income was as nothing compared to the vast sums paid her from the Irish Treasury, instead of from the English, because the corruption was less easily to be detected. As for the Privy Purse, she never went shopping without it. "Make a note that this is to be paid for out of the Privy Purse," she used to say to her maid when anything in the London shops took her fancy. Further, during the period that my Lady Castlemaine played the Montespan to Charles's Louis, all offices that fell vacant, whether spiritual or temporal, were auctioned for her benefit. And, like the true courtesan she was, this literal shower of gold in which she lived ran off her like water through a sieve.

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One night she lost £25,000 at play, and her usual stake on a cast was from £1,000 to £1,500.

Money had neither meaning nor value for her, but she wanted it and was prepared to get it at all costs. Once too, like the harlot again, she stripped Charles of everything, so that he himself lacked linen and the very servants at Whitehall had not bread to eat!

This abnormal appetite, which consumed even the money set aside for the purchase of the royal stationery, was the concomitant symptom of the nymphomania from which she suffered—a disease perfectly well known to medical science. Without some such explanation it seems impossible to us to account for the innumerable infidelities that Lady Castlemaine indulged in while *maîtresse en titre*. As Charles had some knowledge of medicine and chemistry, and was very far from being a fool—as the beautiful shrew once called him to his face—one is almost tempted to hazard the suggestion, as an explanation of his long bondage to this woman, that he found a scientific excuse for her conduct which has been overlooked by historians. Be this as it may, it was not long before the lovely Lady Castlemaine found room again for others beside the King in her capacious heart.

To enumerate her lovers, the number of whom exceeded the King's, would not only be impossible but scarcely amusing. Of this legion devoted to the worship of Priapus there are a few, however, that may be cited. As Lady Castlemaine consumed money irrespective of the source from which it was derived, so she never gave a thought to the rank from which her lovers were recruited. My Lady Castlemaine's taste in men was thoroughly catholic. From Berkeley and Hamilton her fancy flitted to her cousin, Buckingham, one of the most extraordinary men of an extraordinary age, of whom more later. From this great Duke what she termed her affections roamed through the various grades of society, and finally rested on a "compound of Hercules and Adonis," who supplemented his living on the tight-rope. With this man, Jacob Hall, she was, as Pepys would say, so "besotted" for a time that she gave him a salary, diverting the money for this purpose from a sum voted by Parliament for the National Defence. From the rope-dancer, who is said to have treated her after her own vituperative fashion, she probably suffered less than from the polished villainy of Buckingham.

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Nor, when the ice of the trough on which we are skating is cracking under our feet, should we fail to mention the actor, Hart, a great-nephew of Shakespeare. Her *liaison* with this handsome and justly celebrated tragic actor had apparently a less voluptuous motive than such amours usually had with her. Pepys, gossiping with Mrs. Knipp, the actress, in his customary prurient curiosity to glean news from any source, learns that "my Lady Castlemaine is mightily in love with Hart, of their house; and he is much with her in private, and she goes to him and do give him many presents; and that the thing is most certain, and by this means she is *even with* the King's love to Mrs. Davis." (Moll Davis, an "impertinent slut" of an actress, and as beautiful and brazen as my Lady Castlemaine herself.) As one of many instances of the bond, of which history does not afford a parallel, between a king and a *maîtresse en titre* this attempt of Lady Castlemaine to get "even with" Charles is striking.

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How the ice cracks under us!

It is not always on dukes and rope-dancers, actors and dandies that my Lady Castlemaine casts her hungry glance. No one, provided he be fair and shapely to the eye, escapes her attention. History does not relate the number of times Chiffinch let her through that little gate at Whitehall by which the crowd of duchesses, actresses, and meaner beauties passed secretly to and from the private closet of Majesty. But on one of these masked assignations, as my Lady Castlemaine scuttled down the back-stairs, she spied with her observant eyes a page loitering there. The page passed after that meeting with the King's mistress from the back-stairs of Whitehall to the stage, assassination plots, and many a questionable adventure, but for nigh on twenty years my Lady Castlemaine was "interested" in him. His shallow, handsome head being turned, Goodman boasted openly of the patronage he enjoyed. Once at the theatre—it was in William and Mary's time—the audience being seated, the Queen in her box, and the curtain ready to rise, he shouted from behind the scenes to inquire "whether his duchess had come," and forbade the raising of the curtain till she should appear. Fortunately at that moment her Grace of Cleveland arrived and Queen Mary was spared the insult of having to wait an actor's pleasure. Such was her passion for this scoundrel that she was content to share his affections with his wife and another woman of the town. But this was at a later period when her money and rank rather than her charms attracted.

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**WILLIAM WYCHERLEY.**  
*After Sir Peter Lely.*

Perhaps no better instance of the morals of the Restoration could be cited than the manner in which this female Don Juan commenced her notorious acquaintance with Wycherley. He was at the time a good-looking young man, in the bud of his dramatic career, and she was a middle-aged woman with such a past! He had, with design to secure her patronage, flattered her in his play, "Love in a Wood, or a Night in St. James's Park" (!), just then running to crowded houses, when she passed him one morning in her carriage in Pall Mall. With the gross humour of Restoration manners she shouted at him a low epithet that might with perfect justice and much more fittingly have been applied to her own sons. He at once turned, and the following dialogue, according to Dennis, Pope, and others, took place:—

"Madam," said Wycherley, "you have been pleased to bestow on me a title which generally belongs to the fortunate. Will your ladyship be at the play to-night?"

"Well," she replied, "what if I am there?"

"Why, then, I shall be there to wait on your ladyship, though to do so I disappoint a very fine woman."

"So you are sure to disappoint a woman who has favoured you for one who has not?"

"Yes," was the gallant reply, "if she who has not is the finer woman of the two. But he who will be constant to your ladyship till he can find a finer woman, is sure to die your captive."

It is stated that hereupon the lady blushed! But she was at the theatre that night and sat with him in his box.

After this episode, which if it caused talk did not cause scandal, we need no longer wonder at the tone of Wycherley's comedies.

One would think that such flagrant infidelities would have snapped the mysterious spell Lady Castlemaine had cast upon the King. But perhaps there was safety in the openness of her amours, and it was not often that Charles was jealous; he was too cynical, and gave his mistresses the same license he took himself. There were, however, times when his pride was hurt, and two of these are worth citing: one as an incident in the life of the great Marlborough, the other as the means through which Lady Castlemaine finally lost the King.

No light has been shed on the character of Marlborough clearer than that in which it is exposed by the story of his start in life. John Churchill came up to London to seek his fortune with empty pockets, no influence, and a face of such beauty as few young men have ever been endowed with. He was an obscure youth of seventeen, with ambition already unbridled, when the eyes of my Lady Castlemaine first fell upon him. At the first exchange of glances desire was born in both of them. The courtesan saw in him a new emotion to be gratified; he saw in the King's mistress a stepping-stone to fortune. But the game to both was full of danger; detection, in this instance, was thought by Lady Castlemaine to spell her ruin. For she was shrewd enough to perceive that her sway over Charles had begun to wane; and in her falling it was to her interest to fall softly. To bind young Churchill to secrecy was easy; he was naturally cunning, and the prize he sought was slippery. Careful, however, as they both were, they could not escape the alert, vindictive suspicion of his Grace of Buckingham. Five years before this nobleman and his "cousin Barbara" were on the best of terms; she had saved him from the Tower and paved the

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way for him to the Ministry, but they had now fallen out, over what is not related, and Buckingham, as usual, flung all his ability into his hate. Being informed by his spies of the visits John Churchill paid the courtesan, he laid a trap in which the King might catch the culprits *in flagrante delicto*. Doubtless every one remembers how the handsome young guardsman—who had already got out of his mistress enormous sums of money as well as his commission in the army—hearing the sound of the King's voice as he lay in her arms, leapt out of the window to escape recognition, while Charles, with his consummate cynicism, cried after him, "I forgive you, for you do it for your bread."

Charles had one great virtue which seems to us at times to cancel most of his vices—a fine sense of humour. May we suggest that the kingly hand may be seen in the fate of the child whom, after this episode, the Duchess of Cleveland bore to Churchill? Surely, it could only be his sense of humour that made a "nun at Pontoise" of the issue of this *liaison*? For Barbara Villiers, who never had a sense of humour at all, was not religiously inclined, though she once made a bishop and liked to be painted as a madonna; nor was John Churchill the man to give a second thought to liabilities he had helped others to incur—a statement that reminds us of a story of a game of basset at which the Duke of Marlborough refused to lend the Duchess of Cleveland half-a-crown, when he was keeping the bank, and had a thousand pounds lying on the table before him!



**M.<sup>R</sup> DE  
MARLBOROUGH.**

**As he was in 1668 when ensign in  
the Gardes Françaises.  
From an Engraving after  
Vandermeulen.**

The other instance in which Charles was recalcitrant was my Lady Castlemaine's fondness for the "invincible Jermyn," with his big head and little legs and forced wit. As the records of the period quite fail to convey the charm this vain, shallow dandy exercised on all the women of the Court, we are inclined to agree with the King that he was a creature to be despised. But Lady Castlemaine, like the rest of her sex, thought differently. This was one of the rare occasions when the termagant was strangely chary about giving offence. To cover up one's tracks at Whitehall was very difficult, and Lady Castlemaine was only partially successful. The arrival of Frances Stuart at Court gave her an opportunity to practise her powers of dissimulation. Lady Castlemaine professed a great friendship for the beauty and had her to sleep in the same bed, not so much as a compliment on the part of my lady as a ruse to throw Charles off the scent. For when the King came, as was his habit, every morning and nearly every night, to visit Lady Castlemaine he found La Belle Stuart in bed beside her ladyship. But while this friendship tended to extinguish Charles's jealousy of Jermyn, it finished by firing my Lady Castlemaine's of Miss Stuart. It is not here that we shall relate in full the amusing particulars of the game of cross-purposes, of which the prize was sexual emotion, that to the ribald delight of the town and the more decorous gratification of Mr. Pepys now took place. The shrew had to fight the prude for her position, her plunder, and her royal paramour. From being friends the rival beauties became deadly enemies. The quarrel was taken up by their servants; the nurses of the mistress's bastards

assaulted the maids of the prude; once the King had to leave the Council of State to make peace!

All her powers of coarse vituperation, all her powers of intrigue, all her knowledge of the King's character were brought into play by Lady Castlemaine. She dished her rival, but it is a marvel, with the strange means she employed, that she was not utterly ruined. The secret of her success is to be found, we think, in that she was fighting not for possession of the King's affections, she cared nothing about them, but for the possession of his influence. [82]

It is to be borne in mind that this Stuart-Castlemaine-Jermyn affair continued for nearly five years. Once during this time, on some slighting words from the King, Lady Castlemaine packed her boxes and trunks and, swearing she had shaken the dust of the Court from her feet, quitted the palace for Richmond. But in spite of Miss Stuart, or perhaps on account of her prudery, Charles, after a couple of days, missed the termagant, and went a-hunting in her neighbourhood, to the amusement of the Court. The next day my Lady Castlemaine was back at Whitehall, but before she came she made the King implore her on his knees! The reconciliation was, however, of short duration. The talk of the town was of nothing but the wrangling that went on in the royal palace between the mistresses. Pepys's diary is for the time a thermometer registering the rise and fall of the temperature of a mercurial royal favour and its effect on my Lady Castlemaine's looks and moods.

Had her beautiful prudish rival possessed less virtue and more wit Lady Castlemaine's star would have set long before it did. But she finally ruined La Belle Stuart in the same contemptible, unprincipled fashion as Buckingham later ruined herself. Warned by the pimps of the back-stairs, whom she took care to secure to her interest, she was able to notify Charles in time for him to surprise Miss Stuart in a situation which deprived her of his regard. With the prude's elopement from Whitehall the day after this adventure, Lady Castlemaine's position was more secure than ever, and her reign continued as before, punctuated with infidelities and Billingsgate quarrels. [83]

In the morning of the Restoration decency was not wholly flung to the winds. Then when my Lady Castlemaine presented her lord with a son, the new-born babe was smuggled out of her bed secretly, and "carried off by a coachman under his cloak," to be publicly acknowledged by the King years later when the sun of the Restoration was at its zenith. It is said that several dukes came into the world in this mysterious fashion. But as time passed the coming of a bastard was noised about the Court and the coffee-houses long before he arrived. During the Great Plague, when the Court was at Oxford, Pepys states that "every boy in the streets openly cries, 'The King can't go away till my Lady Castlemaine be ready to come along with him.'" On this occasion the poor Queen, who, under the mask of friendship which she wore even in private, studied revenge for the insults she received from this brazen courtesan, called upon her lady of the bedchamber to fulfil her duties, and my Lady Castlemaine, scarcely able to leave her bed, had to mount and ride in Catherine's suite. [84]

Another time she contented herself with laughing at Lady Castlemaine's jealousy of La Belle Stuart. Yet another, the King himself revenged her. Overhearing his mistress one day making a slighting remark of the Queen, Charles burst into one of his rare fits of anger and ordered the woman to leave Whitehall forthwith. Lady Castlemaine went off imperiously enough, but took the precaution to leave her baggage behind her. At the end of three days, hearing nothing from him, she became alarmed and wrote him submissively to ask for permission to send for her things. He told her she might come in person and fetch them if she wished them, and the quarrel ended as usual in a reconciliation. Her hold over him seemed magical—a hold the secret of which, one would say, was the fearlessness of her abuse. Under that terrible lash Charles cowered to the end like a whipped dog.

During her struggle for supremacy with the Stuart, when even the most witless of frailties would have cunningly manœuvred the whole artillery of flattery, kisses, smiles, sighs, and tears, Lady Castlemaine exploded her vituperative bombs in the royal presence, and taunted the King like a *poissarde*. Nor, what is perhaps more remarkable, in the duel of these Restoration Brunhildas and Fredregondes for Charles's heart, did either one or the other subject her private inclinations to interest. [85]

When the Queen was supposed to be dying and the gamesters of the Court were backing Miss Stuart for her place, Lady Castlemaine continued her intrigue half-openly, half-secretly with Jermyn. On the authority of a Mr. Cooling, from whom Pepys was in the habit of pumping the gossip of the Court when that gentleman was primed with wine, history learns that Charles, venturing a little cynical raillery on the subject of Jermyn, whom he considered more despicable a rival than Goodman or Hall, remarked that though always willing to oblige the ladies, he could hardly be expected to father *all* the babes about to be born at Whitehall. To which Lady Castlemaine, who saw an allusion to herself in the remark, "made a slight puh at him with her mouth." In this instance, however, Charles proved very inconsiderate of my Lady Castlemaine's state of health. Whereupon with curses and tears of rage she rushed from the palace to a friend's house in Pall Mall, swearing that "she will have it christened in the Chapel at Whitehall and owned for the King's; or she will bring it into Whitehall gallery and dash the brains of it out before the King's face!"

But whether it was because he was afraid that this woman, unique in the annals of palace prostitution, was capable of putting her Medea-like vengeance into effect, or from the more likely fear of her threat to publish his letters, Charles followed her and prayed her on his knees to return. From one of his Povys, or Fenns, or Coolings the prurient Mr. Pepys learns that my Lady Castlemaine allowed herself to be persuaded to yield, but "not as a mistress, for she scorned him, but as a tyrant to command him! And so she is come to-day, when one would think his mind [86]

should be full of some other cares, having this morning broken up such a Parliament with so much discontent, and so many wants upon him, and but yesterday heard such a sermon against adultery."



NELL GWYNN.  
*After Sir Peter Lely.*

It has been said that the English take their pleasures sadly; it might have been added with more reason that they take their vices grossly. Never was this latter sardonic reproach more applicable than at the Restoration. The contrast between Whitehall and Versailles is striking in this respect. At the former the very duchesses were demi-reps; at the latter even the termagant Montespan never forgot the dignity and breeding due to her position. In England, in our respectable age, the language of a Nell Gwynn or a Duchess of Cleveland are alike impossible of printed quotation. In France, after more than two centuries, the attic wit of a Ninon de Lenclos or a Madame de Maintenon has lost none of its savour. But if we have lacked the refinement of the French we have had compensation. We paid for our gross vices on the spot, cash down, so to speak. We settled our little Restoration bill, with a discount of course, at the Revolution of 1688. A Duchess of Cleveland has, after all, only cost us a couple of dukedoms. France's bill for a similar article was presented in the Reign of Terror, with another for interest in the Commune. In a word, if a nation wishes such luxuries, as nations have done before and may do again, we should recommend on the whole a coarse-mouthed Cleveland to a *spirituelle* Pompadour. They both wear equally well in the public memory, and the price paid in pounds sterling for the former is incalculably less than that paid in human blood for the latter. [87]

But it must not be supposed that Charles and his favourite were always quarrelling and making up, or that he, in the intervals between one rupture and another, regarded her with indifference while cynically permitting her to plunder the State and enjoy the liberties which he took himself. On the contrary, he treated as personal affronts the many insults offered to her. Overhearing Lady Gerard maligning Lady Castlemaine behind her back, he ordered her to quit the Court. For an obscene jest at her expense he likewise banished Killigrew, the wit, whom personally he liked. On one occasion he ordered the gates of St. James's Park to be shut and everybody found within to be arrested because three masked men assailed her as she was taking a walk and frightened her into a fit by swearing she should die in a ditch like Jane Shore. And his splendid gift of Berkshire House was the means he took of consoling her after a quarrel for the famous "Poor Whores' Petition to the Illustrious Lady of Pleasure, the Countess of Castlemaine," which was followed a few days later by "A Gracious Answer" to the same. But perhaps Charles showed as much defiance as pity in this act; for these lampoons were levelled at the favourite at the time of the riot of London apprentices, who, fired with religious zeal, pulled down the brothels in the city, and when suppressed with bloodshed declared that "they had only done ill in not pulling down in place of the little ones the big one at Whitehall." [88]

The security of her position, which neither her vituperation nor her infidelities, nor the King's, seemed able to shake, naturally caused her to be regarded as a political factor of the greatest importance. Early in her reign Lady Castlemaine became the centre of the cunningest, most dangerous, and most profligate ambitions in the nation. In her apartments the famous Cabal was formed which had the fall of the honest Clarendon for its immediate and the plunder of the State for its ulterior object. She had no political ability, no inclination for political affairs, but she was

at once the tool and guiding genius of the Cabal. She was willing to essay the *rôle* of stateswoman with no other principle than revenge and no other policy than plunder. Never before or since in English history has a conspiracy had baser motives than that which made the nation the slave, dupe, and plaything of Clifford, Ashley, Buckingham, Arlington, and Lauderdale. Never, perhaps, in any country were talents so nearly akin to genius so corrupted. To call these men statesmen is to debase the name, but they ruled the State, thanks to my Lady Castlemaine. Of this crew of brigands Buckingham was the most notorious. As the stately Ormond represents, we think, the highest type of nobleman, so Buckingham represents the lowest. He was one of the most extraordinary men of the century; with the power, had he wished, of rising to the summit of human virtue, he sank to the lowest depths of animal vice. In few men have the possibilities of the good and evil in human nature been so apparent. That such a character had the power to charm the stern Puritan Fairfax, whose daughter and Cromwell's niece he married, and at the same time to appeal to the dissolute Charles, would alone make him remarkable. As the chief ornament of the Court, the lover and foe alike of Barbara Villiers, and her male counterpart, the following striking portrait by the author of "Hudibras" strikes us as worthy of attention. It breathes more than anything else we remember to have read the very atmosphere of the Restoration, and explains all that seems incomprehensible in the characters of Charles, Lady Castlemaine, and the rest of the monstrous anomalies of Whitehall.

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"The Duke of Bucks," wrote Butler, "is one that has studied the whole body of vice. He has pulled down all that Nature raised in him and built himself up again after a model of his own. He has dammed up all those lights that Nature made into the noblest prospects of the world and opened other little blind loopholes backward by turning day into night and night into day. His appetite to his pleasures is diseased and crazy, like the pica in a woman, that longs to eat that which was never made for food, or a girl in the green sickness, that eats chalk and mortar. Perpetual surfeits of pleasure have filled his mind with bad and vicious humours, which make him affect new and extravagant ways, as being sick and tired with the old. Continual wine, women, and music put false value upon things, which, by custom, become habitual and debauch his understanding, so that he retains no right notion or sense of things. He rises, eats, and goes to bed by the Julian account, long after all others that go by the new style, and keeps the same hours with owls and the antipodes. He does not dwell in his house, but haunts it like an evil spirit, that walks all night to disturb the family, and never appears by day. He lives perpetually benighted, runs out of his life, and loses his time as men do their ways in the dark, and as blind men are led by dogs, so he is governed by some mean servant or other that relates to his pleasures. He is as inconstant as the moon which he lives under; and though he does nothing but advise with his pillow all day, he is as great a stranger to himself as he is to the rest of the world. His mind entertains all things very freely, but, like guests and strangers, they are not welcome if they stay long. This lays him open to all cheats, quacks, and impostors, who apply to every particular humour while it lasts and afterwards vanish. He deforms Nature while he intends to adorn her, like Indians that hang jewels in their lips and noses. His ears are perpetually drilled with a fiddlestick. He endures pleasure with less patience than other men do their pains."

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And this man ruled England after Cromwell! What a swing of the pendulum of fate! Considering the period, it is not at all surprising to learn that he died miserably in a peasant's hovel and was buried in Westminster Abbey. The Restoration is made up of these theatrical contrasts.

Opposed to Lady Castlemaine's Cabal, or the Cabal's Lady Castlemaine—for each was the tool of the other—Clarendon and Ormond tried to protect the honour and dignity of the nation. These men had rejected with scorn the bribes of Louis XIV., which the Cabal were eager to accept; they had lofty and patriotic aims, the respect of the people, and the greatest claim to that of the King. While they held power they acted as a dam to the sea of profligacy that threatened from the day of the King's restoration to inundate the State. But around such a man as Charles it could be but a question of time before their fatherly advice, incorruptible honour, and grave demeanour would become a bore. Nevertheless, though he regarded them as a boy does a schoolmaster, he was not prepared at the instigation of a Buckingham or a Lady Castlemaine to break loose from their tutelage. It was one of the strangest traits of Charles's character that he always respected virtue even while he paraded vice.

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And though the Cabal have had the credit of accomplishing the fall of Clarendon and Ormond, it is perhaps truer to say that Charles sacrificed them to public opinion rather than to private spite. To those who are interested in the history of political wire-pulling the intrigues of the Court of Charles II. will afford an entertainment second to none of the same kind. But this is not the place to expose them, and we merely refer to them in passing for the sake of such light as they may throw into the dark corners of Lady Castlemaine's political career.

This woman fought Clarendon and Ormond as she fought the King. Both had offended her in many ways—ways such as a courtesan never forgives. Clarendon had been the best friend of her noble father, and she was Barbara Villiers, the subject of lewd jests alike in the ante-rooms of Whitehall and the coffee-houses of the town. The contrast between them, with the unuttered reproach, pity, and scorn it implied, was sufficient cause for hatred. But Clarendon was tactless; a statesman himself, he laughed at the idea of a woman of her lack of ability attempting to rule the State. Nothing whetted her hatred for him like her powerlessness to hurt him; he seemed to stand out of the reach of her coarse abuse. When it was a question of Clarendon between them, the King told her that "she was a jade that meddled with things she had nothing to do with at all." But neither she nor the Cabal ever dreamt of throwing up the sponge. That such men as Clarendon and Ormond should have been under the necessity of taking her seriously into account

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was perhaps a greater humiliation than their struggles with Buckingham and Company. The Chancellor having declared, when refusing to put the seals to some grant of a place the courtesan had disposed of, that "the woman would sell everything shortly," she, on its being repeated to her, sent word to tell him that what he said was quite true and that she would sell his place too before long. She used openly to express a desire to see his head on a stake and a "hope to see Ormond hanged," for refusing to pay her drafts on the Irish Treasury. But this great nobleman, whose character was as stainless as the Chancellor's abilities were great, merely replied to her virago outburst that, "far from wishing her ladyship's days shortened in return, his greatest desire was to see her grow old."

Great stress has been laid on Lady Castlemaine's political influence from the fact that Clarendon finally fell. But of this there is no real proof; for, though she succeeded in fastening the King's anger on him at the time of the discovery of Miss Stuart's elopement, his disgrace was already imminent. The Chancellor, like most statesmen, sooner or later, was the victim of unforeseen complications. He made enemies by his want of tact; his popularity had already been impaired when the Dutch War broke out. The reverses sustained then aroused the desire for vengeance, which is one of the most effective ways public opinion has of expressing its will. Charles was not the man to resist the popular clamour, and Clarendon fell. Every schoolboy has heard the story of his fall—how, on leaving Whitehall after his dismissal, Lady Castlemaine jumped out of her bed and reviled her enemy like a fishwife as he passed under her window. Two years later Buckingham got rid of Ormond. In the place of one Minister who made a single mistake—the Dutch War—public opinion got the Cabal. As soon as the welcome news reached France, Louis XIV. sent each member of Lady Castlemaine's junto his portrait framed in jewels, valued at £3,000.

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Three years later, as might be expected, Lady Castlemaine and the Cabal fell out, like brigands over their booty. Buckingham, who had once been her lover, gave the *coup de grâce* to the *maîtresse en titre*, though it was left to others to provide her successor. Just why or how Charles ceased to crave the society of this woman whose coarse and disgusting behaviour had amused him for ten years is not clear; but the fact remains that he was anxious to break with her, and Buckingham offered him the opportunity, perhaps quite as much from the sheer love of a low intrigue as from hate of a woman who had offended him. Charles, who was still strangely afraid of the terrible termagant, was at a loss for a plausible excuse for dismissing her. To find one after all he had so long suffered from her with indifference, if not delight, indeed required ingenuity. But Buckingham discovered it for him in Jermyn, for whom his aversion was well known. Her *liaison* with Jermyn had continued more or less masked for years; for though Lady Castlemaine's passion for him had been the cause of more than one rupture with the King, the issue of which even she dreaded, she could not bring herself to give him his *congé* while bestowing the questionable favour of her regard on a score of others. Buckingham, who kept paid spies for the purpose of shadowing every person at Court, gave himself the contemptible pleasure of enabling Charles to surprise Lady Castlemaine and Jermyn precisely as she had enabled the King to surprise Miss Stuart and the Duke of Richmond.

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JACOB HALL, THE ROPE DANCER.

The scandalous *finale* to the most shameful royal *liaison* in the history of such things has been told by Count Hamilton with the inimitable gloss that he alone has been able to give to the



vulgarity of the Court of Charles II. As an example of the refinement with which it is possible to handle vice no less than the purity of literary style, his account of the way in which Charles broke with Lady Castlemaine is worth reproducing. His Majesty, having summoned up the courage to face her, "advised her rather to bestow her favours upon Jacob Hall, the rope-dancer, who was able to return them, than lavish away her money upon Jermyn to no purpose. She was not proof against his raillery. The impetuosity of her temper broke forth like lightning. She told him that it very ill became him to throw out such reproaches against one who, of all the women in England, deserved them the least; that he had never ceased quarrelling with her, ever since he had betrayed his own mean, low inclinations; that, to gratify such a depraved taste as his, he wanted only such silly things as Stuart, Wells, and that '*petite gueuse de comedienne*' (Nell Gwynn). After which, resuming the part of Medea, the scene closed with menaces of tearing her children to pieces and setting his palace on fire. What course could he pursue with such an outrageous fury who, beautiful as she was, resembled Medea less than her dragons when she was thus enraged? The indulgent monarch loved peace, &c."

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So the Chevalier de Gramont came to the rescue, and that prince of humorists drew up an agreement that Lady Castlemaine should for ever give up Jermyn, whom, as a proof of her sincerity, she would consent to have banished the town, while she would never abuse any more for ever the fair friends of the King, including that *petite gueuse* of an actress. In return for such condescension his Majesty would no longer put any restraint on her conduct, and immediately created her Baroness Nonsuch, Countess of Southampton, and Duchess of Cleveland, with parks and privileges and an income suitable to maintain such dignities. There were some at Whitehall who, while laughing over this buffoonery to which the royal seals were affixed, suggested that the Chevalier was not without a personal interest in the income he added to her titles, as he was in the habit of gaming every day at basset with her Grace, and never losing. Thus fell my Lady Castlemaine!

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The rest of her career was destined to be no less notorious than that of which we have already given a sketch. As Duchess of Cleveland she still hung about the Court, and for the rest of the reign was treated by Charles with the cynical good-nature that in him passed for friendship, and which he bestowed on all his discarded favourites. The next few years her Grace spent in getting her children acknowledged by the King—we are inclined to agree with his Majesty that they would be wise indeed if they ever knew their real father; but sooner than they should never have had a father at all, he graciously consented to assume that *rôle*. This urgent and profitable business finished, she set about marrying them, in which she showed as much zeal for their material, as neglect for their moral, welfare. A rather nasty libel action was the result of her match-making; but though she covered herself with ridicule, she got for her daughters the husbands she intrigued for. They were married on the same day, and his Majesty gave the elder £20,000 and the younger £18,000 as a dowry, while the Duchess, with characteristic greed, sent the bill for the wedding banquet and the trousseaux, some £3,000, to her old friend the Privy Purse.

Shortly afterwards she decided, having been so successful at Whitehall, to try her fortune at Versailles. She went to France with her eldest daughter, the Countess of Sussex (the Duchesse de Mazarin's *friend*) and Barbara, her youngest, and young John Churchill's receipt for the big sums he had got from her. The Duchess remained several years in France, and though very ill-received, as we can well imagine, at polished Versailles, she led her usual life in Paris. Among her adventures in the Ville Lumière, she succeeded in fascinating Montague, the English Ambassador, and ruining him. For this man, having in his infatuation confided to her how little he thought of Charles, had the misfortune some time after to transfer his passion for her Grace to her daughter, Lady Sussex. Whereupon the Duchess, who only objected to her daughters' escapades when they were at her own expense, immediately wrote to the King and informed him of Montague's treachery to him as well as to herself.

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She was in England again before the King's death—an event as disastrous for her as it was for the rest of the seraglio of the Merry Monarch. Compared with her past wealth her revenues were now shorn by debt, but she still lived in considerable luxury, and though less and less seen in public, still kept up her amorous intrigues. Her especial favourite, it would seem, was Goodman, with whom on her return to England she had resumed her old relation. Her day with the Buckingham and Jermyns and men of rank was past; it was now entirely the turn of actors, lackeys, and impostors. The year after Charles's death, when she was forty-five, there was born at her house in Arlington Street a child, "which the town christened Goodman Cleveland."

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A little later her daughter Barbara, who had taken the veil at the Convent of the Immaculate Conception in Paris, where she was known as Sister Benedicta, played on the Order to which she belonged an indecent practical joke, that, however, did not prevent her from becoming the prioress of a nunnery at a later and, we hope, a more circumspect day. This "love-jest" of the Sister Benedicta was adopted by its grandmother—almost the only generous act to her credit—and became in time a man of note in the eighteenth century.

Thus, in a partial and ignoble retirement, the Duchess passed the remaining years of the century, to emerge suddenly and with much scandal in the reign of Queen Anne before the curtain dropped upon her for ever.

Those who doubt, not without a certain righteous regret, the existence of the hell our ancestors believed in, may possibly derive some satisfaction from the fact that the Duchess of Cleveland did not escape some punishment in this world at least for her sins. In the tragi-comic close of this woman with the temper of a fishwife, the passions of a prostitute, and the conscience of an embezzler, there was a seeming retribution as terrible as it was deserved. If Buckingham's

end was sinister, the Duchess of Cleveland's was grotesque and brutal—a scene fit for a Latin comedy.

In the summer of 1705 her husband, the unlucky Earl of Castlemaine, died, and a little while later, in her sixty-third year, she married a man sixteen years her junior. In his youth he had been called Handsome Feilding and the name was still given him in ridicule, which, however, his blustering vanity prevented him from feeling. Once, when walking in the Mall with a companion, he inquired if his sword touched his right heel and whether the ladies ogled him. "Yes," was the reply. "Well, then," he swaggered, "let them die of love and be d—d!" The anecdote is characteristic of him. But of his original charms he possessed nothing now save the belief in their continued existence—a belief with which he had managed to inspire her Grace. Everybody but the doting old Duchess knew him to be a bully, a coward, and a knave. Fortune, never very kind to him, had completely deserted him; he kept up a certain appearance and out of gaol by gambling. On the wedding-day "he hired a coach and two footmen, who, that they might know to what fop they belonged, were clothed in yellow, and as foppishly wore black sashes, which he bought at a cheap rate as being only old mourning hatbands bought of such as cry about the street 'Old clothes.'" In such fashion did her Grace of Cleveland, who had been in the habit of drawing *ad libitum* on the purse of the nation, enter upon what she hoped was the late St. Martin's summer of her life.

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Her dream was short. In those days a wife and her property were the chattels of her husband. Handsome Feilding at once proceeded to materialise his bargain, and at last the termagant was tamed. Terrible was the life he led his aged bride. He took her money from her violently, and when she could not, or would not, give him more, he was in the habit of "drawing his sword and threatening to kill her, swearing it was no more sin to kill her than a dog." At last the terrified old woman, in deadly fear of her life, who had never before been afraid of any one, plucked up the courage to implore the protection of her children.

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"HANDSOME FEILDING."  
*After Wissing.*

"Just as I came down here," wrote Lady Wentworth from Twickenham to her son, "I heard that the Duchess of Cleveland's Feilding was dead, and she in great grief for him; but it was no such thing, for instead of that she has got him sent to Newgate for threatening to kill her two sons for taking her part when he beat her and broke open her closet and took £400 out. He beat her sadly, and she cried out 'Murder!' in the street out of her window, and he shot a blunderbuss at the people."

During the legal proceedings which followed she was too terrified to testify against him, and the case was dismissed. But immediately afterwards he was arrested on a charge of bigamy, lodged against him by one Mary Wadsworth, "a jilt of the town," whom it was proved he had married three weeks before the Duchess.

His trial was a *cause célèbre*. Few have ever lent themselves so conspicuously to the venomous humour of the press. Court and coffee-house alike roared over the satires and lampoons that flooded the town at the expense of these two surviving relics of the rakes of the Restoration. Before the idea of marrying the Duchess had occurred to him, Feilding had promised a Mrs. Villars five hundred pounds if she would help him to marry a Mrs. Deleau, a rich City

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widow, of whom he had heard but never seen. Mrs. Villars, who was Mrs. Deleau's hairdresser, being anxious to get the bribe, passed off the prostitute, Mary Wadsworth, in her name. At the second meeting they were married by a priest from one of the embassies. Dupe of his dupes, Feilding gave a supper on the occasion, at which, to the delight of the lampooners, he gave the supposed rich Mrs. Feilding a ring inscribed with the words *Tibi Soli*, as a mark of his passion, offering this sentimental token in a song "from the Greek," addressed to "Ianthe the lovely." By the light of Wycherley's comedies one may imagine the Restoration saturnalia of this wedding feast! When Handsome Feilding discovered the joke played upon him we are not told what he thought, but Mrs. Villars in open court assures us what he did. Having tried to persuade Mary Wadsworth that the marriage was a mere pretence, with sufficient success to enable him to marry the Duchess of Cleveland three weeks later, "it is duly set out that he, the said Robert Feilding, did lock five Locks upon the said Charlotte Henrietta Villars, and did beat and abuse her in a most Barbarous and Cruel manner, and did hold up to her head an Instrument or Weapon being a Hatchet on one side and a Hammer on the other, and did say to the said Charlotte Henrietta Villars that he the said Robert Feilding would slit her skull and nose if she should dare say to the Duchess of Cleveland anything of the marriage."

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Freed from this horrible nightmare, a foretaste, perhaps, of what awaited her in the next world, her Grace, with the ribald laughter of the world in her ears, shut herself up, a broken old woman, in her house at Chiswick, and soon died there of "a dropsy which swelled her to an enormous bulk."

Her heirs proved her will the day after her death in greedy haste to secure her supposed wealth. But of the vast sums she had plundered from the State nothing remained; they had vanished like the Restoration. As for Handsome Feilding, he was lucky to escape with a light sentence and have the shelter of the attic of his "Ianthe the lovely" to die in.

It is the commonplace habit of the Duchess of Cleveland's historians to sign their portraits of her with a moral. But such hackneyed reflections on the career of a glorified courtesan of yesterday are not apt. An angry moralist, like a schoolmaster with a birch, is an incapable instructor; his stripes are resented by dissimulation. For our part, in passing by the Duchess of Cleveland, as she hangs, whether one likes it or not, for ever in the Gallery of English History, we feel neither indignation nor sympathy. Perhaps the chief impression we have carried away, with which the reader may also agree, is the arresting contrast between the ribald ha-ha of her dropsical and lonely end and Leigh Hunt's portrait of my Lady Castlemaine at twenty. As it is quite as captivating as any of Lely's it is worth reproducing.

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"Lady Castlemaine was dressed in white and green, with an open bodice of pink, looped with diamonds. Her sleeves were green, looped up full on the shoulders with jewelry, and showing the white shift beneath richly trimmed with lace. The bodice was long and close with a very low tucker. The petticoat fell in ample folds, but not so long as to keep the ankles unexposed; and it was relieved from an affluence of too much weight by the very weightiness of the hanging sleeves, which counterpoising its magnitude, and looking flowery with lace and ribbons, left the arms free at the elbows and fell down behind on either side. The hair was dressed wide with ringlets at the cheeks, and the fair vision held a fan in one hand, while the Duke led her by the other. When she had crossed the steps and came walking up the terrace, the looseness of her dress in the bosom, the visibility of her trim ankles, and the flourishing massiveness of the rest of her apparel, produced the effect, not of a woman overdressed, but of a dress displaying a woman; and she came on breathing rosy perfection like the queen of the gardens."

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**THE DUCHESS OF RICHMOND.**  
*From the Medal by Rotier.*  
*Reproduced by the courtesy of the "Strand Magazine."*

# "LA BELLE STUART," DUCHESS OF RICHMOND

## A PRUDE OF THE RESTORATION

LA BELLE STUART! The glamour of the Restoration is in that romantic name. At the sound of it our thoughts at once rush back to childhood, when we learnt English History out of story-books and picture-books; and old, half-forgotten tales of the Merry Monarch, and the gay doings of cavaliers with periwigs and swords, of maids of honour all lace and perfume, crowd upon the memory. La Belle Stuart! To the very children of the Board Schools—if Imagination be a faculty looked upon with favour at those practical seats of municipal learning—must come visions of a far-off romantic time. And even now in maturer life, when the naughty gossip of Mr. Pepys and Hamilton's wit have torn off the magic veil that hid the truth from us, the name still fascinates, and our fancy delights to be lured back from the utilitarian virtues and Philistine vices of to-day to the *joie de vivre* of the Restoration. No, we have not the heart to scold La Belle Stuart; for childhood's sake she is still dear to us.

But enough of reflection. To the story, and as the giant Molineau said on a similar occasion, [106]  
"*Bélier, mon ami, commencez au commencement.*"

Frances Theresa Stuart was one of the daughters of a Scotch cavalier, whose capital consisted of a sword broken in the royal cause and a pedigree dipped in royal blood. After the capture or execution of King Charles, England being clearly no longer a country in which any one bearing the name of Stuart could live in safety, Stuart of Blantyre fled with his family to France. Broken swords and pedigrees were capital of a sort in those days across the Channel, and the starving cavalier applied for the interest on his to Queen Henrietta Maria. Her exiled Majesty, who was so poor herself that but for the pity of Cardinal de Retz she would have passed a winter without a fire in her apartment at the Louvre, could not do much for the ruined loyalist, but she did what she could. Stuart of Blantyre, like many another, was provided with a new sword by Condé or Turenne, and his year-old daughter, Frances, was adopted by the ex-Queen.

Much water was to flow under the bridge before the Stuarts and their followers were to come to their own again, and it was more French than English that La Belle Stuart arrived at Whitehall in her sixteenth year. As the *protégée* of Henrietta Maria she had enjoyed superior advantages, and it is not surprising that, brought up at the Louvre in constant intercourse with the best society of France, she should have spoken French as if it were her native tongue, and acquired that breeding and *air de parure* which in that day of French pre-eminence gave the possessor a peculiar distinction. Perfect manners and a perfect taste in dress have of themselves been known to redeem the looks of many a plain woman, but to these attractions Nature had bestowed on Frances Stuart the most perishable but most highly prized of all her gifts—beauty; beauty in its perfection, exquisite, statuesque, *éblouissante*. There was but one flaw in this *chef d'œuvre*, according to the critics, and that was the lack of sense. "It was hardly possible," said Hamilton, [107]  
"for a woman to have less wit or more beauty."

The opinion of this judge, who was capable of twisting, exaggerating, or suppressing the truth if by so doing he could polish a period, has passed unchallenged, presumably because many of La Belle Stuart's actions seem to confirm it. Yet nothing would be easier than to prove the contrary. It is quite true that she lacked the gift of saying smart, witty things, and the ambition to grasp at dazzling shadows, like the majority of her contemporaries. But she never lost sight of the main chance, and as she had the patience to wait for it, the courage to seize it, and the skill to take advantage of it, there is no exaggeration in saying that no more artful and calculating woman stepped at Whitehall than this canny Scot, whose mother, said Pepys, "is one of the most cunning women in the world."

It is quite useless to predict what would have been her fate had there been no Restoration; but from her apparently witless refusal of Louis XIV.'s splendid offer to provide for her suitably if she would remain and adorn his Court instead of returning to England with the Stuarts, it may be taken for granted that the inducement was not as attractive as it seemed. In spite of Louis XIV. and his promises, no one knew better than Frances Stuart and her "cunning mother" that it required something more than a pretty face, a taste in dress, and a *bel air* to induce a French lord worth having to marry a penniless girl. But in England men were less fastidious, and if she played her cards cleverly there was no reason why her attractions should not secure her the husband she wanted. The Restoration was Frances Stuart's first opportunity, so, gracefully declining Louis' offer and accepting his valuable present, she went to England in the train of Henrietta Maria. Shortly afterward, through her protectress's influence, her own beauty, and her family's claims, she was appointed maid of honour to Queen Catherine. At the Court of Charles II. such an appointment was equivalent to that filled by the houris who luxuriate behind the ivory and ebony lattices of the Imperial seraglio at Stamboul. [108]

Frances Stuart assumed her post at Whitehall with the firm intention of winning a husband; the supreme object of her life was marriage. She did not ask for love, or even great wealth, but rank, prestige. To have lovers galore, or even to be a king's mistress, made no appeal to her. Any woman with a pretty face could have the former and the To-morrows of the latter—! [109]

"I shall be a duchess," decided La Belle Stuart.

Every carnal inclination, if one of so cold and passionless a temperament was capable of being tempted, was subjected to her end. A girl of sixteen who can reason like this may be a coquette,

immodest in her actions, impure in her thoughts, and open to slanderous imputations, but she must of necessity be a prude. La Belle Stuart was one *par excellence*; in her the hypocrisy of prudery was double-distilled. The situation in which she found herself was the only possible one open to her. The road to her goal was a filthy and dangerous quagmire; she took it fearlessly, never once lost her presence of mind, and by trusting in a remarkable degree to herself, arrived safely at her destination. Frivolous, shallow, brainless, childish are some of the epithets that have been applied to her; but to us she seems to have possessed an exceptionally subtle intelligence and power of calculation which, as Clarendon declared, she "used for the convenience of her own fortune." No; whatever she was, La Belle Stuart was not a fool.

To Lady Castlemaine belonged the honour of "discovering" the new beauty. Confident of her own charms, and partly from a real liking, partly to use the appearance of friendship to cloak her intrigue with Jermyn, the *maîtresse en titre* patronised the maid of honour, displayed the greatest fondness for her, and almost forced her upon the King's notice. It was not long before Charles, who knew a pretty woman when he saw her, became "besotted with Miss Stuart" to such an extent that he would kiss her for half an hour at a time, quite regardless of observation. Such proceedings, at Whitehall of all places, afforded the necessary amount of food on which scandal thrives. Lady Castlemaine tore her hair and roundly abused her quondam friend, the "besotted" King became love-sick for the first and only time in his life, and La Belle Stuart defied the one and tormented the other almost out of his senses, staining her reputation, if you like, but keeping her virtue intact. This state of affairs lasted with varying degrees of intensity for about five years. It was like a great war in which battles and sieges, campaigns and winter quarters, followed regularly from year to year.

The political aspirations that spring from the soil on which the vivifying beams of royalty have fallen never lack reapers. The wily crew of sharpers who hung about my Lady Castlemaine for sake of what they could pick up, no sooner perceived the passion that La Belle Stuart had inspired in Charles than they gathered around her. Considering the witless, ingenuous character that, judging from her behaviour, the beautiful maid of honour was supposed to possess, never was there a finer opportunity for those politicians, who, like pickpockets, were planning at Lady Castlemaine's how to steal the seals of office from the statesman Clarendon. Had La Belle Stuart been the fool that they took her for, not only they, but Charles himself might have succeeded. But along the dirty and dangerous road she was going not a pitfall escaped her; to save herself from slipping she shod herself in dissimulation. The little prude, whose indifference of the benefits of the King's passion was only matched by her indifference of Lady Castlemaine's hate, encouraged the King, Lady Castlemaine, and the whole Court to attribute her "simplicity" to lack of intelligence. To save herself from Charles it was not sufficient merely to play the prude, he was capable of overpowering prudery by brute force. La Belle Stuart took advantage of her youth to play the child as well. Never was beauty so silly; she laughed at everything, and affected tastes suited to a girl of twelve or thirteen. "She was a child," said Hamilton, who was duped like everybody else, "in all respects save playing with dolls."



**CHARLES THE SECOND.**  
*From a youthful portrait by Gerard van Honthorst.*

Blindman's-buff and hunt the slipper were her favourite games, and the charm with which she

invested these romps gave them a vogue. Pepys saw some of the greatest personages at Court sitting on the floor in the gallery at Whitehall playing at "I love my love with an A, because he is so-and-so," and "I hate him with a B, because of this and that." "Some of them," he added, "were very witty," which we can very well believe. There was, too, not infrequently a dash of malice in her artlessness. It was, perhaps, not altogether for effect that she chose the presence-chamber in which to let her childishness speak for her, by interrupting the deepest play with an ingenuous but imperious command that the cards should be given her to build castles with!

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These artifices, which were cleverly designed as an armour for her prudery, increased the King's passion and protected her from it, both of which to one with La Belle Stuart's end in view were necessary aids. To Buckingham and Company the idea of governing such a "simpleton," and thus ingratiating themselves with the King, was enticing. To them the road to power by means of one who appeared to have as little ambition as she had experience, was infinitely more attractive than by means of such a woman as my Lady Castlemaine, whose terms staggered even the Cabal, and who was quite capable of bringing every one of them to the scaffold. The Duke of Buckingham, whose genius was as universal as it was the subtlest of the unprincipled gang of self-seekers at Whitehall, lost no time in cultivating the new favourite.

La Belle Stuart was fond, or pretended to be, of music; the Duke of Bucks had a sweet voice. She, like all prudes, was not averse to scandal; his Grace was both the father and mother of scandal, and gifted with a particular talent of mimicry. He sang to her and told her stories by the hour; and when it came to romping and other childishness, no one could build finer towers of cards. He was equal to every occasion. To outwit such a man was difficult, to fail to was dangerous; one false step, and La Belle Stuart's career at Whitehall would have been ruined irretrievably. The "silly" creature realised this, and did her best, not to win his friendship—that *would* have been "silly," the Duke of Buckingham had no more principle in friendship than in anything else—but to use him to further her ends. Had it been possible there is no doubt but that she would have married him, and thus gained at once the position she craved. For the Duke of Buckingham was, as far as rank went, a first-class grandee, extremely handsome, and equally fascinating. The Puritan Fairfax had been so charmed with him as to give him his daughter in marriage, to the anger of Cromwell who himself would like to have stood in the same relation to him. La Belle Stuart found him so entertaining that she would send for him to come and "play" with her whenever she felt bored. But, alas, for his too clever Grace! The "simpleton" was so beautiful. In a moment of weakness he discovered a passion himself for his would-be dupe. The repulse he received from the artless child, suddenly turned prude, was so severe as to compromise him with the King. Instead of ruling her, he was forced now to be ruled by her. Poor Villiers! how irksome the building of card-castles must have become!

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Nor where Buckingham failed did others succeed. The subtlety with which it was necessary to repulse him would have been wasted on Arlington. So La Belle Stuart treated the attempt of this stupid and unscrupulous mediocrity to make her his political cat's-paw by bursting out laughing in his face. Her exceedingly keen sense of humour—one of her many charms for Charles—was tickled by the absurd gravity with which he played his game. For, said the inimitable Hamilton, "having provided himself with a great number of maxims and some historical anecdotes, he obtained an audience of Miss Stuart, in order to display them; at the same time offering her his most humble services in the situation to which it had pleased God, and her virtue, to raise her. But he was only in the preface of his speech, when she recollected that he was at the head of those whom the Duke of Buckingham used to mimic," and Arlington and his intrigues were laughed away.

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That the consummate prude was quite alive to the value of reporting to the King the unsuccessful attempts on her chastity, as well as the political designs on her influence, may be taken for granted. Yet though La Belle Stuart had no inclination for political intrigue—and what is indeed stranger, no greed of gain, though very poor—she was remarkably wide awake where her own advantage was concerned. It is possible that the prudery which kept her virtue safe, while destroying her reputation—the loss of which at such a Court was almost unavoidable—may have been the effect of a temperament incapable of passion. We know that she never loved, and when married never had children. But if naturally prudish, La Belle Stuart made full use of the profit to be derived from such moral infirmity. It certainly never occurred to her, or her cunning mother, when she arrived at Whitehall from France and fascinated Charles, to dream of playing there the *rôle* of Anne Boleyn. Catherine of Braganza was a young and complaisant Queen, and Charles, though a faithless husband, respected her. But as time passed and the desire of all kings—save Frederick the Great—for issue became more and more remote, intrigue lifted its snaky head and threatened the helpless Portuguese.

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The passion of the King for La Belle Stuart, kept at fever heat by her prudish resistance to his advances, made the possibility of Catherine's death a stepping-stone to the throne. During a short and severe illness of the Queen it was openly hinted that Frances Stuart was to be her successor. There can be no doubt but that she, trusting in Charles's absorbing passion and her kinship to the House of Stuart, did at this time hope to step into Catherine's shoes. "She was greatly pleased," said Hamilton, "with herself for the resistance she had made; a thousand flattering hopes of greatness and glory filled her heart, and the additional respect that was universally paid her contributed not a little to increase them."

But the Queen recovered. Charles, however, who saw no means of reducing the fortress of virtue he had so long and unsuccessfully stormed, now began to think of divorce. He went so far as to ask Archbishop Sheldon "if the Church would put any obstacle in the way of his putting away a wife who was sterile." Sheldon promised to consider the matter, but as he was the

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creature of Clarendon, and the Chancellor was the friend of Catherine, whatever real hope Charles might have had was dashed. Intrigue, however, was still busy. The Duke of Buckingham, who had not yet indiscreetly placed himself in the power of the "simpleton" whose influence he was courting, suggested to the King a plan for abducting the Queen and carrying her off to the West Indies, where it would be easy to get rid of her! Charles, to his credit, instantly scorned the suggestion, and the *rôle* of Anne Boleyn became less and less possible for La Belle Stuart.

The part she played in this situation, when, surrounded with enemies, one false step might have ruined her utterly, was admirable. She gave no one the slightest opportunity of injuring her, and, whatever her hopes or disappointments, satisfied the Queen at any rate that her intentions were honest. Without doubt, if the road to the throne had been open she would have taken it; but it was not from lack of ability or courage to set out to open it that she failed. It was never really a possibility, and she was cunning enough to appreciate the fact.

During this period La Belle Stuart had to parry the hate with which she was assailed by Lady Castlemaine with all the energy of which that fury was capable. The danger from first to last that she ran from the *maîtresse en titre* was always more present than the chance of succeeding the Queen. There was but one way for Frances Stuart to crush Lady Castlemaine, and that was at the cost of her virtue. It was the condition on which the King promised to dismiss the termagant. But the beauty, who was as obstinate as she was cunning, was firmly resolved to be no man's mistress, she wished to make a grand match, and it was certainly not at the Court of Charles II. that an ex-mistress was likely to find a duke to marry her. The value she set upon virtue was that of all prudes who angle in a muddy stream. She had her price—it was marriage—and she took care to publish the fact. It was her way of cleansing her reputation of the stains left on it by the King's attentions. So as she elected to put up with Lady Castlemaine she was obliged to continue to defend herself from her. She would not have been human if she had not tried to score off a rival from whom she had to endure so much.

One of their many quarrels convulsed the Court, and afforded Hamilton an opportunity for the display of his caustic wit. It was known as the "Affair of the Calash." This ridiculous feminine enmity, of which the following description by Count Hamilton is not to be improved, was one of the beautiful prude's ways of testing her power over the King:—

"Coaches with glass were then a late invention; that which was made for the King not being remarkable for its elegance, the Chevalier de Gramont was of opinion that something ingenious might be invented, which should partake of the ancient fashion, and likewise prove preferable to the modern; he therefore sent away Termes privately with all the necessary instructions to Paris; the Duke of Guise was likewise charged with this commission; and the courier, having by the favour of Providence escaped the quicksand, in a month's time brought safely over to England the most elegant and magnificent calash that had ever been seen, which the Chevalier presented to the King.... The Queen, imagining that so splendid a carriage might prove fortunate for her, wished to appear in it first, with the Duchess of York. Lady Castlemaine, who had seen them in it, thinking that it set off a fine figure to greater advantage than any other, desired the King to lend her this wonderful calash to appear in it the first fine day in Hyde Park. Miss Stuart had the same wish, and requested to have it on the same day. As it was impossible to reconcile these two goddesses, whose former union was turned into mortal hatred, the King was very much perplexed. Lady Castlemaine was with child, and threatened to miscarry if her rival was preferred. Miss Stuart threatened that she never would be with child if her request was not granted. This menace prevailed, and Lady Castlemaine's rage was so great that she had almost kept her word."

Hamilton added that this triumph was believed to have cost the prude her virtue. But this was merely the malice of gossip. Miss Stuart had the art of granting small favours and of holding out alluring hopes without really conceding anything. Charles, tantalised to desperation, continued more devoted than ever.

Royal admiration, while it invariably serves to recruit desirable *partis* who might otherwise evince no inclination to confer the blessing of matrimony upon a young and portionless beauty, is not without great disadvantages. In the case of La Belle Stuart the attentions she received from her sovereign tended to defeat the very object for which she was trying to employ them. "*Point de raillerie avec le maître, c'est à dire, point de lornerie avec la maîtresse*" was a maxim particularly applicable to the present situation. For Charles, who laughed cynically at the numerous rivals a Duchess of Cleveland gave him, had no intention of bearing patiently with those a Frances Stuart might offer him. In this instance he let it be clearly understood that he would brook no competitors in the game he had afield. Such suitors as she longed to treat seriously were conspicuous by their absence; fear of incurring the royal displeasure, and perhaps the imputations to which the royal favour had exposed her, prevented those she would have deemed eligible from coming forward. The possibility of a grand match, as time went by, must have seemed to her as remote as that of being obliged to yield to the impatient King must have seemed imminent. In her despair she was reduced to the necessity of declaring that she would marry "any man with fifteen hundred a year who would have her."

Two infatuated younger sons would have been only too willing to take her at her word, and dare the King's rage, if the beautiful prude could have made up her mind to abandon her grand desires, which she never could. One was George Hamilton, a younger brother of the famous Anthony, a brilliant, dashing, devil-me-care Irishman, as poor and blue-blooded as the Stuart herself. The other was Francis Digby, a younger son of the Earl of Bristol. This brave, handsome youth was consumed with one of those ardent and tender passions over which a sentimental world, revelling in romance, always drops a tear. Never was a cause more hopeless, never beauty

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colder, more obdurate. Digby worshipped his fair for six or seven years as men with strong, deep feelings worship women, and then in his despair, life being no longer tolerable, rushed off to the Dutch War and found the death he recklessly courted in a naval battle. This event and the circumstances which occasioned it were widely known, and Dryden tried to shed some poetical tears over poor Digby in the song, "Farewell, fair Armida." But his attempt at weeping was so poor, that Buckingham, ever seeking some one or something on which to practise his powers of ridicule, burst into mockery of poet, lover, and beauty in his own clever satire "The Rehearsal."

George Hamilton was, however, of the moth species, and after flitting round the flame for a time took de Gramont's advice and flew off before he was even singled. This hare-brained, fascinating young fellow was never happy unless he was in love, but his idea of a passion differed vastly from Digby's. The Irishman's was of the earth. One evening at a party in Frances Stuart's apartments at Whitehall his head was turned by the sight of the beauty's ankles, which in her childish and innocent way she displayed with such an artless lack of reflection as to strike the reckless George, as he afterwards told de Gramont, that "it would not be difficult to induce her to strip naked." He at once conceived one of his daredevil passions for the "inanimate statue," and boldly set out to attract her attention. His means were characteristic. Having noticed that the lady was "like to die with laughing" in her "silly way" at the sight of an old gentleman with a lighted candle in his mouth, young Hamilton, who had a fairly large mouth, "put two lighted tapers into it and walked three times round the room without their going out."

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After this exhibition he was admitted to the prude's select coterie, and advanced to the point of persuading her to accept the gift of "one of the prettiest horses in England." La Belle Stuart looked her best on horseback. Pepys once had the good fortune to behold her at Whitehall on the return of a Court riding-party, and from some coign of vantage, very modest we may be sure, the chattering snob watched "all the ladies talking and fiddling with their hats and feathers, and changing and trying on one another's and laughing. But it was the finest sight to me, considering their great beauty and dress, that ever I did see in all my life. But, above all, Miss Stuart in this dress with her hat cocked and a red plume, with her sweet eye, little Roman nose, and excellent *taille*, is now the greatest beauty I ever saw I think in all my life."

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These riding and hawking parties, of which Miss Stuart was very fond, afforded Hamilton the opportunity of wooing her under the pretext of teaching her how to manage the horse he had given her. Not that the beauty had need of lessons in horsemanship; she had made herself a mistress of the art before she left France, where in those days Frenchwomen were noted for their grace and skill on horseback. Such a flirtation could not pass unobserved, and people who knew the cold nature of the dazzling prude laughed or shook their heads and wondered, perhaps, how long George Hamilton's would be safe on his shoulders. For the wild young Irishman, who had begun his love-making with no more honourable intention than to outwit a beautiful girl and turn marble to life, ended by being enchanted by Armida.

This fatal spell was broken, fortunately, as stated above, by the ubiquitous Chevalier de Gramont, who kept a large supply of charity and good sense under his Joseph's coat of flippancy. Seeing the noose into which the infatuated brother of the future Comtesse de Gramont had thrust his head, he said to him one day with cynical levity, with which, if one wishes to make a present of advice to such a temperament as George Hamilton's, a warning is most effectively wrapped: "Friend George, *point de raillerie avec le maître, c'est à dire, point de lorgnerie avec la maîtresse*. I myself wanted to play the agreeable in France, with a little coquette whom the King did not care about, and you know how dearly I paid for it. I confess she gives you fair play, but do not trust her. All the sex feel an unspeakable satisfaction at having men in their train, whom they care not for, and to use them as their slaves of state, merely to swell their equipage. Would it not be a great deal better to pass a week or ten days incognito at Peckham with the philosopher Wetenhall's wife, than to have it inserted in the *Dutch Gazette*, 'We hear from Bristol that So-and-So is banished the Court on account of Miss Stuart, and that he is going to make a campaign in Guinea on board the fleet that is fitting out for the expedition under the command of Prince Rupert?'" And Hamilton, more lucky than Digby, escaped in time.

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But these were not the only men whose heads were turned by La Belle Stuart. Charles, wishing to flatter and soften her in every imaginable way, decided that the memory of her loveliness should be commemorated on the medals and coins minted during his reign. The brothers Rotier, the famous medallists, who at the Restoration had been invited to England by the King and given the post of the Cromwellian Simon at the Royal Mint, received notice to prepare a medal engraved with Miss Stuart as Britannia, to commemorate the Peace of Breda. This commission was executed by the youngest of the Rotiers, Phillipe, an inflammable genius who had but recently joined his brothers. It is not to be supposed that the beautiful, passionless prude who could successfully keep a fascinating King at arm's length, and on whom neither a George Hamilton nor a Francis Digby could make an impression, was the woman to succumb to a medallist of the Royal Mint. La Belle Stuart had not the instincts of a Duchess of Cleveland. During the sittings that she gave the young artist she probably never honoured him with a thought. But he, from gazing upon her, became so devoured with Beauty-hunger as to nearly fit himself for Bedlam.

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NAVAL VICTORIES, 1667.



THE PEACE OF BREDA, 1667.

**The Rotiers' Medals for which the Duchess of Richmond sat  
as Britannia.**

***Reproduced by the courtesy of the "Strand Magazine."***

The medal, like most works of genius conceived in despair, was a *chef d'œuvre*. Rotier's Britannia became to him what Calais was to Queen Mary. The vision he had had of faultless beauty, at once blessed and baleful, was engraved upon his heart and brain. It stamped itself upon all the fine works that came from his hands, and found its way from that first glorious medal of Breda down to the humblest coins. Britannia has since had various faces and forms, but it is to be doubted if any have been so fair as the original. Poor Rotier's romance is now well-nigh forgotten, but his La Belle Stuart still survives, and is likely to for many a day, in a more or less imitative form on all the copper coinage of the realm.

It was during these very days when she was unconsciously turning the head of the medallist that the chance she had so long and almost hopelessly sought presented itself. Her cousin, the Duke of Richmond, on the death of his second wife made her an offer of marriage. This nobleman, notwithstanding his wealth and lineage, which made his rank second to none, was one of the most insignificant men at Court. To the King, of whom he stood in the greatest awe, he was particularly odious; although Charles, who in case the Duke died childless would as next of kin be his heir, had heaped honours and riches upon him. All the brilliant qualities for which the Stuarts of Richmond-d'Aubigny had been conspicuous had degenerated in this last representative of the line. The present Duke had none of the spirit or sense of his ancestors, and was, moreover, a dipsomaniac. In a Court like that of Whitehall, brimful of wit and malice, such a man was treated as a clown. "To court his Majesty's favour," wrote Hamilton gibingly, "he thought proper to fall in love with Miss Stuart." The fact that his passion, which he divided pretty equally between the beauty and the bottle, should have excited the jealousy of a man so callous as Charles may be taken as a proof of the strength of the spell La Belle Stuart had cast upon the King. But as the Duke of Richmond had a wife he could not be considered an eligible *parti*, and consequently the cunning prude treated her ducal admirer with her customary indifference.

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The unexpected death of the Duchess, however, completely altered the aspect of things. Her Grace was scarcely cold when the Duke asked his lovely cousin to be his third wife. The offer was not one that La Belle Stuart had the slightest intention of refusing, but its acceptance, owing to the King's passion for her and dislike of the Duke, made her hesitate like one who *recule pour sauter mieux*. Before pledging herself to her infatuated cousin, to whom love and drink seemed to have lent their audacity for the occasion, she persuaded him to ask the King boldly for permission to marry her. Charles, who knew exactly the state of the Duke of Richmond's finances, concealed his rage under cover of a demand for a settlement that it was beyond the Duke's power to make. To the beautiful maid of honour, who had tantalised him for four years with her prudery and now implored him to allow her to marry honourably—not because she loved the Duke, as she confessed, but from a "desire to reform him"!—the King tempered his refusal with dazzling

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bribes. She should be a duchess in her own right; she should have her drafts to any amount on the Treasury or Post Office or Customs honoured like my Lady Castlemaine's; she might shop with the Privy Purse; he would send away Lady Castlemaine and give up his Nell Gwynns and Moll Davises; in fine, he would do anything in the world she asked, provided she would consent to be his *maîtresse en titre*. La Belle Stuart's reply is, perhaps, the only instance of the refusal of such an offer on record. "I hope I may live to see you old and willing," retorted the baffled King, from whom consent to this marriage at any price was not to be wrung.

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To a man of the mental calibre of the Duke of Richmond the position in which he had placed himself was well qualified to damp his ardour. To prevent such an undesirable eventuality, Miss Stuart, while seeking a happy end to her troubles, was in the habit of giving her ducal lover midnight assignations, which though of a strictly virtuous type, be it understood, kept the heat in him. It was one of these secret interviews that brought matters to a head. For Lady Castlemaine, having learnt from one of her spies, of whom she kept a well-paid staff at Whitehall, of these midnight meetings, made her plans accordingly. One night, as Charles was returning in very ill-humour from Miss Stuart's, who had pleaded a headache as an excuse for refusing to see him, Lady Castlemaine waylaid him and informed him in her vixenish fashion of the cunning with which his "angelic Stuart" was duping him. As the termagant swore she could prove her words, Charles at once returned to the prude's apartments. At his wholly unexpected reappearance some maids opposed his entrance instead of trying to warn their mistress, but the King pushed them aside roughly, and entered La Belle Stuart's bedroom, where he found the Duke of Richmond sitting at her bedside. The anger of Charles was only equalled by the consternation of the others. The Duke, speechless and petrified from the torrent of abuse poured upon him, had thoughts of jumping from the window, but as he reflected that if he did so he would probably fall into the Thames which flowed beneath it, he chose to make a discreet rather than a valorous exit and left the room in silence.

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This attack on the Duke gave Miss Stuart time to compose herself, and after his departure, instead of attempting to justify herself, she gave the surprised Charles such a talking to as perhaps he had never had before, save from my Lady Castlemaine. "If," she said, "she were not allowed to receive visits from a man of the Duke of Richmond's rank, who came with honourable intentions, she was a slave in a free country; that she knew of no engagements that could prevent her from disposing of her hand as she thought proper; but, however, if this was not permitted her in his dominions, she did not believe that there was any power on earth that could hinder her from going over to France and throwing herself into a convent to enjoy there the peace which was denied her in his Court." And she ended by asking him to be good enough "to leave her in repose, at least for the remainder of that night."

Such effrontery dumfounded the King. He went off in a towering rage. We are not told what sort of, if any, "repose," after such a scene, the maid of honour got that night; but the next morning, with a craft worthy of a Madame de Maintenon, she appealed to the Queen with the due tears to help her to retire to a convent. So well did she play her part that Catherine, who had every reason to hate her, wept with her; but reflecting that if she were to have a rival, such an innocent Magdalene as Miss Stuart would be infinitely preferable to a Lady Castlemaine, her Majesty actually brought about a reconciliation between her husband and her maid of honour! It was exactly what La Belle Stuart desired; under cover of this reconciliation she had time to prepare her plans without exciting suspicion.

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One "foul night" the beautiful prude stole from her room at Whitehall and joined the Duke of Richmond, who, the day after that surprise visit of the King's had fled the Court without waiting to be banished. The assignation on this occasion was at the Bear Tavern by London Bridge, where the Duke had a chaplain and a coach ready. And here, having at last been properly made a duchess by the chaplain, her Grace and her husband, who one suspects from his habits must have kept up his courage artificially for this occasion, "stole away into Kent" in the coach.

Charles's anger, when he discovered the flight of the prude, may be imagined. Its consequences were far-reaching. On coming from the cage from which his beautiful bird had flown, the King chanced to meet a certain Lord Cornbury in the door. The sight of this man, who was the son of Clarendon, at such a time and place confirmed the suspicions aroused in him by Lady Castlemaine of the Chancellor's complicity in a plot to help La Belle Stuart marry the Duke of Richmond. And it is, perhaps, no exaggeration to say that at that moment Charles's opposition to the many enemies in Court, Parliament, and the country of the ablest of his Ministers, to whom also he not a little owed his throne, was finally broken down. On the morrow of this "marriage affair" of La Belle Stuart's the great Clarendon fell.

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As for the happy couple, they were banished the Court, whereupon her Grace saw fit to return his Majesty the trifling presents she had allowed herself to accept from him, and to justify her conduct by what, from the notoriety given it, was practically a public confession of innocence preserved against great odds. And this subtle and calculating woman has been called by Hamilton, and those who have taken his mockery literally, a brainless, childish simpleton, with just sense enough to capture a Duke of Richmond! No doubt in a day when Gwynns, Castlemaines, and Portsmouths were fleecing the nation and making and unmaking Ministers, a woman who had only had a few jewels and a fixed salary of £700 a year for her services to the Queen, and took no interest in politics, must seem both virtuous and a fool. The "explanation," however, of her line of action at Whitehall produced a favourable effect. The public readily acquitted her of all the base imputations that had been cast upon her.

At Whitehall no one benefited by the absence of the beautiful and "wronged" Duchess of Richmond but Lady Castlemaine. She, indeed, was now established more firmly than ever in the

Council and the Treasury, but La Belle Stuart was missed. When new beauties appeared at Court people compared them with the faultless loveliness of her who was banished for her virtues to the country. They remembered the charming grace with which she had danced and walked and rode; the elegance of her mode of dressing; the polished refinement of her manners. Poor Queen Catherine, who had to endure the insolence of Lady Castlemaine, sighed for the maid of honour who had always shown her respect, and "was never known to speak ill of any one." And even the King, who had never been able to love a woman as he had loved La Belle Stuart, longed to see her once more. So in the following year she was forgiven and came back triumphantly, as lady of the bedchamber to the Queen, with splendid apartments at Somerset House, where Catherine was living.



**THE DUKE OF RICHMOND.**

The Duke and Duchess of Richmond were now people of the highest consequence; and if scandal, as it did, chose to busy itself with her Grace, she, no doubt, endured it philosophically. At least, from personal experience, she was able to draw comparisons between the quality and quantity of the mud flung at a duchess and that with which a destitute maid of honour is bespattered. What effect marriage produced on the prudery of this beautiful creature we cannot learn. Slander had it that the King once, when drunk, boasted to the Duke of Richmond that the Duchess was no longer indifferent to him. A similar imputation was cast upon his Grace's appointment as Ambassador to Denmark. As his wife did not go with him, people said he was sent there to get him out of the way. And we require something more than the word of Mr. Pepys's "Mr. Pierce," before we accept as proved the statement and all that it implies, that Charles "did on a sudden take a pair of oars or a sculler, and all alone, or but one with him, go to Somerset House (from Whitehall), and there, the garden door not being open, himself clamber over the wall to make a visit to her (the Duchess), which is a horrid shame."

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What, however, can be vouched for as true is that some time after her Grace returned to Court the King appeared as devoted as ever. His attention was especially solicitous during a severe illness when she was attacked by the small-pox. Notwithstanding the danger he ran of catching the disease, he visited her once, at least, in her sickroom, nor did his admiration for her appear to wane on her recovery, when her looks were so altered that Pepys was shocked to see her, and Ruvigny wrote to Louis XIV. that "her matchless beauty was impaired beyond recognition, one of her brilliant eyes being nearly quenched for ever."

The Duchess, however, bore the loss of her beauty with indifference, and consoled herself, if one may judge from tastes of which she had apparently given no previous evidence, with the cultivation of the artistic sense. Nat Lee, the tragic poet, whose "Rival Queens" long held the stage, owed much of his success to her encouragement. In dedicating his "Theodosius" to her he enthusiastically acknowledged her love of dramatic art as well as her kindness to himself. "Your extraordinary love," he wrote, "for heroic poetry is not the least argument to show the greatness of your mind. Your Grace shall never see a play of mine that shall give offence to Modesty and Virtue. My Genius was your favourite when the Poet was unknown, and I openly received your smiles before I had the honour to pay your Grace the most submissive gratitude for so illustrious and advantageous a protection. You brought Her Royal Highness just at the exigent time, whose single presence on the poet's day (benefit performance of 'Theodosius') is a subsistence for him all the year after." Her letters to her husband that have been preserved, it may be added, are

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evidence of her sound common sense. Of painting, too, she had a keen appreciation. After her death "her fine collection of original drawings of da Vinci, Raphael, and others, together with miniatures and engravings, was sold at auction." Such instances of artistic taste and kindness of heart go far to disprove Mrs. Jameson's statement as to the "frivolity of her mind and shallowness of her character."

With the coming of Louise de K roual all the scandal about the Duchess of Richmond and her royal lover ceased. The new and fresher beauty completely supplanted her in the King's affections. But La Belle Stuart had the consolation, if she required it, of proving that prudery fares better in the day of adversity than the courtesan. The ducal rank for which she had intrigued so questionably in her youth gave her a great prestige, which she enjoyed till her death. She continued, in spite of Louise de K roual, to be lady of the bedchamber—a post equivalent to that of Mistress of the Robes of the present day—to Catherine of Braganza during the rest of the reign; while on his accession James II. appointed her in the same capacity to his Queen. It was in fulfilling the duties of this office that she witnessed the birth of that Prince of Wales who was afterwards to be known as the "Old Pretender."

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On the coming of William of Orange her services were dispensed with, but she passed the remainder of her life without suffering the misfortunes of exile and confiscation that fell upon so many Jacobites. As she had never taken the least interest in politics the troubles of the party to which she belonged by birth did not apparently concern her. The years rolled by serenely. While Jacobites were plotting she lived quietly among her pictures and books and a crowd of cats. At the coronation of Anne she emerged from her retirement for the occasion. It was her last public appearance. Shortly after she died, "devout in her way," and was buried, as she had requested, in her peeress's robes in the vault of the Dukes of Richmond at Westminster Abbey.

Her will revived public interest in the forgotten beauty of the past generation, and afforded many a gibe at her expense. Instead of dying comparatively poor, as was expected, it was found that she had accumulated a considerable fortune, saved out of the wreck of her husband's, whom she had survived thirty years. The bulk of it she left to her favourite nephew, Lord Blantyre, to purchase an estate to be called "Lennox's love to Blantyre." She had always been particularly proud of the fact that she was not only Duchess of Richmond, but of Lennox as well. This seat is still known as "Lennox-love."

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But this reminder of the cunning prudery with which La Belle Stuart had hooked a double duchy out of the quagmire of Whitehall afforded the wits less amusement than the legacies she left her cats. Pope set the town a-laughing with his line, "Die, and endow a college—or a cat!" But there were some, perhaps, whose laughter turned to tears when a certain Lord Hailes, who had known her, declared "that the annuities she left to support her cats was a delicate way of providing for some poor and proud Jacobite gentlewomen, who had the care of them, without making them feel that they owed their livelihood to mere liberality."

It may, perhaps, be of interest to add that the beauty for which La Belle Stuart was so celebrated ran in her family. Her sister, Sophia, who was also a favourite at Court, and after the Revolution of 1688 a loyal adherent of the Stuarts, excited the admiration, among others, of Mr. Pepys, who pronounced her "very handsome." The daughters of the handsome Sophia, who married not so well as her sister Frances, were distinguished by the friendship of the famous Hamilton. The eldest, Ann, was particularly lovely. As the wife of the Mar chal Duc de Berwick, the right noble son of James II. and the sister of the Great Marlborough, she was long known at the French Court as "La Belle Nanette."

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# "LA BELLE HAMILTON," COMTESSE DE GRAMONT

## A GOOD WOMAN OF THE RESTORATION

THE masterpiece of Sir Peter Lely, which forms the frontispiece to this book, scarcely needs the charming testimony of Anthony Hamilton to assure us that the fair subject of this *historiette* was a good woman. The portrait breathes goodness and refinement. The Court of Charles II. had no ornament so flawless. La Belle Hamilton was as chaste as Lady Castlemaine was polluted, as pure as La Belle Stuart was designing. If the "Mémoires de Gramont" has kept the recollection of the Restoration more vivid than that of perhaps any other period of English history, its heroine, more than all the characters who enliven its inimitable pages, has unquestionably aided the author in his wonderful effort to refine vice of its grossness. Her perfume seems to sweeten the noxious air of her times and to linger subtly in the memory of the unclean palace in which it was spilt.

If it be granted that rules may be proved by their exceptions, one wishing to defend the truth of the cynical aphorism that virtue, like happy nations, has no history, could choose no more convincing argument than to cite La Belle Hamilton. She seems, one is tempted to say, to have been born for the express purpose of proving that purity could exist undefiled in the vicious atmosphere of Whitehall. Her story cannot be compressed into the space of a footnote. It is too closely interwoven with that of her brilliant brother, his fascinating book, and her extraordinary husband.

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The Hamiltons, like the Stuarts of Blantyre, were very poor and very highly connected. Miss Hamilton's father, like Miss Stuart's, was a younger son and a Royalist, and fled, like him, to France after the execution of Charles I. We have stated how Stuart of Blantyre was provided for in exile. Sir George Hamilton was no less fortunate. The young King, Louis XIV., gave him a military command, which enabled him to maintain himself, his wife, and his nine children till the Restoration. When Charles II. returned to England, Hamilton, like the rest of the banished cavaliers, returned with him and obtained preferment at Court. Appointments as pages, grooms-in-waiting, and army officers were provided for his sons; while his daughters, thanks to the influence of their uncle, the great Duke of Ormond, without being obliged to accept for their maintenance the doubtful distinction of becoming maids of honour to the Queen or the Duchess of York, lived with their parents and had the *entrée* to Court.

It was not long before the beauty and charm of Miss Hamilton attracted attention. The Duke of York was the first to admire her. The mind of this prince was so extraordinary that it sought, and apparently found, excuse for his lax morals, as well as at a later period encouragement for his political ambitions, in the zeal of his religious convictions. Where Charles II. took his pleasures with a cynical indifference of God or man, his dull brother pursued his armed with a breviary. His immoralities were as circumscribed as his religious views. When Charles wanted a mistress he went far afield; in his hunt he bagged anything that came his way, from a duchess to a demi-rep. James was only catholic as regards the mission of Rome on this planet; his quest for the same article as his brother was restricted to the *entourage* of his Duchess. He was satisfied with a maid of honour. As those in the Court of the Duchess of York were, with one or two exceptions, particularly unprepossessing, the cynical, witty Charles used to say that "he believed his brother's mistresses were given him as a penance by the priests."

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There were times, however, when beauty appealed to the sanctimonious James. One of these was when he beheld Miss Hamilton. His admiration soon became the talk of the Court without, owing to her tact, compromising her; for she treated him with such dignity that James, who was shy in these matters, could never summon up the courage to get beyond a mild flirtation, while the Duchess of York felt there was so little cause to be jealous of such a rival that she showed her the greatest affection and esteem. This behaviour on the part of Miss Hamilton soon made the ogling of her royal admirer so fatiguing that it was not long before he carried his attentions elsewhere.

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The Duke of Richmond, who, when contemplating matrimony was inclined to be guided in the choice of a wife by following in the steps of royalty, succeeded the Duke of York as a suitor for the favour of La Belle Hamilton. This was the Duke of Richmond who was afterwards, when in quest of his third wife, so cleverly hooked by La Belle Stuart. He was now, however, in search of his second Duchess, but, though apparently greatly in love, unable to bring himself to the point of a proposal—not from any timidity, like the Duke of York, but from purely mercenary motives. This man who afterwards married Miss Stuart without a penny hesitated on the present occasion to wed the beautiful Miss Hamilton, who was equally destitute. The King, it is true, from consideration of the claims of her family upon him, offered to overcome the Duke of Richmond's objections by himself dowering the beauty. But as she resented being bargained for like an odalisque in a slave-mart, she decided that the honour it was proposed to confer on her was not worth having.

The "invincible" Jermyn was the next suitor, but as his intentions were no more honourable than the Duke of York's Miss Hamilton soon treated him with the contempt he deserved. While the Duke of Norfolk, with his twenty-five thousand a year, could not get her so much as to look at him. And it was her refusal to become the premier Duchess in the kingdom that kept Lord Falmouth, one of the most talented and ambitious as well as one of the most dissipated of the younger peers of the realm, from declaring a passion which, as he told St. Evremond, "made him regard Miss Hamilton as the only acquisition wanting to complete his happiness."

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The list of her unsuccessful lovers would not be complete without mention of the Russells, uncle and nephew. And as the portrait of the elder has been drawn by La Belle Hamilton's brother with a humour that elevates caricature to a fine art, we can do no better than reproduce it from the "Mémoires de Gramont."

"He was," says Anthony Hamilton, "full seventy, and had distinguished himself by his courage and fidelity in the civil wars. His passions and intentions in regard to Miss Hamilton appeared both at once; but his magnificence only appeared by halves in those gallantries which love inspires. It was not long since the fashion of high-crowned hats had been left off, in order to fall into the other extreme. Old Russell, amazed at so terrible a change, resolved to keep a medium, which made him remarkable; he was still more so by his constancy for cut doublets, which he supported a long time after they had been universally suppressed; but, what was more surprising than all, was a certain mixture of avarice and liberality, constantly at war with each other, ever since he had entered the list of love."

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This Lord John Russell, whose favourite nephew, a tiresome, stupid young man, was also in love with La Belle Hamilton (though the fact was concealed from his uncle), had some difficulty in finding the courage necessary to propose to his youthful innamorata. But he managed to find it just as he was on the eve of leaving town, and his mode of declaration will complete the above portrait.

"I am," he said, suddenly coming to the point on finding her alone when he came to bid her goodbye, "brother to the Earl of Bedford. I command the regiment of Guards. I have three thousand a year, and fifteen thousand in ready-money. All which, madam, I come to present to you, along with my person. One present, I agree, is not worth much without the other, and therefore I put them together. I am advised to go to some of the watering-places for something of an asthma, which, in all probability, cannot continue much longer, as I have had it for these last twenty years. If you look upon me as worthy of the happiness of belonging to you, I shall propose it to your father, to whom I did not think it right to apply before I was acquainted with your sentiments. My nephew William is at present entirely ignorant of my intention; but I believe he will not be sorry for it, though he will thereby see himself deprived of a pretty considerable estate; for he has a great affection for me, and besides, he has a pleasure in paying his respects to you since he has perceived my attachment. I am very pleased that he should make his court to me, by the attention he pays to you; for he did nothing but squander his money upon that coquette Middleton, while at present he is at no expense, though he keeps the best company in England."

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Miss Hamilton, who had a very keen sense of humour, had, as may be imagined, great difficulty to refrain from bursting into laughter. However, she kept her face sufficiently to tell him "that she thought herself much honoured by his intentions towards her, and still more obliged to him for consulting her before he made any overtures to her relations. 'It will be time enough,' she said, 'to speak to them upon the subject at your return from the waters; for I do not think that it is at all probable that they will dispose of me before that time, and in case they should be urgent in their solicitations your nephew William will take care to acquaint you. Therefore, you may set out whenever you think proper; but take care not to injure your health by returning too soon.'"

It is needless to say that neither the absurd uncle nor the stupid nephew succeeded in winning the beauty. Nor was the latter compensated for this loss by the long-anticipated possession of the wealth of the former. The uncle derived so much benefit from that visit to the waters, that he was enabled to defy the asthma for nigh upon another twenty years, so that his nephew grew tired of waiting for the deferred pleasures of this world and went into the next before him.

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But while rank and fortune were being laid at the feet of La Belle Hamilton, she was being courted by a man whose remarkable personality had the power of making that of all others seem commonplace. This was Philibert, Chevalier de Gramont.



THE CHEVALIER DE GRAMONT.

Of all the qualifications he lacked, by the possession of which alone one would have said he would have been acceptable to so charming a creature, he was at least, in point of birth, second to none of her suitors. The de Gramonts were one of the oldest and proudest feudal families in Europe, long settled in Navarre. The Chevalier, who was a younger son, boasted that he was descended from Henri IV. through his grandmother, "La Belle Corisande," one of the many mistresses of that gallant King. His eldest brother was the Maréchal Duc de Gramont, the head of the family, whose ancestral seat was the lordly Château de Gramont "at Bidache on the Bidouze." The titles of this stately house comprised a marquise borne by the second brother, Louvigny, and a countship, which, together with a large fortune possessed by the third, Toulangeon, were to go in case he died without heirs to the Chevalier, the cadet of the family. Philibert, having nothing but expectations, which seemed extremely doubtful of ever being realised, was destined for the Church. His boyhood was spent at the Château de Seméat, the property of his luckier brother, the Comte de Toulangeon, in preparation for this career. But a trip to Paris made him turn his thoughts from the Church to the army. Like most of the well-born young men of his time, he had the honour of serving under the great Condé and Turenne, and distinguished himself for his *insouciant*e bravery in numerous battles and sieges.

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One of the many stories told of him at this period is very characteristic. While besieging some small fortress which capitulated after a short defence the governor, who was surprised at the easy conditions he received, said to him—

"I will tell you a secret, Chevalier; my only reason for capitulating was because I was short of powder."

"And I will tell you another," replied de Gramont; "my only reason for granting you such easy terms was because I was short of ball."

His incurable flippancy, however, stood in the way of his promotion and finally ruined him. For his colossal egotism made him dispute out of bravado the affections of Mademoiselle de la Motte-Houdancourt, whom he did not love, with the young Louis XIV., who promptly banished him. Like many who have been driven into exile, he carried with him nothing but his illustrious birth. At Whitehall, whither he came, he was, however, instantly welcomed by Charles, who never tired of his company. His brilliant wit and manners soon made him generally popular, and he was received everywhere on terms of intimacy. Among his closest friends was St. Evremont, who had preceded him a year, and in whom he was in the habit of confiding his impressions and troubles with that gaiety with which he knew how to captivate La Belle Hamilton and make her disdain splendid offers to marry him, who had neither character nor means of existence, save by gambling, at which he was an adept.

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His fascination for the society of the Restoration is easily comprehended. The Chevalier de Gramont had the luck to be born at the right time. This *mauvais sujet de l'esprit*, as he has been called, was the first appearance in modern Europe of the Petronian cynic and *arbiter elegantiarum* of which there have been since so many examples. He was the immediate forerunner of the Regent d'Orléans and the Maréchal de Richelieu, the historical father of countless Brummels, d'Orsays, and Oscar Wildes. His wit, said Saint-Simon, who was jealous of it, was "mainly of the sort which shows itself in pleasantry and repartee; it was bold enough to detect a failing and describe it in one or two ineffaceable sentences. He was like a mad dog from whom none escaped. He had wonderful animal spirits and invulnerable self-complacency, never



entertaining a serious feeling or a deep thought." This is the character given him by Bussy-Rabutin and St. Evremond, who were his friends, as well as by his brother-in-law, Anthony Hamilton. The portrait of him by the last, who has immortalised him, he himself applauded.

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For when the "Mémoires de Gramont" were submitted to the censor Fontenelle before their publication he was so scandalised that he flatly refused his approval. The Chevalier on hearing this at once went to Fontenelle and asked him in his characteristic way "what business he had to be more solicitous of his reputation than he was himself, and demanded that the book should pass if the freedom with which his character was drawn was the only objection." As Mrs. Jameson has very aptly remarked, "Fontenelle might have replied to him as de Gramont did on another occasion to Madame de Hérault. The Count had visited this lady to pay her his condolence on the death of her husband; she received him with an air of extreme coldness, upon which, suddenly changing his tone, he exclaimed gaily, 'Is that the way you take your loss? Well, to tell you the truth, I don't care any more about it than you do!'"

Such an Epicurean as de Gramont scarcely needed the advice of St. Evremond. No one knew the world better than he, or was more deeply acquainted with all its vice, at which, without seriously polluting himself with it, he laughed in the gayest, most cynical way. He had so little religion that once in old age, when his wife in an attempt to convert him recited the Lord's Prayer, he remarked, "That is very fine, who wrote it?" His moral sense was entirely lacking. Women meant to him an amour, nothing more. And even La Belle Hamilton, whose virtue, to his credit be it said, he never attempted to attack, had so little real hold of his affections that on being pardoned by Louis he would have gone back to France without marrying her had it not been for her brothers. Two of them, who had no intention of letting her be compromised by such a desertion, rode after him and overtook him at Dover. "Chevalier," they cried, galloping up and addressing him in his own fashion, "haven't you forgot something in London?"

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"Excuse me," he replied gaily, "I have forgotten to marry your sister."

He returned and married her, making her, it must be confessed, the best of husbands. His conduct when married was in this respect in striking contrast with that of the de Gramonts of his time generally. For his brother the Maréchal was notoriously brutal; while the private lives of the Comte de Guiche and the Princess of Monaco, his nephew and niece, could not in the present day be exposed in print.

Many people have often tried to guess the secret of the fascination of this Chevalier de Gramont for La Belle Hamilton, a woman on whom slander never breathed. Without ourselves entering the lists of those who vainly attempt to explain the mysteries of human emotions, we should suggest that a mutual sense of humour was not without its effect on first attracting each to the other. Both were gifted with a very keen sense of the ridiculous. The picture of Miss Hamilton in the exercise of hers is one of the most entertaining incidents in the "Mémoires de Gramont."

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A splendid masked ball, which the Queen gave in honour of the King, afforded Miss Hamilton an excellent opportunity to amuse herself innocently at the expense of two silly women of the Court. These persons, whose actions and appearance certainly marked them as victims for the practical joker, were Miss Blague, a maid of honour, and Lady Muskerry. As Miss Hamilton, said her brother, "liked to do things in order, she began with her cousin Muskerry, on account of her rank." The appearance of her ladyship was ridiculous in the extreme. Her face, which was ludicrously plain, matched her figure, which seemed without being so to be perpetually *enceinte*. This deformity was further heightened by a limp, occasioned by an inequality in the length of her legs. But Lady Muskerry, far from being aware of her defects, was exceedingly vain. "Her two darling foibles were dress and dancing. Magnificence of dress was intolerable with her figure; and though her dancing was still more insupportable, she never missed a ball at Court; and the Queen had so much complaisance for the public as always to make her dance. But in a function so important and splendid as this masquerade it was impossible to give her a part. However, she was dying with impatience for an invitation, which she expected."

It was this impatience on the part of Lady Muskerry that gave Miss Hamilton her opportunity. She sent her ladyship an invitation, as if from the Queen, with the request that she should appear at the ball as a Babylonian princess. Lord Muskerry, who was particularly afraid of ridicule, and aware of the absurd figure his wife would cut if she were present at the ball, had begged her on no account to think of accepting the invitation in case she should receive it. But Lady Muskerry, believing that her husband had taken measures to prevent her being invited, was so exasperated that she had determined to go to the Queen unbeknown to him and ask for an invitation. It was at this juncture that the invitation arrived. She promptly decided to conceal the fact from Lord Muskerry, and "immediately got into her coach in order to get information of the merchants who traded to the Levant as to how the ladies of quality dressed in Babylon."

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The practical joke that Miss Hamilton prepared to play upon Miss Blague was of a totally different kind. She had noticed that the maid of honour was in love with the Marquis de Brisacier, a Frenchman as insipid and silly as herself, who was visiting England and paying her considerable attention. Miss Blague had quarrelled with another maid of honour, Miss Price, over some man whom Miss Blague believed had been "drawn away" from her by Miss Price. With this material the inventive mind of La Belle Hamilton prepared to play. The gloves of Martial, a Parisian maker, were then the rage, and Miss Hamilton, who had several pairs of them, sent one to Miss Blague together with some yellow ribbon and a note from the Marquis de Brisacier, couched in the most ridiculous and affectionate language, asking the maid of honour to wear them at the masked ball as the means by which he might recognise her. Then, giving a similar

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pair of gloves and a piece of yellow ribbon to Miss Price, the merry mischief-maker induced her to wear them by letting her only so far into the secret as to make Miss Blague's enemy determined to cut her out with Brisacier as she had previously done with the former admirer.

To Miss Hamilton's intense delight, as well as that of the persons she had taken into her confidence, both jokes succeeded admirably, and without the betrayal of their originator. But Lady Muskerry got no nearer the ball-room than the state entrance to Whitehall. As it was understood that all the ladies who were to dance in the Queen's quadrille, of whom Lady Muskerry had no doubt that she was one, would be met at the entrance to the palace by their partners, and as in the secrecy she was obliged to practise to prevent her husband from knowing that she had been invited to the ball she had not been able to learn who her partner was, she was still patiently waiting when the Chevalier de Gramont passed her. His costume and the late hour at which he arrived attracted universal attention, and the King asking him the reason of his delay, de Gramont seized the occasion in his characteristic way to tell a witty story, concluding as follows:

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"*À propos*, Sire, I had forgotten to tell you, that to increase my ill-humour" (at the cause of his late arrival), "I was stopped, as I was getting out of my chair, by the devil of a phantom in masquerade dress, who wished by all means to persuade me that the Queen had commanded me to dance with her; and, as I excused myself with the least rudeness possible, she charged me to inquire who was to be her partner, and desired me to send him to her immediately. Your Majesty will, therefore, do well to give orders about it, for she has placed herself in ambush in a coach, to seize upon all who pass through Whitehall."

The Chevalier went on to describe the costume worn by the mask, whose appearance must indeed have been laughable; for poor Lady Muskerry, not having the least idea how a lady of quality dressed in Babylon, had adopted from a crowd of different opinions she had consulted something of each. The Chevalier's description of this fantastic unknown not only amused those who heard it, but excited the greatest curiosity, inasmuch as the Queen declared that all whom she had invited were present. They began to wonder who it could be. The King, whose sense of the ridiculous was much more mocking than Miss Hamilton's, guessed it was the Duchess of Newcastle—a woman even more absurd than Lady Muskerry. For she was afflicted with a dramatic *cacoethes scribendi* to such a pitch that she would only wear theatrical costumes, and kept a secretary, who, according to Walpole, was often roused in the night to register the Duchess's conceptions, "which," added this English de Gramont of a later generation, "were all of a literary kind, for her Grace left no children."

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But Miss Hamilton, thoroughly satisfied with the success of her joke, had no desire to expose her victim to the laughter of the Court by seeing her suddenly appear as a Princess of Babylon. It was therefore with a sense of relief that she saw Lord Muskerry, dreading lest the ridiculous mask should prove to be his wife, go off to ascertain her identity before, exhausted with waiting for her partner, she should come in search of him. The interview at the entrance to Whitehall between the husband and wife was not, as reported to Miss Hamilton, the least amusing feature of her joke. For when the Princess of Babylon at last found her partner, she showed a decided inclination to wait for another, till Lord Muskerry, terrified at the bare thought of the ridicule to which she was exposing him, was obliged to use force in order to get her to return home!

As for the joke played at Miss Blague's expense, its success was sufficient to complete Miss Hamilton's satisfaction and to divert the whole Court. This silly maid of honour, with her "pig's eyes" and long white lashes, in response to the note she had received from the equally silly Marquis de Brisacier, wore the gloves and the ribbon. But it was not until after the stately French dances, with which the ball opened, were over and the country dances and real fun began that La Belle Hamilton and those in her confidence had the pleasure of watching the working of their joke. They observed with the greatest amusement that Miss Blague's "pale hair was stuffed with the citron-coloured ribbon, while to inform Brisacier of his fate she often raised to her head her victorious hands, adorned with the gloves we have before mentioned. However, if the others were surprised to see her in a head-dress that made her look more wan than ever, she herself was far more surprised to see Miss Price share Brisacier's present with her in every particular. Her surprise soon turned to jealousy; for her rival had not failed to join in conversation with him; nor did Brisacier fail to return her first advances, without paying the least attention to the fair Blague, nor to the signs which, exerting herself to desperation, she made to inform him of his happy destiny."

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To make matters worse, the Duke of Buckingham innocently brought up Brisacier to Miss Blague, with the request to dance with her on the King's behalf. But Brisacier, who could not dance the English dances, and preferred to sit them out with Miss Price, who could not dance at all, excused himself. This was the last straw to Miss Blague. Feeling herself despised by the man she loved, and cut out by her mortal enemy, "she began to dance, without knowing what she was doing"—a sight that, no doubt, convulsed Miss Hamilton, of whose fondness for practical jokes other examples than those already mentioned could be cited.

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How her sense of humour was affected by the circumstances stated above which made her the wife of de Gramont, it is impossible to guess. That the story of the Chevalier in flight from the altar of Hymen and forcibly brought back to it—if true, of which there appears to be some doubt—did not make Madame de Gramont ridiculous in the eyes of the world may be assumed from the high esteem in which she must have been held. For in that age of lampoons the incident is not one that would have been suffered to pass unnoticed. The silence of the coffee-houses on the subject may, therefore, be taken as an eloquent tribute to the popularity La Belle Hamilton enjoyed. Perhaps it is not too much to state that this reputation of his beautiful wife, who was

twenty years his junior, was of great assistance to de Gramont's relations in procuring his pardon. Louis XIV. was induced to permit the Chevalier shortly after his marriage to return to his native country, where, with the exception of several visits to England, which altogether ceased on the overthrow of the Stuarts, he and Madame de Gramont remained for the rest of their lives.

The death of his brother, the Comte de Toulangeon, made the Chevalier himself a count and one of the richest men in France. The Comtesse de Gramont was now much at Versailles, and in spite of the jealousy of certain Court ladies, who were inclined to sneer at the English lady-in-waiting of the Queen of France, she succeeded in winning the respect of Louis. He made her a present of a villa in the neighbourhood of Versailles, which became such a fashionable resort that de Gramont declared he should be obliged to ask the King to pay his bills for entertaining, which the acceptance of the royal gift entailed. We are not told if Louis took the hint. Such wit as de Gramont's was not of the sort that the French King appreciated; it was too familiar. He would, for instance, never have laughed, like Charles II., when that King one day dining in state asked de Gramont to observe that he was served on one knee, a mark of respect not usual at other Courts, to which de Gramont replied, "I thank your Majesty for the explanation; I thought they were begging pardon for giving you so bad a dinner."

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But, on the other hand, no one knew better than the Comte de Gramont that the way to make his wit acceptable to Louis was to wrap it in flattery. The following anecdote is in striking contrast with the one just related. They both prove the cunning with which the Comte read character. We are told that once when Louis XIV. was playing backgammon he disputed a throw with his opponent. The King appealed to those who were watching the game, but they, not daring to give against him, sought refuge from their dilemma by appealing to de Gramont, who from the other end of the room declared against the King.

"But you have not heard the case," cried Louis.

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"Ah, Sire," replied de Gramont, seizing his opportunity, "if your Majesty had but a shadow of right, would these gentlemen have failed to decide in your favour?"

No wonder that people were afraid of his nimble repartees, or that to the end he knew how to stand well with his master.

The flight of James II. brought a host of Jacobites to France, and among them some of the brothers of the Comtesse de Gramont. One, Anthony, found a refuge with his sister, and to him de Gramont at the age of eighty, but still the same flippant, cynical wit that he was when he had first fascinated the Court of Charles II., suggested that they should write the Chevalier's memoirs. De Gramont, who was exceedingly vain of the reputation he had acquired, and anxious to transmit its memory to posterity, was incapable of the literary effort necessary to this end.

This man, who in conversation could sparkle as few have ever done, could not string two sentences together on paper. His wit completely deserted him when he took a pen in his hand. The opposite was the case with Hamilton. His brother-in-law's suggestion appealed to him, and the result of their curious partnership, in which, so to speak, de Gramont furnished the capital and Hamilton the brains, was the famous classic, "Les Mémoires de Gramont."

Of all the high praise that has been heaped upon this "*bréviaire de la jeune noblesse*" that of the French critics is the most notable. To us, "the adventure of the soul among masterpieces" that we experience when reading it cannot be so great a pleasure as it must have been to Hamilton in his own lifetime to be told that he, a foreigner, had written a book in the French language which in style, atmosphere, wit, what you will, was French to the core—a *chef d'œuvre* of French literature! Everybody has heard of Count Hamilton's "Mémoires du Comte de Gramont." How many have ever read it? Is it because it is thought to be that ponderous thing, a classic? Without attempting to express our opinions on this curious work we are daring enough to seize this opportunity of answering a question heard everywhere, "What shall I read?" by replying, "The Memoirs of Gramont." Do not be afraid of it because it is a classic; all classics are not tedious because many stupid books have usurped the label of immortality. A true classic is never tedious. The character of the Chevalier de Gramont as conceived by Anthony Hamilton is one of the great creations of literature.

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Hamilton also occupied his time in France with writing other things. His fairy tales, very much *goûté* in their day, would make very dull reading now. One of the best, that of Béliet and the Giant Moulineau, was written to please his sister. It is interesting to note that Hamilton was nearly sixty when he wrote his masterpiece, and past middle life when he first turned his attention to literature. Considering the active military life he had led it was not strange that he should have made his literary *début* so late. In fact, had it not been for the Revolution of 1688 he might possibly never have written at all. Before that date he had been first, as a youth, in the French army, which he left at the Restoration to serve in that of his own country. Roman Catholic and Jacobite by birth and association, England had for him after the Battle of the Boyne, as for many another, no shelter. A soldier by instinct, he once more turned to France for employment. Of his career in the French service little is known, beyond that he was an officer in Louis' *gens d'armes anglais* and received the title of count, presumably in lieu of salary; for such money as the French King had to spare he gave to the last of the Stuarts.

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COUNT ANTHONY HAMILTON.

At middle life one does not start a new career with the light heart of youth. Hamilton came to France a disappointed man, and such hopes as he may still have cherished must have been quickly dispelled at James's Court at St. Germain. Here, as in all exiled Courts, poverty, quarrelling, and despair cast their shadows, rendered all the more sombre by the melancholy bigotry of the fallen King. The noble mother of that handsome, unfortunate youth who lived to be known as the Old Pretender alone faced the future with dauntless courage and dignity. How could a Hamilton with a spark of chivalry desert such a woman in such a crisis? It was now that the soldier turned author, like old St. Evremond before him in a similar strait. Hamilton took to literature not as a profession—it is uncertain if he ever earned a sou by his pen, all the profits of the "Mémoires de Gramont" at least went into his brother-in-law's pockets—but as a pastime. Writing was to him the only means he had of killing the intolerable *ennui* of exile.

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But life was not without its compensations; there was the home of the de Gramonts to brighten him. His books brought him fame and friends; his society was courted by an illustrious Duke of Berwick and his "Belle Nanette" and her sister; by the too brilliant Duchesse de Maine, whose court at Sceaux was known as "the galleys of the brain," because the clever people she gathered round her were constantly required to furnish proof of their wit. All this fame, however, brought no financial independence with it, and after the death of the Comtesse de Gramont poor Hamilton had to live on the charity of a niece and to welcome death as a late release for his proud spirit. Perhaps to none of the Jacobites broken in the cause of the bigot James was death so welcome as to this cold, sombre man, who could describe the *joie de vivre* of the *ancien régime* with a gaiety which has never been rivalled.

The Comte de Gramont whom he immortalised predeceased him many years. This singular man died at the age of eighty-six, frivolous to the last. Like the celebrated Maréchal de Richelieu of the next generation, who closely resembled him, de Gramont had scarcely ever known what it was to be ill. He used to say that "he hated sick people and only loved them when they recovered their health." His flippancy and irreligion as he grew old alarmed the Comtesse de Gramont, who was very devout, for the safety of his soul. Her attempts to convert him must, serious as they were, have amused her, if she still retained her sense of humour. Once Louis XIV. himself tried to assist her and sent the strict Marquis de Dangeau to offer him religious advice.

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"Comtesse," said de Gramont, turning to his wife on learning his visitor's errand, "if you don't look out Dangeau will cheat you out of my conversion."

Madame de Gramont, however, had the satisfaction of bringing her husband to a deathbed repentance, and followed him herself to the grave in a year. Her life, passed in two of the most dissolute Courts in Europe, was from first to last stainless. Of her two daughters, one took the veil, while the other married the Jacobite Earl of Stafford, and inherited all her mother's beauty and virtue and her father's wit.

The great Gramont fortune, which the Chevalier inherited from his brother the Comte de Toulangeon, passed to his nephew, a younger brother of the notorious Comte de Guiche, who had died without a son. This man, whose life is said to have been as scandalous as his brother's, also inherited the fortune and dukedom of his father the Maréchal. It is from him that the de Gramonts of the present day are descended. The tombs of their ancestors are still to be seen amongst the picturesque ruins of the once famous Château de Gramont "at Bidache on the Bidouze," which was destroyed in the Terror.

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**"THE LOVELY JENNINGS."  
(DUCHESS OF TYRCONNEL.)**

# "THE LOVELY JENNINGS," DUCHESS OF TYRCONNEL

## A SPLENDID FAILURE OF THE RESTORATION

IF the fairies, as is believed in fairyland, come to christenings, we have a fancy that five were present at Frances Jennings's, and that each in turn addressed her thus in fairy fashion, as they clustered round her with their gifts:—

"I bring thee Coquetry, it shall gain thee hearts."

"I bring thee Malice, it shall gain thee enemies."

"I bring thee Virtue, it shall gain thee respect."

"I bring thee Ambition, it shall gain thee power."

"And I," frowned the Wicked Fairy—it is *de rigueur* that there should be a wicked fairy at christenings—"I bring thee Beauty; thou shalt lose it and all that thou gainest from the gifts of the others."

Those who care to follow the fortunes of the Lovely Jennings will learn that everything came to pass just as the fairies predicted.

But from fancy to fact. The Duchess of York, in order to refute the imputation cast upon her own looks by the ugliness of her maids of honour, decided to form a new Court. And that none but beauties should compose it, she resolved to see all the applicants herself and choose those who pleased her, regardless of their recommendations. Frances Jennings, then about sixteen, was one of those thus selected. Her father was an insignificant country squire of small fortune, and her mother a woman, as we say nowadays, "with a past." We are not told the nature of her excursions into the realms of the unconventional or disreputable, but are left to infer that they were such as even in that day of license were not to be tolerated. Nevertheless, though Mrs. Jennings was not received at Court, the fact was apparently no bar to the advancement of her family. She managed somehow to secure royal patronage for her daughters, Frances and Sarah, who in their turn managed to use it as a stepping-stone by means of which they climbed to very exalted stations. [164]

The elder of the two sisters had no sooner appeared at Court than she attracted the attention of the Duke of York, who regarded his duchess's maids of honour as the *sine quâ non* of his seraglio. The lovely odalisque, however, had already, young as she was, formed a very decided resolution as to the line of conduct she intended to adopt. Like La Belle Stuart, she meant to use Whitehall as a trap in which to catch a husband. Being naturally sensible, she was aware that the freedom which certain ladies enjoyed at Court was the exception, not the rule; and that, while a Lady Castlemaine or a Countess of Shrewsbury might with impunity, by reason of personality and rank, defy decency, a humble maid of honour in attempting to copy them would very quickly be given her *congé*. This reasoning was demonstrated by many instances, the latest being that of Miss Price, whose conduct had obliged the Queen to dismiss her. Moreover, to emphasise the value of a good reputation she had that of her mother constantly before her eyes as a warning. [165]

So the Lovely Jennings turned a deaf ear to the entreaties of the royal tempter. But as the world is ever more ready to believe evil than good of one—a platitude especially applicable to a maid of honour at Whitehall—the mere consciousness of being virtuous is not enough for the world. Of virtue the world always demands proofs. It was impossible to believe that a mere chit of a maid of honour—with such a mother too!—could resist a royal duke. He, however, clumsy at love-making as at everything else he undertook, himself furnished the world with proofs of Miss Jennings's innocence. "He thought that writing might perhaps succeed, though ogling, speeches, and embassies had failed. Paper is made to serve many uses, but it unfortunately happened that she had no use for it. Every day notes, containing the tenderest expressions and most magnificent promises, were slipped into her pockets or muff. This, however, could not be done unperceived, and the malicious little creature took care that those who saw them slip in should likewise see them fall out unopened. She had only to shake her muff or pull out her handkerchief as soon as his back was turned, and his notes rained about her for any one to pick up who chose. The Duchess was frequently a witness of this conduct, but could not find it in her heart to chide her maid of honour for want of respect to the Duke. Thus the charm and virtue of Miss Jennings were the only subject of conversation in the two Courts; people could not understand how a young creature fresh from the country should so soon become the ornament of the Court by her attractions and its example by her conduct." [166]



THE DUKE OF YORK,  
AFTERWARDS JAMES THE SECOND.  
*After Vandyke.*

This discreet behaviour soon rid the maid of honour of her troublesome admirer, for the Duke of York, unlike his brother King Charles, very quickly lost interest in the women who resisted him. Finding the Lovely Jennings prove invincible, James turned his attention to one of her more complaisant companions in attendance on his duchess, and as a consequence had, many years later at St. Germain, the, to him, morbid satisfaction of doing penance for, among other sins, the ruin of Arabella, young John Churchill's sister. James's repentance in this instance, however, was not unnaturally tempered with a just pride, for if ever there was a royal bastard worthy of admiration and honour it was James Fitz-James, Duke of Berwick, the son of the complaisant Miss Churchill and the Duke of York. Without exaggeration it may be said that there were few men of any rank in his day more knightly in the true sense than this illustrious nephew of the Great Marlborough.

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But while Frances Jennings had successfully avoided one of the most treacherous pitfalls at Whitehall, she very nearly tumbled into another equally dangerous. The King, whose curiosity was fired by the maid of honour's reputation, piqued himself on succeeding where his brother had failed.

"God knows," said Hamilton, "what might have been the consequence; for he greatly excelled in wit, and besides he was King—two qualities of no small consideration. The resolutions of the Lovely Jennings were commendable and very judicious; but wit had great charms for her, and—royal majesty at the feet of a young person is very persuasive. *Miss Stuart, however, would not consent to the King's project.*"

That cunning prude, to whom the royal admiration was the bait with which she hoped to catch her ducal husband, had strong objections to others with a similar purpose using her bait and fishing in the same stream. Charles allowed himself to be deluded with false hopes by La Belle Stuart, and the Lovely Jennings, though she lost the chance of becoming a *maitresse en titre*—a position to which her ambition may have led her fancy—added both to her reputation and admirers by this adventure.

But of all the various kinds of fish that were angled for at Whitehall, husbands were the most difficult to catch. The beauties who hooked theirs out of that fishpond only succeeded in landing them after much practice. Miss Jennings's first attempt might be described as a graceful failure. The fish on her hook, so to speak, was the son of Lionne, Louis XIV.'s Minister for Foreign Affairs. This statesman, rightly considering that the Court of Charles II. was the place *par excellence* in which a very *gauche* and shy youth of nineteen would have unrivalled opportunities to "form" himself, had sent his son, the Marquis de Berni, there under Courtin, when that diplomatist went to England for the first time as French Ambassador. The details of the young man's progress have been preserved in the official despatches that Courtin sent to Lionne.

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"Your son," wrote the Ambassador, "begins as an honest man; he is a little abashed, but we have given him courage, and M. d'Irval (of the Embassy) has so well seconded him that he has at last"—after a month in London—"made his declaration. It has been very well received by one of the finest girls in England—Miss Jennings, of the household of the Duchess of York. She is small, but with a fine figure, a splendid complexion, the hair such as you remember Madame de Longueville's was, brilliant, keen eyes, and the whitest, smoothest skin I ever saw."

The "forming" of the *gauche*, shy Berni proceeded apace. Under the influence of the Lovely Jennings he displayed "more ease in conversation, and greater care of his person, and less shyness in society. He arranges to see her every day, and sends her strawberries every evening." As to these graceful practices he added that of following the Duchess of York wherever she went in order to catch a glimpse of her lovely maid of honour, it was soon evident to the whole Court that he was madly in love, and Miss Jennings began to picture herself as a French marquise with a *tabouret* at Versailles. Whereupon Courtin became alarmed, for marriage was not in the Lionne programme, especially with a paltry Miss Jennings. He tried to impress M. le Marquis with a sense of the fitness of things, and that even an attaché of an Embassy had certain lesser duties to perform besides the supreme one of love-making. M. le Marquis was ordered to draft a despatch. He began, but could never finish it. How could he with the Lovely Jennings ever in his thoughts? Courtin then thought the time had come to send him back to France. "We have sometimes to contend with his timidity," he wrote the anxious father, "and sometimes with his presumption; very often with his sloth, but above all with his vanity, which is fed by all the honours paid to him. I think you would do well to destine him for the Bar!"

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Lionne, on receipt of this, promptly and angrily ordered his son to return home, and M. le Marquis went off after three months in England, faithful to the last. "He will be greatly regretted at this Court," wrote Courtin, trying to appease Lionne's anger, "being, as he is, appreciated by the King and Queen and dearly loved by the prettiest young lady in England. Thursday evening the King, in my presence, very much teased Miss Jennings on the subject of your son; the young girl reddened; she never appeared more beautiful. His Majesty told me that your son had asked M. Porter to let him know how she looked on the day he was gone; and at the same time his Majesty assured me that he had never seen such a picture of sadness and desolation as the young gallant offered when on board the yacht of the Queen Mother. He was right, I can tell you, for the young lady loved him dearly." Thus ended Miss Jennings's first romance.

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Life, however, was to have others in store for her, and the Frenchman had not long departed when all thoughts of him—the tenderness of which we are inclined to attribute to Courtin's imagination rather than to Miss Jennings's heart—were obliterated by the arrival of a dazzling Irishman. "Dick" Talbot, as he was called, was about twenty years older than the lovely Jennings, and not far off forty when he first met her. Already his life contained, in romance and adventure, sufficient material to equip an incipient Dumas for a literary career. He was a sort of living serial with many a thrilling chapter yet to run before the finish. As he was destined to be the means by which the prophecy of the imaginary Wicked Fairy at Miss Jennings's christening was fulfilled, an epitome of Dick Talbot's romantic past is necessary before describing its still more romantic sequel. His family had been settled for centuries in Ireland—since its conquest by Henry II. Time, the great assimilator, had made them Celts to the core, and "Dick," the last of five sons of a younger branch, was the Irishman *par excellence*. He was a soldier from necessity and an adventurer from inclination. His birth and poverty made him the former, and the times in which he lived the latter. He was only a boy when Ireland rose against Cromwell, but he enlisted and served, if not with distinction, at least with the characteristic Irish intrepidity. During the bloody defence of Drogheda he was wounded and left for dead on the battlefield, but was succoured by one of Cromwell's officers, who being charged with the burial of the dead noticed signs of returning consciousness in the corpse. On his recovery he managed to escape from his prison disguised as a woman, and joining a relation, under whom he had served, followed him to Spain, whence, possibly as a volunteer in the Spanish army, he made his way to Flanders. Here he found many Royalist fugitives, among whom was his brother Peter, afterwards the Archbishop of Dublin, who introduced him to the Duke of York.

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One may easily picture the temper of the exiled Cavaliers. As it is natural, if immoral, that the vanquished should hate their conquerors, it is not at all surprising or, to our mind, shocking that the Duke of York should have wished to have Cromwell assassinated, or that others should have conspired to this end, or that young Dick Talbot should have offered his services for the purpose. Much ignominy has been heaped on Talbot for the ready willingness with which he lent himself to this assassination scheme. But while we personally by no means advocate assassination, we confess we are unable to understand the reasoning that makes the thought of assassinating Cromwell so much more horrible than that of assassinating any other tyrant. When the People, of whom so much insincerity is talked and written, make tyranny impossible there will be no question as to the crime or virtue of assassination.

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Young Talbot was sent to England on his terrible errand, where he was arrested, and examined by Cromwell himself at Whitehall. While detained in the palace to await the decision as to his fate, he made the Puritan servants drunk, and, slipping from a window into the Thames, hid on a ship in the river. Rumour had it that, being in reality a spy in his pay, Cromwell had aided him to escape. As Dick Talbot was an expert duellist, and "ready to fight on the smallest provocation or none at all," it is easy to guess how such a calumny, which he denied with oaths, got its quietus. Among the *spadassins* who composed the Duke of York's regiment, of which, after the above adventure, he got the command in spite of great opposition, Talbot's sword, so quick to fly from its scabbard, gained him the discipline due to fear. With the Duke of York he was always a great favourite, and at the Restoration followed him to England as his gentleman of the bedchamber. None of the Cavaliers were more fortunate, for he had left his country a poor, insignificant lad, and returned at thirty possessed of royal favour which he knew well how to turn to his advantage.

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If, as has been wittily said, William of Orange is the hero of the historical romance known as Macaulay's "History of England," the villain is unquestionably Dick Talbot. In those false,



fascinating pages he is a consummate scoundrel, "a mere cringing courtier and a pimp." To refute the malevolent prejudices of Macaulay is easy, and he has been exposed over and over again. We know now that his brilliantly arresting portrait of Talbot was no more like him than was the Great Frederick to an equally haunting portrait by the same master. The Talbot of Macaulay's "History" is, as Jusserand says, a caricature. Perhaps, without placing any more confidence in Hamilton—who drew a very flattering picture of him—than in Macaulay, a certain little-known portrait by the Duke of Berwick comes nearest the truth. It utterly refutes the imputation that he lent himself to the scheme to take away the character of the Duchess of York in order that the Duke, who was tired of her, might divorce her. Likewise the charge that he used his influence to enrich himself at the expense of his fellow-countrymen, whose confiscated estates he got returned to them after deducting his commission, falls to the ground. His fellow-countrymen, whose popular representative he was at Whitehall, willingly gave him money for the purpose. "Though he had acquired great possessions," wrote the Duke of Berwick, "it could not be said that he had employed improper means."

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But enough of historical recriminations over this almost forgotten man. Hero or villain, he was when Frances Jennings first beheld him one of the tallest and handsomest men in England. Macaulay at least did justice to his looks when he spoke of "that form which had once been the model for statuaries." With his striking appearance and fascinating manners were combined reckless courage, an emotional, passionate temperament, and the Irishman's ready wit. There is an anecdote of the latter which, as an example of thrust and parry in *double entente*, is hardly to be matched. Once Louis XIV., struck with the handsome Irishman's likeness to himself, on which many had remarked, asked him with a subtle insolence if his mother had not been at the Court of the late King (Louis' father).

"Non, Sire," was Dick Talbot's instant reply; "mais mon *père* y était."

A man, one would say, with a wit as quick and dangerous as his sword, for which he was noted.

His reputation had been still further increased by a *liaison* with the notorious Countess of Shrewsbury, and when Miss Jennings met him he had just come back from Ireland, whither he had gone to forget La Belle Hamilton, who had refused him. He was, in fact, very susceptible where the fair sex was concerned, and the ambitious Miss Jennings, having cast a shrewd glance at his two thousand a year in landed property and the valuable royal favour he enjoyed, was not long in bringing him to her feet. The match having been approved by the Duchess of York, Talbot and the beauty were as good as betrothed. This engagement, however, did not last long. Miss Jennings's intimacy with Miss Price occasioned the chivalrous Talbot much concern. Believing his lady-love to be above reproach, and wishing her to remain so, he talked to her with more affection than tact as to the impropriety of making a friend of one who, having been dismissed by the Queen for misconduct, now enjoyed the doubtful distinction of companion to my Lady Castlemaine.

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Miss Jennings, who was not the least in love with Talbot, whom she regarded from a purely mercenary point of view as being more eligible than any other of her admirers, objected to be lectured on her choice of friends; and as the society of Miss Price, whatever her reputation, was most amusing company, she haughtily bade her lover mind his own business. This quarrel under ordinary circumstances, owing to the impulsive and generous nature of Talbot, would not have been of long duration. But it chanced to occur just at the time that the "invincible" Jermyn returned to Court after a long absence in the country. Having heard sufficient of the Lovely Jennings to excite his curiosity, he at once paid her court with his customary dishonourable motive. The beauty, however, without adding another to this frivolous coxcomb's many triumphs, nevertheless encouraged his attentions with a shrewd and mercenary eye to his twenty thousand a year. Poor Talbot, who would have forgiven the siren that had bewitched him anything, made several attempts to win back the heart of his fair, but the coquette only laughed at him, and used the quarrel as a means of exchanging one suitor for another more eligible.

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The Duchess of York, whose esteem Miss Jennings had cleverly won, was persuaded by the designing maid of honour to sound Jermyn as to his intentions, and succeeded in drawing from him the most satisfactory assurances. The jilting of Talbot and conquest of Jermyn were soon the chief topics of the Court, and the artful beauty flattered herself on the aptitude she showed for intrigue. But Jermyn though hooked was not caught. The irony in the compliments he received on being snared by a girl he had tried to snare cooled his infatuation. He delayed to become a Benedict, and the steps that Miss Jennings took to hasten him constitute one of the best-known episodes in the "Mémoires de Gramont."

One of the customs much in vogue at the time was that of going about the streets masked. "Both the King and Queen and all the Court," says Burnet, "went about masked, and came into houses unknown, and danced there, with a great deal of wild frolic. In all this people were so disguised that, without being in the secret, none could distinguish them." The same form of amusement was popular at the French Court, whence no doubt it had been imported into England. It was, therefore, not surprising that a fast Miss Price or a circumspect Miss Jennings, in the desire to pass a weary hour or two, should have found many a precedent to excuse a frolic to which the risk of discovery gave an additional zest. "Having well considered the matter," said Hamilton, "the best disguise they could think of was to dress themselves like the girls who sell oranges in the theatres and public promenades. This was soon managed; they attired themselves alike, each taking a basket of oranges, and having embarked in a hackney coach, they committed themselves to fortune without any other escort than their own caprice and indiscretion."

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Their objective was the motive which had inspired the frolic. Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, the famous wit and rake, having by mistake handed Charles II. a clever, filthy lampoon on himself for one on some one else, had been banished the Court. In his temporary exile he had conceived the idea of disguising himself so that his nearest friends could not have known him, and had established himself near the Tower as a German doctor possessed of "wonderful secrets and infallible remedies." His success was astonishing, and the fame of him having reached the Court, it occurred to Miss Price and Miss Jennings to consult him; the former out of sheer wanton love of excitement, the latter—as the German doctor was also a fortune-teller—to discover, if possible, why Jermyn delayed to marry her. On their way to the fortune-teller's they passed the theatre known as the Duke's House, "where the Queen and the Duchess of York were seated in state." Hereupon Miss Price, with the boldness characteristic of her, suggested to Miss Jennings that they should hawk their oranges in the theatre under the Royal box. Miss Jennings rather timidly consented, and as they were crossing the lobby they encountered a man whom they knew, Killigrew, to whom they offered their oranges. He, not recognising them, but struck with the grace of Miss Jennings's figure, chucked her under the chin, squeezed her, and asked her to come to his lodgings. The beauty was so indignant and frightened that she very nearly betrayed herself, but the more experienced Price got her away in safety.

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This little *contretemps* somewhat dashed their spirits, but they proceeded nevertheless to the fortune-teller's in their cab. Within a few doors of his house they ordered the driver to stop, and having alighted and left their orange-baskets in the cab till their return, they were proceeding on foot when the *roué* Brounker stopped them. At first "he had no doubt but that Miss Jennings was a young courtesan upon the look-out, and that Miss Price was her business woman." But they, knowing his reputation, no sooner beheld him than they gave themselves up for lost. Their manner betrayed them, and Brounker immediately recognised them, without, however, letting them know of his discovery. "The old fox possessed wonderful self-command on such occasions, and having teased them a little longer to remove all suspicions, he quitted them, telling Price that she was a great fool to refuse his offers, and that the little creature would not, perhaps, get so much in a year as she might with him in one day; that the times were greatly changed since the Queen's and the Duchess's maids of honour nowadays came to the same market as the poor women of the town!"

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Brounker, who would not have taken a thousand guineas for this meeting, having passed on, the now thoroughly terrified girls, abandoning all thought of the fortune-teller, returned to their cab, to find the coachman engaged in a fight with some roughs who were trying to steal their oranges. The honest fellow was with the greatest difficulty pacified, and the orange girls, having left their wares to the mob that had collected, drove back to the palace. But, owing to the malice of Brounker, the story of their escapade was soon spread abroad with much exaggeration. Lady Castlemaine, whose sins were seventy times seven, made a taunting comment to the effect that the only one of her sex at Court whose virtue could not be impugned was her infant daughter. But fortunately for Miss Jennings her previous honourable reputation prevented any stigma from attaching to her, and the favour she enjoyed with the Duchess of York saved her from the disgrace and dismissal that might otherwise have overtaken her.

Jermyn, however, already weary of a conquest from which he had gained nothing but ridicule, took advantage of the scandal caused by the frolic to release himself from his entanglement. The means he took were malicious, but his malice recoiled on himself and made him ridiculous. Having for some time pretended to be ill in order to delay his marriage, he suddenly sought and obtained the King's consent to serve as a volunteer in the expedition to Guinea that was fitting out under the command of Prince Rupert. Whereupon he came himself to acquaint Miss Jennings of his heroic project. She quickly realised that the husband she had so cleverly angled for had for the third time escaped capture. Nor did she have the satisfaction of knowing that her wiles could entice back Talbot, whose ardour must have contrasted very unpleasantly now with Jermyn's cold-blooded desertion. For Talbot in a fit of pique had married another. The curse of the Wicked Fairy had begun to work, and for the first time in her life the coquetry, malice, virtue, and ambition bestowed on her by the other fairies were brought to nought.

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But in this hour of humiliation she bore herself with all the haughtiness and disdain for which she was afterwards to be noted. "There appeared," says Hamilton, "so much indifference and ease in the raillery with which she complimented Jermyn on his voyage, that he was entirely disconcerted, and so much the more so as he had prepared all the arguments he thought capable of consoling her, upon announcing to her the fatal news of his departure." She told him "that nothing could be more glorious for him, who had triumphed over the liberty of so many persons in Europe, than to go and extend his conquests in other parts of the world; and she advised him to bring home with him all the female captives he might make in Africa, in order to replace those beauties whom his absence would bring to the grave." Her resentment did not, however, stop here, for shortly afterward, the expedition to Guinea being abandoned, she wrote a clever lampoon on Jermyn, which was circulated all over London and covered him with ridicule.

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At this juncture, attracted, so to speak, by the blaze of all this, George Hamilton, a moth drawn to every pretty face that smiled on him, fluttered round her. Pique made her encourage him, for though he was good-looking and well-born and fascinating, it was hardly likely that an ambitious girl who had set her cap for Talbots and Jermyns would otherwise have contented herself with an impecunious younger son. Enchanted by his friendly reception, Hamilton quickly forgot La Belle Stuart, Lady Chesterfield, and the others for whom he had sighed in vain, and imagining, as he always did, that his heart was made of the wood with which the fire of a *grande passion* is kindled, he besought the Lovely Jennings to be his wife. They were married almost

immediately, and Hamilton, having been knighted by Charles II., who did not evince an inclination to bestow on him further and more substantial honours, crossed to France with his wife and offered his services to Louis XIV.

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Judging from what we know of Lady Hamilton's character, it seems justifiable to attribute to her energy his rapid advancement in the French army. For though George Hamilton was brave, he could hardly be called brilliant, and in order to account for the honours Louis XIV. gave him it must have been due in no small degree to his clever wife that the powerful interest of the Gramonts, to whom he was so closely related, was exerted.

Of the life of the Countess Hamilton, to give her her French title, in France we know nothing. But it did not last long, for a few years after her marriage her husband was killed in Flanders. Once again, with every prospect of winning a brilliant station in life her schemes were upset, and she was left a widow with three little daughters and a petty pension from the French Government on which to eke out a miserable existence. But her courage was not broken; she still had youth, beauty, and ambition—three qualifications with which a clever woman may make a successful bid for fortune. She returned to England, and it was not long before her star was again in the ascendant. Evelyn recorded in his Diary that on the occasion when he went as far as Dover with the new English Ambassador to Paris "there was in the company of my Lady Ambassadors my Lady Hamilton, a sprightly young lady much in the good graces of the family."

It was now when travelling in the suite of these exalted persons that the charming widow met her old lover Dick Talbot, who had been obliged to leave England on account of his supposed implication in the Popish Plot. It was nearly fifteen years since they had met: he was now close on fifty, but still the same handsome, passionate, generous Talbot of the old days, and she was nearly thirty, with the glamour of misfortune to excite sympathy for her beauty. Talbot, whose wife had recently died, at once fell under the old spell, and this time he was not refused. If she could not love him as he loved her, she knew how to satisfy him, and gave him the full benefit of her cunning and ambition in the stormy days in store for them. Just before the death of Charles II. they managed to return to England. The Duke of York, with whom Talbot was always a favourite, at once reinstated him in his old post of groom of the bedchamber, while the new Duchess of York (Mary of Modena) made as much of his beautiful wife as the late one had done of the Lovely Jennings.

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The accession of James II. gave the Talbots their opportunity. The favourite was created Earl of Tyrconnel, and sent to Ireland in command of the army. His wife accompanied him, and now there began for them the culminating and most critical period of their lives. Already the shadow of the ruin of the Stuart dynasty could be discerned outlined in the ferment of the times. The spirit of the approaching Revolution of 1688, which cost James II. his crown, was more religious than political; and it was in Catholic Ireland, which had groaned under the iron heel of the Puritans, that the struggle for which all were preparing was to be decided. In that distracted kingdom, with the passionate Papist Talbot in command of the military, and the sleek Protestant Clarendon (the great Chancellor's son) in command of the civil power, the very difference in temper, character, and politics of the two men was enough to lash the factions they represented to fury. The tactics by which Talbot crushed his rival and set the Catholics, eager for revenge, at the throat of the Protestants caused his name to be execrated in England. But terrible as they were, it should be remembered that the revered Cromwell's were not a whit less ruthless. Talbot was the *enfant perdu* of a doomed faith and a doomed nation; his name has been covered with infamy because he failed, and Macaulay, in making him the villain of his romantic "History," was merely expressing the opinion of triumphant Protestant England.

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**RICHARD TALBOT, DUKE OF TYRCONNEL.**

When James II. fled from Whitehall his hopes turned naturally to Ireland and Talbot. The exiled King at once created him Duke of Tyrconnel and Viceroy. There never has reigned at Dublin Castle a more striking figure. Nor was the Vicereine unequal to the position of power, splendour, and intrigue to which she had climbed with such difficulty. Destiny ruled that her magnificent reign should be short and her ruin an arresting contrast to the success of her equally ambitious and clever sister, Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough. She took advantage of her temporary fortune to marry her three daughters by her former husband, Hamilton, to rich and influential Irish noblemen. Of one of these "three viscountesses," as they were popularly known in their day, there is, says Mrs. Jameson, a picturesque legend still current among the Irish peasantry. Laughlen Castle was left to the Viscountess Dillon on the death of her husband with the proviso that she should reside in it during her life. In her widowhood, falling in love with a young Englishman, and being unable to detain him in Ireland or follow him to England while her castle existed, she ordered a banquet to be prepared in her garden and, having set fire to the castle and feasted by the light of the blazing pile, went off to England after supper with her lover!

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It is not surprising to learn that the mother of such a daughter had a commanding spirit and temper. "She is said to have ruled her husband without much effort, but as all her prejudices and passions held in the same direction, she on many occasions only added the fuel of her feminine impatience to his headlong self-will." Her influence over Talbot was, in fact, supreme. Struggling, as she did with all her force, to maintain her husband and herself at the summit they had scaled, it was but natural that she should have made enemies among the distracted and desperate Jacobites who surrounded her contemptible master, James. All sorts of efforts were made at St. Germain to induce the fallen King to supersede the Viceroy, or at least banish his wife from Ireland. Lord Melfort, foiled by her intrigues, declared that she had "l'âme la plus noire qui se puisse concevoir."

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The Talbot influence was, however, too strong to be easily broken, and James, having decided to fight for his crown in Ireland, trusted implicitly to the Duke of Tyrconnel, who had refused to go over to William of Orange in spite of heavy bribes. From the coming of James and his French army to Ireland in March 1689, to the fatal Battle of the Boyne, the struggle between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism entered upon its final and most distracted phase. In these months of peril the Jacobite camp was honeycombed with anarchy. Round the Viceroy and his wife envy and malice coiled like a hydra. It required all their skill to baffle the intrigues and treachery in their own party. At the same time the terror and hatred of the English vented themselves on the frenzied Duke of Tyrconnel, who, still sure of the support of his weak King, was ruthless in his vengeance and desperate in his measures to out-manceuvre William of Orange, that master of strategy. Of the lampoons that rained upon him the following is a sample:—

"There is an old prophecy found in a bog,  
That Ireland shall be ruled by an ass and a dog;  
And now this prophecy is come to pass,  
For Talbot's a dog and James is an ass!"

The French authorities quoted by Macaulay are probably quite correct in stating that the Duke of Tyrconnel had arranged with James to make Ireland a French protectorate, in case the English crown should again be on the head of a Protestant king. The thought that he was just the

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Irishman to entertain such a design was sufficient to make him execrable to the Englishmen of his own day, and no less infamous to Macaulay, that strict respecter of conventions, who ferreted his forgotten name out of the oubliettes of history to depict him as the traitor *par excellence*. But it was certainly not England that Talbot would have betrayed had his schemes succeeded. To him the yoke that crushed his race and creed was foreign. Nor would Ireland have altogether resented his handing her over to France, all bleeding as she was from Protestant and English wounds. Of the two yokes the French would assuredly have been the easier for Ireland—at least so Irishmen have declared on many occasions.

Be all this as it may, perhaps no other but Talbot could have maintained himself against the calumnies and intrigues that began slowly to break down his iron frame. It must have been with something of relief, something of despair, that the high-spirited Duchess of Tyrconnel learnt that the factious Franco-Irish army was finally to meet the common foe. She knew well enough, when on the night of the 30th of June a courier brought her the news that a battle would be fought on the morrow, that on its issue hung all her future. The agony of suspense in which she passed the day of the Battle of the Boyne found her at evening no less exhausted than the conquered and fugitive James when he reached Dublin Castle. Nevertheless, in this hour of her deepest humiliation she rose proudly above despair. As soon as the worst was told her she bore herself with as high a spirit as when years before she had faced Jermyn. When the fleeing King arrived, faint and covered with mud so as to be hardly recognisable, the Duchess of Tyrconnel assembled her household in state, and dressing herself magnificently received him with all the splendour of Court etiquette. Never has Dublin Castle witnessed a function more dramatic than this of Dick Talbot's Vicereine on the night of the Battle of the Boyne. Having on one knee congratulated James on his safety, she invited him to partake of refreshment. His answer is celebrated. Shaking his head sadly, he replied that his breakfast that morning had spoiled his appetite, and ironically complimented her on the swiftness of her husband's countrymen's heels. "At least your Majesty has had the advantage of them," she could not help retorting, stung by the ruin of her hopes and ambitions. When Lauzun, the French general, told her that fifteen Talbots and half as many Hamiltons had been slain, and that her husband had fought like a hero of romance, she might have been acquitted of disloyalty had she cried, as she must have felt, with the Irish soldiers, "Change kings, and we will fight the battle over again!"

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At the Council held on the following day it was decided that James should return to France, and the Duchess of Tyrconnel either went with him or followed shortly afterwards. It was no doubt necessary for the Viceroy to have his clever wife to intrigue in his behalf at St. Germain, where his enemies were the most dangerous. She did her best for him in that plot-laden atmosphere, but Tyrconnel and the cause he represented were hopelessly broken, and the doom of the wicked fairy had fallen on the Duchess. Her star had set, never to rise again.

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In the following year the patriotic Viceroy died suddenly at Limerick, whither he had gone in brave despair to give battle to the fatal William of Orange once more. Before he died his enemies at St. Germain had triumphed over his wife, and the weak, ungrateful James had at last allowed himself to be persuaded to deprive him of all authority in Ireland. But, so loved as well as feared was he, the despatch which disgraced him was kept a profound secret. His death was generally attributed to poison, but the real cause, according to a more trustworthy opinion, was apoplexy. So exciting were the times, that his end scarcely caused a thrill. Death must have been welcome, for his passionate heart was broken.

Thus perished this questionable hero, whose virtues and abilities have been covered with infamy by failure and the unbounded popular passions of the times in which he lived. Two voices only have ever been lifted in his defence: one was Berwick's, his contemporary, who, when the opportunity was offered, nobly refused to supplant him; the other was Lady Morgan's, a sympathetic critic of a later day. "Of Richard Talbot, Duke of Tyrconnel," she said, "much ill has been written and more believed; but his history, like that of his unfortunate country, has only been written by the pen of party, steeped in gall, and copied servilely from the pages of prejudice by the tame historians of modern times more anxious for authority than authenticity."

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His brilliant wife, whom his death reduced to poverty, paid his memory such honour as she could. At her entreaty Anselme, the most popular preacher of the day, pronounced his *oraison funèbre* in Paris, and the Courts of Versailles and St. Germain assembled to hear it. The obscurity in which the rest of her long life was spent has only been fitfully illuminated. Neglected in the distracted Court of the exiled Stuarts, she was so poor that she was often in want of the necessaries of life. On one occasion temporary relief was afforded her by the gift of four hundred pounds from the pension the Pope gave to James II. Her proud spirit having been embittered by misfortune, she quarrelled with nearly all her relations, living on especially bad terms with her "three viscountesses;" her only child by Talbot that survived, and whom she had married to the Prince of Vintimiglia; and her luckier but no cleverer sister, the Duchess of Marlborough. Many years later, in the reign of Queen Anne, when her famous brother-in-law was at the height of his power and playing his double game between the Whigs and the Jacobites, she was employed for a time in his secret negotiations. But the proceedings are wrapped in mystery. There is a story said to be apocryphal, though Horace Walpole and others believed it, that she was in England in 1705, and sold haberdashery at the Royal Exchange, which was at that time let out in stalls.

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"Above stairs," said Walpole, "sat, in the character of a milliner, the reduced Duchess of Tyrconnel, wife of Richard Talbot, Lord Deputy of Ireland under James II. This female, suspected to be his duchess after his death, supported herself for a few days, till she was known and otherwise provided for, by the little trade of the place. She had delicacy enough to wish not to be detected; she sat in a white mask and a white dress, and was known by the name of the White

Milliner."

It is certain that three years later she was at Brussels, where she had a meeting of a political nature with the Duke of Marlborough. In describing it to his wife he wrote that he found her grown very old and hoarse, and so much changed as to be hardly recognisable. Through his influence some of her confiscated property in Ireland was restored to her, and she went to Dublin, where she remained for the rest of her life, with what thoughts one would like to know! She lived for nearly thirty years in a most devout and lonely retirement, and, her funds being now more than sufficient for her wants, founded a nunnery for the Order of Poor Clares. "Her death," says Walpole, "was occasioned by falling out of her bed on the floor in a winter's night, and being too feeble to rise or to call out, she was found in the morning so perished with cold that she died in a few hours." Her age was eighty-three, and she had survived the fatal Battle of the Boyne forty years!

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Of the beauty for which "the Lovely Jennings" had been so celebrated at Whitehall, when she scattered the Duke of York's love-billets "like hailstones around her," there had long ceased to remain the slightest trace.



**"WANTON SHREWSBURY."  
(ANNA MARIA, COUNTESS OF SHREWSBURY.)  
From the portrait by Mary Beale in the possession of  
Earl Spencer.**

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# "WANTON SHREWSBURY"—LADY ANNA MARIA BRUDENELL, COUNTESS OF SHREWSBURY

## A MESSALINA OF THE RESTORATION

IN all ages there are persons of whom it may be said that they have been born out of their proper era. The manner in which such beings are received by the times in which they find themselves depends entirely on the standard of public opinion then existing. The Countess of Shrewsbury was one of these strange individuals. She should have flourished in France under the Valois and the great Dumas should have been her historian. In times like our own, for instance—for whether in or out of her proper period her individuality was too striking to have permitted her to pass unnoticed—she would undoubtedly have proved the truth of the verse that declares—

"Three yards of cord and a sliding board  
Are all the gallows' need."

It was certainly fortunate for her that Fate did not retard her appearance until after the Stuarts had vanished. As it was, even the Restoration looked askance at her; and it was only to her rank that she owed the immunity she enjoyed. There was a magic in rank in those days that secured liberty for its crimes. And no name appeared grander to the popular imagination than that of Talbot. [194]

In the remote past when, first coming out of Normandy into Britain, that family of which Tyrconnel was the most illustrious representative had settled in Ireland, its titular chief had remained in England. From him in the course of the centuries had sprung a line which yielded to none in pride of birth. Before the Howards or Percys had been heard of the English Talbots had become famous. One family alone boasted a more ancient lineage. This was de Vere, of which at the time we are now contemplating Aubrey, twentieth Earl of Oxford, was the last of his race. Since the fifteenth century the earldom of Shrewsbury had been the chief of the many dignities honourably borne by the head of the Talbots—a title whose unbroken succession the family boasts down to the present day. At the Restoration this distinguished house was represented by the eleventh of the line. He was a colourless aristocrat who, the year before the return of the Stuarts, had been married in London to his second wife, Lady Anna Maria Brudenell, daughter of the Earl of Cardigan, by a Justice of the Peace in the church of St. Giles-in-the-Fields.

When the Chevalier de Gramont arrived at Whitehall at the beginning of Charles II.'s reign the Countess of Shrewsbury was among the most beautiful and fascinating women he found there. If she had not already out-Castlemained the Castlemaine it was only from want of opportunity, not of inclination. Her terrible career had, however, begun. "As for Lady Shrewsbury," declared Gramont, "she is conspicuous. I would take a wager that if she had a man killed for her every day she would only hold her head the higher for it. One would suppose that she had plenary indulgences for her conduct. There are three or four gentlemen who wear an ell of her hair made into bracelets, and nobody finds any fault." [195]

Judging from the virtuous, no less than the vicious, men on whom she cast her spells, my Lady Shrewsbury, like King Arthur's sister Morgan le Fay, must have possessed the secret of enchantment. Not otherwise can one explain how the Earl of Arran, the noble Duke of Ormond's noble son, became the first and most ardent of her many lovers. This brave and upright young man long languished a slave to the passion with which she had inspired him. Perhaps, so powerful and seductive was her charm, he might never have been freed but for her own caprice. For the sorceress soon tired of her victims, and disenchanting them or had them slain as it pleased her. Few, like her kinsman, Dick Talbot, ever "sacrificed for another her letters, pictures, and hair" with impunity. But then he was quite an extraordinary man.

To those who care to peep into the seraglio of the Countess, it may cause some surprise to discover the "invincible" Jermyn bleeding in it. Both of these voluptuaries were attracted to each other by the same motive—the desire to subjugate a notable rival in the art of enchantment. But the ever-victorious Jermyn never embarked on a more ill-advised undertaking than that of adding Lady Shrewsbury to his list of triumphs. At the time of his attempt the slave of her ring, so to speak, was Thomas Howard, brother to the Earl of Carlisle. Like Arran, he had a fine character, which under a shy exterior concealed a sensitive, jealous spirit. In his infatuation for the Countess he invited her one evening to a *tête-à-tête* supper at a sort of *café chantant* known as Spring Garden, a fashionable place of amusement in the neighbourhood of Charing Cross. To give a little *éclat* to his hospitality, Howard, who was an officer in the Guards, had engaged one of his soldiers who played pretty well on the bagpipe to entertain them during the supper. The little festivity was in full swing when Jermyn, having been previously informed by her ladyship of her engagement for this particular evening, arrived at Spring Garden as if by chance, and insinuated himself into her company. Howard politely asked him to join his guest and himself at supper, and Jermyn not only accepted, but at once began to monopolise the lady's attention; and the better to impress her with his superiority to her host, to whom, unlike to himself, the subtle advantages of a life passed entirely in the air of Courts had been denied, he had the insolence to gibe at the cooking, the music, and the Spring Garden generally. [196]

Naturally under such circumstances the cynical wit of Jermyn, which seemed to delight Lady Shrewsbury, was offensive to Howard, who possessed none at all. Stung by the veiled insults [197]

levelled at him by this impertinent intruder on his evening's amusement, as well as by the jealousy of watching the Countess's smiles bestowed on another, he had the greatest difficulty to refrain from drawing his sword. A quarrel on her behalf between these two men, one of whom had begun to bore her while she wished to dupe the other, was perhaps exactly what Lady Shrewsbury most desired to complete her evening's amusement. Jermyn, no doubt, would willingly have assisted her, for he owed some of his victories over the fair sex to his skill in the art of self-defence. But a chivalrous dread of exposing the fatal woman he loved to scandal prevented Howard from staining the supper with blood.

The next morning, however, Jermyn, who had gone to bed with the satisfaction of having made Howard appear ridiculous, was awakened by a challenge. He at once chose his second, one Rawlings, while Dillon, an intimate friend of Rawlings, served in the same capacity to Howard. The place of meeting was "at the old Pall Mall at St. James's," and the battle, such was the determination of the impetuous Howard, was *à l'outrance*—the seconds, according to the custom of the times, engaging as well as the principals.

"Mr. Coventry," recorded Pepys in his Diary that day, "did tell us of the duel between Mr. Jermyn, nephew to my Lord St. Albans, and Colonel Giles Rawlings, the latter of whom is killed, and the first mortally wounded, as is thought. They fought against Captain Thomas Howard, my Lord Carlisle's brother, and another unknown (Dillon), who they say had armour on that they could not be hurt, so that one of their swords went up to the hilt against it. They had horses ready and are fled." Thus did my Lady Shrewsbury rid herself of a lover grown inconvenient, and without the blood of her victims staining her. For, adds Pepys, "what is most strange, Howard would not to the last tell Jermyn what the quarrel was, nor do anybody know."

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As it was not to the interest of the "invincible" Jermyn, who received three wounds and was carried off the field with very little sign of life, to breathe his suspicions regarding the lesson he had received, when Lady Shrewsbury's share in this duel finally came to light long afterwards her reputation was too deeply stained with the blood of others to make these drops remarkable. Possibly, had she only had gentlemen to deal with, like Arran and Howard, the Countess might have managed to evade the infamy with which she came to be regarded. But as her career proceeded her amours became more wanton, and the men she attracted lacked both chivalry and decency. Her depravity was already the subject of the idle gossip of the Court, when Harry Killigrew, having nothing better to do, had the folly to fall in love with her, and thereby proved in the sequel how fatal an enemy she could be. His advances were well received, for, said Hamilton, "as Lady Shrewsbury, by an extraordinary chance, had no engagement at that time, their *liaison* was soon established."

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Wide as had been her experience of men, it is doubtful if she had ever had a lover quite so impudent and foolish as young Killigrew. He was the son of Thomas Killigrew, a man *bien vu* at Whitehall and well known in the Restoration times, who had, says Pepys, "a fee out of the wardrobe for cap and bells and the title of King's Fool or Jester, and might revile or jeer anybody, the greatest person, without offence, by the privilege of his place." Indeed, this Master of the Revels of the Court of Charles II., to give him his official designation, though he was commonly known as "Tom the Jester," spared no one, and, like the still more famous Chicot, took liberties even with the King himself. Not that there was any particular daring in making merry at Charles's expense, for his Majesty had so little care of his dignity that any one could take almost any liberty with him. But Tom Killigrew had the courage to aim his quips at much more dangerous targets; to his sorrow very often, once being boxed on the ears and another time even stabbed for his jests. For the palmy days of the Court Fool had long since disappeared, and the revival of the office was only due to the cynicism of the Merry Monarch. Tom, however, took his knocks with a good grace, and reaped all the advantage possible out of his dangerous sinecure.

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Many anecdotes of his daring are extant, but the only one that seems to us worth repeating is the sample he gave, as Court Jester be it understood, to Louis XIV. It is not recorded whether the Sun King laughed or bit his lips—the latter, we should judge from what we know of him—when showing Killigrew a picture of the Crucifixion hanging between two portraits of himself and the Pope, the Fool remarked: "Ah, Sire, though I have often heard that our Lord was hung between two thieves, I never knew till now who they were."

But perhaps he may best be remembered now as the original founder of the Drury Lane Theatre and as the first to introduce Italian opera to England. He had ever had a fondness for the stage, and as a boy, in order to obtain admittance to the play, used to wait outside the doors till one of the actors, as was customary, would come out in search of one of the urchins loitering there to act the devil. From acting he had taken to writing plays, and during the time he had spent in Venice, whither he had been sent by the exiled Charles to try to raise money for him, and from which he was turned out for his immoral life, he wrote some indifferent comedies. It was under his management that Nell Gwynn and the Duchess of Cleveland's Goodman first appeared at Drury Lane in Beaumont and Fletcher's "Rule a Wife and Have a Wife." Coupled with his fooleries and his profligacy he had much sound sense—a faculty that his son Harry wholly lacked.

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This young man, who owed what prestige he enjoyed to his father, affected the beau of his period. He had plenty of wild, obscene wit, and early gained the reputation of being a swashbuckler. Pepys met him and some of his associates one night at Vauxhall, "as very rogues as any in the town, who were ready to take hold of every woman that came by them." They invited Pepys, who was apparently nothing loth, "to supper in an arbour, but Lord! their talk did make my heart ache! Here," continues the prurient gossip, whom we must thank for giving us many a sidelight on Restoration manners, "I first understood the meaning of the company that lately were called 'Ballers'; Harry telling me how it was by a meeting of some young blades, when



he was among them, and my 'Lady' Bennet (a notorious procuress) and her ladies and their dancing naked, and all the roguish things in the world."

That the Countess of Shrewsbury should have admitted this man to her closest intimacy, without any pretence at concealment, is sufficient to show the free rein she had come to give to her passions. But though he had a preference for the lowest haunts of the town, a shadow of respectability still clung to him. Through the Killigrew interest at Court—besides the favour his father enjoyed with the King, one of his aunts, Lady Shannon, had been a mistress of Charles—he had secured the post of groom of the bedchamber to the Duke of York, with whom he was somewhat of a favourite. His station in life had consequently brought him in contact with the cream of Restoration society, but owing to the insufferable airs and impertinences he allowed himself there were few whom he had not offended. Once, indeed, much to the general satisfaction, the Duke of Buckingham gave him a lesson he richly deserved. For having presumed to take some insolent liberty with this nobleman at Drury Lane, his Grace, in full view of the approving audience, "did soundly beat him, and take away his sword, and make a fool of him, till the fellow prayed him to spare his life." The salutary effect of this lesson was, however, only temporary, and when Harry Killigrew had the Countess of Shrewsbury for his mistress the memory of his public chastisement had quite ceased to have any effect on his volatile nature. Even the resentment he might naturally have been supposed to feel towards the Duke of Buckingham had disappeared. He was, says Hamilton, "a frequent guest at his Grace's table."

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The Duke, who had, perhaps, the most brilliant wit of any person of the period and enjoyed that of others, was, in the cynical indifference with which he regarded both vice and virtue, amused by Killigrew. If, as was said of this foolish son of the Court Fool, "he would never leave off lying as long as his tongue would wag," it was equally true of this organ that it would never leave off wagging as long as there was a bottle to be drunk. Buckingham, who not only used him as a pimp but as a spy and mistrusted him, knowing Killigrew's weakness, delighted to intoxicate him as the surest means of pumping the truth from him. But Killigrew, whose self-love was enormously flattered by being the accepted lover of such a woman as the Countess of Shrewsbury, no sooner got drunk than his tongue would wag by the hour in praise of her ladyship's "most secret charms and least visible beauties, concerning which more than half the Court knew quite as much as he knew himself."

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His Grace, into whose ears these glowing descriptions were being continually dinned, resolved at last to test the truth of them himself, with the result that Harry Killigrew lost his mistress and my Lady Shrewsbury gained a new lover. And now the foolish young libertine gave the crowning proof of his folly. For, being cut dead by Lady Shrewsbury, "he assailed her with invectives from head to foot. He painted a frightful picture of her conduct, and turned all her charms which he had previously extolled into defects."

Buckingham was not the person to be trifled with, still less Lady Shrewsbury, who had no more hesitation in removing an enemy from her path than Messalina. But as Killigrew's compromising indiscretions had after all only served to provide her with a fresh lover more to her taste, "he was privately warned of the inconvenience to which his declamations might subject him, but as he despised the advice, and persisted, he soon had reason to repent of it." His punishment was, however, deferred by an event and its consequence, that for some sixteen months engrossed the attention of his Grace and my Lady to the exclusion of all other considerations.

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It is said that there comes a time when even the worm will turn, and that time had come to the colourless Earl of Shrewsbury—to his cost. For his wife, having ignored him as long as he was complaisant, promptly put her foot on him, so to speak, and crushed him the moment he dared to protest. This unfortunate man, who had silently endured being made a cuckold by infatuated chivalrous Arrans and Howards, and even by an impudent Killigrew, drew the line at a Duke of Buckingham. He accordingly challenged this latest lover of his wanton wife, and "his Grace," says Hamilton, "as a reparation for his honour, having killed him upon the spot, remained a peaceable possessor of this famous Helen."

This duel, or murder, for it was nothing less, in which the Earl and one of his seconds lost their lives, while the other was dangerously wounded, was particularly infamous from the active part Lady Shrewsbury herself took in it. For, like some "foul traitress lady" of the *Morte d'Arthur*, having accompanied her lover to the field of battle clad as a page, she held his horse during the combat, and when he was victorious embraced him all covered as he was with her husband's blood. [205]

Unbridled as were the times even Whitehall could not stomach so shameless and outrageous a crime. Catherine of Braganza, on her own initiative, but powerfully supported by an indignant public, endeavoured to bring the Messalina and her paramour to justice. But the Duke of Buckingham was still more powerful at this time than the law, at which both he and Lady Shrewsbury snapped their fingers. As if to flaunt his defiance of all authority in the face of the angry nation, shortly after the death of Lord Shrewsbury—who did not, as Hamilton says, die on the spot, but lingered two months—his Grace actually installed his mistress in his own house. To the poor Duchess of Buckingham, who was as saintly as her husband was impious, this was the last straw. "It is impossible for both of us to live under the same roof," she protested, when the Shrewsbury arrived. "So I thought," retorted the Duke, "and therefore I have ordered your carriage to be got ready to carry you back to your father's."

The public, staggered by the contempt with which this brazen couple treated their laws and opinions, were reduced to the usual futile expedient with which virtue when baffled by vice seeks to console itself. Aware of the fickle characters of these two arch-evildoers, which presupposed their speedy falling-out, the righteously indignant public, agreeing with the Psalmist that the way of the wicked shall be turned upside down, prophetically awaited this *dénouement*. Nevertheless, even this satisfaction was denied the virtuous, for "never before had my Lady Shrewsbury's constancy been of such long duration; nor had his Grace ever been so solicitous a lover." [206]

When the noise of their murderous outrage had somewhat subsided the Duke was able to assist his mistress to perpetrate her long-deferred revenge on foolish Harry Killigrew. As the Messalina wished to be present in person when the punishment was inflicted, the ingenuity required to arrange matters to suit her made this fresh crime particularly cold-blooded. The victim, who had no suspicion, after a silence of sixteen months, of the attempt to be made on him, was to a certain extent safe owing to the very irregularities of his life, which made it difficult to know where and when to despatch him conveniently. The bravoos, however, who were employed to watch his movements were at last able to inform the Countess that one night at a certain hour, after having performed some trifling duty to the Duke of York, he would leave St. James's Palace for a house in Turnham Green. Her ladyship took her measures accordingly. Killigrew, who had fallen asleep in his coach, was suddenly, somewhere on the road, "awoke by the thrust of a sword which pierced his neck and came out at the shoulder. Before he could cry out he was flung from the vehicle and stabbed in three other places by the valets of the Countess, while"—to continue this extract from a despatch of the French Ambassador to the Minister for Foreign Affairs at Versailles—"the lady herself looked on from her own coach and six, and cried out to the assassins, 'Kill the villain!' Nor did she drive off till he was thought dead." [207]

The darkness, however, favoured him, and it was his unfortunate servant, who was slain in defending his master, that in the hurry and excitement of the fray the Countess took for Killigrew. When she learnt that he had escaped, though badly wounded, and was thinking of demanding redress, far from being alarmed at the consequences to herself, she sent him word that he had better be satisfied with the punishment he had got, for the second time she tried to murder him she should not fail! Killigrew, growing wise by experience, like the majority of us, took the hint, and lived so circumspectly afterwards that little more was ever heard of him. It is rumoured that he succeeded his father as Court Fool in the reign of William and Mary, and was three times married, once to a peer's daughter and twice to servant-girls! But he never crossed Lady Shrewsbury's path again, and the Duke of Buckingham having explained the affair to the satisfaction of the easy-going King, the matter was hushed up.

Some time elapsed after these adventures before her ladyship again came prominently before a public to whose opinion she was so indifferent. Not so his Grace. There was scarcely ever a day of his life that he was not feverishly employed in providing the world with news associated with his name. When not getting himself thrown into the Tower for offending the King, he was caballing for power at my Lady Castlemaine's, or denouncing an unpopular Clarendon in the House of Lords; when not championing the people and Protestantism, in neither of which he believed, against despotism and Popery, both of which he despised, this prince of profligates was squandering his enormous wealth on his enormous vices. Quiet he never was. But so still was Lady Shrewsbury during the year or two in which her passions slumbered that but for the web of [208]

enchantment in which, to the world's marvel, she was known to hold the fickle, restless Duke, it might have been fancied she was engaged, like a tigress after a feast, in cleansing herself of gore. It may, however, be taken for granted that though withdrawn from view for a time it was neither from shame nor weariness nor, least of all, repentance.

Now and then from her seclusion at Buckingham's splendid palace of Clieveden on the Thames, afterwards so celebrated by Pope as "the bower of wanton Shrewsbury and love," there came strange rumours. It was whispered that as the Duke had pulled the strings of intrigue at my Lady Castlemaine's, so Louis XIV.'s agents were pulling his Grace at Clieveden by means of his mistress. The series of events which had been slowly working for the realisation of Buckingham's ambition, and the manœuvring of which he, even when most volatile, never neglected, had at last culminated in his political triumph. The Cabal ministry had juggled themselves into power, and of that corrupt crew his Grace was easily the leader. Not only the Protestant and virtuous section of England, but the ambitious French King, to both of which factors Buckingham owed his success, looked to him as a chief and a confederate respectively. This brilliant libertine was capable, had he wished, of proving himself a patriot, perhaps of changing the whole course of English history. He had something almost like genius and a great opportunity. But he who had never been true to any principle in his life, or to any person for twenty-four hours together, save Lady Shrewsbury, had neither the desire nor the will to choose between his country and his country's enemies. With diabolical cynicism, which in Buckingham sometimes resembled a sort of subtle insanity, he determined to be true to both by despising both. It was, perhaps, the difficulty of playing this double game that was its chief attraction for him. But while it was easy to hoodwink Protestant England, whose idol he was, it was not so easy to dupe Louis XIV., whose tool he was. That astute monarch, informed of the influence Lady Shrewsbury had over the unprincipled minister, had tied the great Villiers fast by bribing his mistress. It is true that Buckingham eventually snapped his bonds, but when that happened he was no longer worth the French King's consideration. The day that the French Ambassador paid the Shrewsbury her first ten thousand livres he had the satisfaction of writing to his master that she had sworn, "Buckingham should comply with the King in all things." Of course, only the vaguest suspicion of this corruption was felt by the public, but the mere fact that while the Duke openly expressed in Parliament contrition for his past evil ways he still kept Lady Shrewsbury under his roof, was sufficient not only to cause his reformation to be doubted, but to remind England that its Messalina was not yet among the damned.

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It was now, when Buckingham was at the zenith of his career, that these two terrible phenomena of the Restoration decided to give the world a crowning proof of their supreme contempt of it. The nation was suddenly staggered by the news that the chief Minister of the State, though his wife was still living, had, without any pretence at secrecy, been married to the Countess of Shrewsbury! As if to emphasise the scandal the bigamous ceremony was performed according to all the rites of the Church by the Duke's chaplain, Dr. Sprat, afterwards Bishop of Rochester. To the pious when such things could be done with impunity it seemed as if they were living in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah. But the impious crew that revelled at Whitehall merely laughed, and jestingly spoke of the lawful Duchess of Buckingham as the "Dowager Duchess." The sun of the Restoration had reached the meridian.

Strange to say, historians have passed over this foolish and gratuitous infamy with comparative indifference, as if the period and the notorious characters of the bigamous couple made further comment unnecessary. This may be a sufficient explanation for the profane Sprat's share in the crime, but it was something more than the mere lawless gratification of lust that forced Villiers and the Shrewsbury into bigamy. As no reason has ever been given ours can only be a guess. The agents of Louis XIV. did not often squander his money without a *quid pro quo*, and perhaps it does not exceed probability to suggest that before receiving French bribes Buckingham's mistress was called upon to show some proof of her influence over him? The same year his Grace went to Paris, ostensibly to represent Charles II. at the funeral of his sister, the Duchess of Orleans, but in reality to prepare the way for selling his King and country, as he had already sold himself, to France. His reception at Versailles was magnificent, and he returned laden with wealth and dignities. So favourably did he impress the French Court that Louis remarked "he was almost the only English gentleman he had ever seen!"

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In the following year the virtuous public, which had indignantly predicted three years before the speedy falling-out of this precious couple, were still further scandalised to learn, in the words of Marvell, that "the Duke of Buckingham exceeds all with Lady Shrewsbury, by whom he believes he had a son, to whom the King stood godfather." We may further add that this infant, to which the courtesy title of Earl of Coventry, borne by the eldest son of the Dukes of Buckingham, had been given, died young and was buried in the family vault at Westminster Abbey!

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And now, in such favour was the Duke at Whitehall, the mock Duchess returned to Court and brazenly dared to show herself about the country. Evelyn relates that at Newmarket "he found the jolly blades racing, dancing, feasting, and revelling, more resembling a luxurious and abandoned rout than a Christian country. The Duke of Buckingham was in mighty favour, and had with him that impudent woman, the Countess of Shrewsbury, and his band of fiddlers." The day of reckoning, however, came at last. Unfortunately, it did not depend on any sudden belated awakening of the moral sense in Charles II., or a revival of virtue in a country prepared to sweep away the indecencies that were outraging it. Buckingham and Lady Shrewsbury were only brought to book when his political power was broken. The Restoration went on more deliriously than ever till it reached the fatal climax in 1688. With the Duke's fall the enchantment of the Shrewsbury was snapped. Called before the bar of the House of Lords, with no Duchess of

Cleveland or King to stay the arm of the law now in his behalf, he was ordered to separate altogether from this woman, and each of them was required "to enter into security to the King's Majesty in the sum of ten thousand pounds apiece for this purpose."

It may be doubted whether the scathing indictment he received from his peers made any impression on him. But his day was over and, though he tried to recover the license he had so shamefully abused and the confidence of the nation he had so infamously betrayed, his star steadily continued to set. His future career was one of baffled hopes and pleasures, of ever deepening disgrace, humiliation, and even poverty. He lost everything of the wonderful store of gifts that Fortune had so bounteously bestowed on him—all, save his brilliant wit, which in a world of wits acknowledged none superior. But even wit deserted him at the end, and he died miserably enough. We have already, on an earlier page, expressed our opinion of this remarkable libertine who occupies such a prominent place in his times, and in mentioning him now for the last we can find no more fitting words in which to dismiss him than Pope's familiar lines. As the *oraison funèbre* of the great Buckingham they will be quoted as long as the phenomenal age in which he flourished is remembered:—

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"In the worst inn's worst room, with mat half hung,  
The floors of plaster, and the walls of dung,  
On once a flock-bed, but repair'd with straw,  
With tape-tied curtains, never meant to draw;  
The George and Garter dangling from that bed,  
Where tawdry yellow strove with dirty red,  
Great Villiers lies—alas! how chang'd from him,  
That life of pleasure, and that soul of whim!  
Gallant and gay, in Clieveden's proud alcove,  
The bower of wanton Shrewsbury and love;  
Or, just as gay, at council, in a ring  
Of mimic'd statesmen, and their merry king.  
No wit, to flatter, left of all his store!  
No fool to laugh at, which he valued more.  
There, victor of his health, of fortune, friends,  
And fame, this lord of useless thousands ends."

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As for Lady Shrewsbury, she was not only compelled to separate from her lover and provide a surety of ten thousand pounds to that effect, but obliged to leave the country. There were thousands of honest people who would, no doubt, have liked to see her burnt or hanged, as would probably have been her fate had she been a woman of the people. But Lady Shrewsbury was a peeress and the widow of a Talbot, and criminal rank in those days was banished not executed. She had not committed the aristocratic crime of high treason, for which alone rank could suffer death. There was, however, a very irksome durance to which offenders of her sex and station were subjected, and in banishing her to Dunkirk Charles obliged her to retire to a convent. How long she remained there, or what intrigues finally freed her from what to such a woman must have been a rigorous imprisonment, history does not relate. As far as the public were concerned she had ceased to exist.



THE DUKE OF SHREWSBURY.

Lady Shrewsbury was, however, very much alive, and having spun her web round the younger son of a Somerset baronet, she married him, and under the name of Mrs. Bridges played a secret and dangerous game in the coming years. For her passions having burnt themselves out, from their ashes sprang a fresh lust—the lust of political intrigue. Its victim was her eldest son, the new Earl of Shrewsbury. A boy when his father was slain, he had resented the ignominy of having to live with his mother under Buckingham's roof; and though the spirit which urged him to appeal to the House of Lords that he and his brother might be removed from the care of such a mother was nipped in the bud, nevertheless it was sufficient to make both children distasteful to Buckingham. They were sent to their maternal grandfather, Lord Cardigan, to whom the young Earl owed his education. At the time his mother married Bridges he was one of the most promising young peers in England. A worthier representative of the proud line from which he sprung it had, perhaps, never had. Gifted with great personal beauty (his mother's legacy) and a shy, gentle manner, he at once attracted all who met him. The seriousness of his character corresponded with the high hopes he raised. Born in a profligate and indulgent age, he had, like most young men of spirit, yearned to taste all the pleasures of the senses. With the blood of such a mother in his veins, to resist desire was impossible. He tasted the cup of vice. It intoxicated him, and in that moment of delirious pleasure it seemed to him, as to many another youth before and since, that to be the slave of lust was a fate more enviable than that of the conqueror of the world. The reputation of being a "king of hearts," a title satirically applied to him at this period, he never quite lost. But this young Talbot was not one of your commonplace striplings who sway like reeds before the wind. He had a thoughtful, intelligent mind and a great ambition. Already, by "a very critical and anxious inquiry into matters of controversy," assisted by the celebrated Tillotson, the young nobleman, a Roman Catholic by birth, heredity, and education, had publicly professed his adherence to the Anglican faith. A youth who could of his own initiative reason himself into taking such a step was not to be long entangled by vice. The world was to be won, and he meant to win it; he would be the greatest of all the Talbots, the champion of liberty, the hope of Protestant England. It was a noble ambition, and the times were favourable.

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But from the very start two influences stronger than he pulled him back at every step he took. One of these was his temperament. The conduct of his mother, the death of his father, and that of a dearly loved only brother—who within five days of his twenty-first birthday was killed in a duel by one of the Duchess of Cleveland's bastards—had combined to deepen the morbid tendencies of a naturally hyper-sensitive nature. To the influence of these terrible family tragedies was added that of a perpetual and vain struggle to subdue the lust he had inherited. He lived, as it were, under the shadow of some fatal curse which seemed to predestine all his actions to failure. Knowing full well the value of self-confidence, he doubted himself constantly, and, like a man from the brink of a precipice, was ever recoiling from great crises which he had enthusiastically helped to create. With all the *wish* in the world, he had not the *will* to be brave. And life demanded bravery, spirit, initiative from him at every turn.

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The other influence fatal to his career was his mother. He could never rid himself from the fear in which he stood of her. To the Countess of Shrewsbury, become now as fierce and vindictive in political intrigue as she had formerly been in her amours, such a son was an asset of the highest value. Married to her second husband, middle-aged, and buried in a remote part of the country, the once notorious Messalina had long ceased to be remembered. But there lived not in England in that day of plots and counterplots a more inveterate conspirator. In the obscurity of her retired life she was steeped to the throat in intrigue. Long before the Revolution she was a spy and pensioner of the French King, and with the fall of the Stuarts, under whom she had fared so safely, she became, as was natural, a rabid Jacobite. The young Earl, her son, long separated from her, was developing on quite opposite lines. In the endeavour to realise his ideals, the year before the Revolution he showed his disapproval of King James's policy by resigning all his Court appointments, and in 1688, in behalf of the cause of freedom he had publicly professed, joined the party that deprived the stubborn, stupid Stuart of his throne. It was natural, as Miss Strickland says, that this young man "might be considered (when all his advantages were computed) the mightiest power among the aristocracy of Great Britain." William of Orange, like all great statesmen, was quick to recognise talent; he readily offered high office to this young Earl of Shrewsbury who had helped to make him King of England, and on whom such high popular hopes were built. It may be said that a young career never bloomed under a more vivifying sun.

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But now his mother, who lived remote from him and had never come into his life but to bring doom with her, like the terrible, mysterious queen in Maeterlinck's *Mort de Tintagiles*, reappeared. What was the exact secret of her hold, what fears she worked on, what hopes she appealed to, cannot be said; but her effect was like the effect of blackmail. The young Earl with the ardent ambition and the noble ideals yielded—with what anguish the indecision of his whole future career indicates—to the inexplicable influence of his mother. One of the first steps in that life of brilliant promise was one of treachery. The would-be saviour of England secretly trafficked with the Court of St. Germain. Nor was he allowed to stand forth as an open champion of the Stuarts whom he could not love; he was made to remain at Whitehall as William of Orange's chief and most confidential Minister in order that his mother and the Jacobites might know all that was going on there. That such a man as Shrewsbury could continue to play this double game long was impossible. His pleas to be allowed to resign the seals of office were pitiable, and his behaviour, when his treachery was finally denounced and King William nobly and secretly gave him the chance to clear himself by a lie which he professed to believe, was painful. The King's attitude on this occasion gave him a fresh chance; he took it but to betray it and his own better nature. At last his conscience could endure the strain no longer; he left office and the country after a

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veritable martyrdom of ten years. "Had I a son," he said, "I would sooner bind him a cobbler than a courtier, and a hangman than a statesman."

After the death of his mother, who, if not wilfully, at least heartlessly, contributed quite as much as his own temperament to the ruin of his career, he returned to England in Queen Anne's reign. But now, though his country, still believing in him, "called" him and he tried to respond, it was too late. He flung all his influence on the side of liberty and Protestantism, but his statecraft was demoralised by his past experiences, and his opportunity, which seldom comes to a man more than once, had been bungled in the previous reign. Like his mother, he too was born out of his fitting age. In the more congenial atmosphere of our day he would have won something more worthy of his great talents than his dukedom and garter. To his lofty ambition such prizes were of small account beside what his soul lost in grandeur.

Of all tragedies those of one's ideals are the saddest. The lives of statesmen who have failed are always interesting, and as English history is full of such the book that may some day record them will be worth both reading and writing. In such a work, of a surety, the career of the first and only Duke of Shrewsbury, who set out not to win fame and fortune, but to do what he believed right, and miserably failed, will be not the least dramatic. Like Tyrconnel, he was more sinned against than sinning; to be forgotten by posterity as they are is not so dreadful as to have the faint memory of them revived by the fleeting mention of some "Wanton Shrewsbury" or other. To us the marring of her son seems the greatest of this Messalina's crimes.

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"MADAME."

(HENRIETTA, DUCHESS OF ORLEANS.)

*From a miniature reproduced by courtesy  
of Dr. G. C. Williamson.*

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# "MADAME"—HENRIETTA, DUCHESS OF ORLEANS

## THE FRENCH COURT—THE EVIL GENIUS OF THE RESTORATION

AS she was French in all but her birth, the favourite sister of Charles II. can only be said to belong to the Court of the Restoration by courtesy. Nevertheless, on the occasion of her two short visits to England during her brother's reign the impression she created was so lasting, so sympathetic, that posterity, like her own generation, has agreed that of all the women who graced Whitehall the most fascinating was Madame.

She was born in the thick of the Civil War at Exeter, whither her mother had fled, and from which soon after her birth the *Reine Malheureuse* was also obliged to flee, leaving her child to the care of the faithful Lady Dalkeith. On the capitulation of Exeter the royal infant fell into the hands of the Parliament, to which the charge of such a prisoner was extremely embarrassing. It was, however, relieved from its dilemma by Lady Dalkeith, who was a woman of courage and resource. For Cromwell, very rightly looking upon every adherent of the Stuarts as a possible conspirator, decided to dismiss her and confine the tiny princess at St. James's, under his own supervision, whereupon Lady Dalkeith promptly fled the country with her charge. [222]

The story of their flight to Dover on foot, clad in the rags of peasants—a disguise to which the little girl had such an objection that she angrily announced to all they met, "that she was not a peasant boy, but the Princess Henrietta of England"—when related at the French Court no doubt excited a suitable thrill. But Parliament was not ridiculous enough to pursue such fugitives, and they crossed to Calais in the ordinary French packet. Such was Madame's *début* on the theatre of life. She was two years old at the time. Fifteen years later she again appeared before the public as a star, so to speak,—a *rôle* in which she scored a brilliant popular success. Like most such intervals, these intervening years were obscure, hard, discouraging.

For Queen Henrietta Maria, widowed, exiled, and impoverished to the condition of shabby gentility, was not a cheerful mother to live with. She was always weeping, praying, and plotting, and her *enfant de bénédiction* had a cheerless childhood. Rooms had been assigned to the Queen of England at the Louvre, and the sum of forty thousand livres had been voted her by the Parliament of Paris. But it was soon *mangé* by her son and his beggared followers, and there was often real misery in that little Court at the Louvre. [223]

The famous Cardinal de Retz, who during the Fronde was a sort of king in Paris, describes with his mocking pity the state in which he discovered the English royalties when one day in mid-winter affairs obliged him to call on Henrietta Maria.

"You see," said the *Reine Malheureuse*, whom he found at the bedside of her daughter, who as a child was thought to be consumptive, "I am keeping Henrietta company; I dare not let the poor child rise to-day as we have no fire."

"The truth was," adds de Retz ironically, "that no tradespeople would trust her for anything. Posterity will hardly believe that a princess of England, granddaughter of Henry the Great, had wanted a faggot in the month of January to get out of bed in the Louvre, and in the eyes of the French Court! We read in history with horror of baseness less monstrous than this, and the little concern I have met with about it in most people's minds has obliged me to make a thousand times this reflection: *That examples of times past move men beyond comparison more than those of their own times. We accustom ourselves to what we see, and I doubt whether Caligula's horse being made a consul would have surprised us so much as we imagine.*"

Owing to the cynical de Retz, it no doubt consoled Henrietta Maria to be assured that "a princess of England would not keep her bed the next day for want of a faggot."

But his generosity seems to us to have been prompted from a far less noble impulse than that of the chivalrous Duke of Ormond. For this Bayard of the British peerage sold his order of the Garter for the benefit of his Queen, and was "compelled to put himself in prison, with other gentlemen, at a pistole a week for his diet." [224]

These days of adversity, however, came to an end, and after the Fronde was subdued Henrietta Maria enjoyed all the privileges of her royal birth. Not that she availed herself of them; on the contrary, grief had taken most of the joy out of life for her, and though she lived in the closest intimacy with her sister-in-law, Anne of Austria, the Regent, and in the midst of a brilliant Court, she was scarcely ever seen out of her own apartments. But grief did not kill Henrietta Maria's ambition. She longed to see a crown on her daughter's head. So the young princess, who shared her mother's rigid seclusion, was carefully educated with the secret object of making a suitable consort for her cousin, the young King.

In looking back on these dreary years of girlhood Henrietta could remember but a single joy they had contained. It was a joy, however, so great that its memory coloured this entire period. This was the real affection that her brother Charles, alone of mortals, during an all too fleeting visit to Paris, evinced for her. The emotional child, whose affections were being choked by the austerity of her mother's life, paid back her brother's kindness to her with compound interest. He began by treating her as a plaything with which he liked to toy in an idle moment and ended by making her his friend and confidante. To her he was like a hero of romance. No one in that graceless, dashing crowd of exiled Cavaliers, whom necessity had turned into adventurers, followed his fortunes with such an eager sympathy. No one in those long years of baffled hopes [225]

and fruitless efforts was more firmly convinced that he would come to his own again. When his star had completely vanished in the dazzling sunlight of Cromwell, when even the astute Mazarin believed that the throne of England was for ever lost to the Stuarts, the insignificant Henrietta in her dreary room at the Louvre never despaired. It is perhaps only a girl who could, under such circumstances, have maintained such an unshaken faith. Charles never forgot it. Cynical and insincere with all, he remained to the last ever frank and true to his sister. She wished no greater reward.

Owing to the simplicity of her life no one in the brilliant French Court remarked the almost imperceptible development of those spiritual charms that were to turn an obscure princess into a fascinating queen of hearts. As a child she was not at all pretty, and all her physical defects were heightened by perpetual colds, and toothaches, and sore eyes. The complete lack of taste with which her mother dressed her, and a certain blue-stocking air that her intellectual cramming gave her were, moreover, little calculated to excite admiration. It was, on the face of it, absurd to imagine that Louis, palpitating with youth and health and pride and the joy of life, would dream of choosing such a princess for his queen. Pride alone would have prevented him from placing on the throne beside him one whom he considered as a poor relation living on his charity. Besides, his boy's head at the time was full of Mazarin's nieces; he was kissing Hortense, flirting with Olympe, and plighting undying troth with Marie.

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Henrietta Maria, however, had learnt nothing from her prolonged lessons in defeat; she was one of those women who resist, not from obstinacy, but from habit. Having set her heart on seeing her daughter Queen of France she intrigued accordingly. The most important accomplice in the making of the match was Anne of Austria, the King's mother. The relations between the sisters-in-law were of the most cordial description, and Anne, like an anxious mother terrified lest her favourite son should make a *mésalliance*—an event that in Louis' case seemed quite likely—decided that the sooner he was married the better. Of course she had a list of marriageable princesses to choose from, but as in her anxiety there was no time to be lost her choice was confined to one of two on the spot. These were "La Grande Mademoiselle" and the Princess Henrietta, both of whom were her nieces; but as no love was lost between Anne and the former, the princess of England who had lacked a faggot to warm herself by suddenly found herself arrived within measurable distance of the throne of France.

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To facilitate matters Anne gave a dance in honour of Henrietta, who was then eleven and very precocious, if equally unattractive, for her age. The young King, who by all the rules of etiquette, which he observed so faithfully in after life, should have offered his hand to his cousin, accorded this honour, to his mother's dismay, to the Duchesse de Mercœur, the eldest of the beautiful nieces of Mazarin. Anne, who though now no longer Regent, nevertheless deluded herself with the thought that her influence over her son was still paramount, was covered with mortification and lost her head. She went up to her son and ordered him to dance with his cousin. But the expression on Louis' face warned the observant Henrietta Maria that another humiliation was imminent for her, and she tried to avert it with a tact that was hardly to be expected of her by at once intervening between the mother and son, declaring that her daughter had hurt her foot and could not dance.

"Well, then," cried the exasperated Anne, "if Henrietta does not dance neither shall Louis."

The boy, intensely mortified at the scene his mother was making before the whole Court, was quick to guess her motive. Having led the Duchesse de Mercœur back to her seat, he went up sulkily to his cousin and asked her to dance. But the next day when Anne, who had had time to cool, coaxingly explained to him her plans for his marriage, he replied firmly, with all the pride of a boy of seventeen, "that he did not like little girls."

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Anne of Austria did not patiently brook attempts to thwart her, but in this instance by wisely discerning her master in her son she managed to marry him—in his own good time—to another niece, the daughter of her brother, the King of Spain. As for the Queen of England, her disappointment was very bitter, and she wept and prayed and plotted against Cromwell more than ever. While Henrietta returned to her former obscurity, and though she did not cherish resentment against Louis, for whom she cared quite as little as he cared for her, she did not forget the slight she had received from him.

At last the day of triumph she had anticipated for her brother arrived.

When the news reached Paris of the *gaudeamus* with which Charles II. was received in England, Henrietta Maria and her daughter were transported with joy. The sister of the King of England became at once a *partie* eagerly sought after. Among those who wished to marry her was the Emperor. She, however, willingly consented to the proposal for her hand made by France on behalf of Monsieur, Louis XIV.'s brother, not because she loved him, but because such an alliance was to the interest of her own brother. This marriage was no sooner arranged, to the great satisfaction of Henrietta Maria, to whom the thought of her daughter on the steps of the French throne was almost as pleasing as the sight of her on the throne itself would have been, than the Queen and the Princess went to England to share in the triumph of King Charles.

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Without detailing the events of this visit, on which Henrietta's right to be classed among the beauties of the Court of Whitehall rests, quite as much as on the fact of her birth, it will be sufficient to say that it was a success. With the restoration of Charles to the throne of his ancestors, Stuarts of every degree of consanguinity had flocked to London. They came from all over Europe, rich and poor, blood relations and collaterals; there never had been in the history of the family such a reunion. As most of them wanted something, a young king in the hour of victory could not but be generous; offices and honours rained on Stuarts of Blantyre and Stuarts of



Richmond; places and pensions on aunt-Queens of Bohemia, on princely cousin Ruperts, and dowager sisters of Orange. Retrenchment was a word that had not been invented to frighten nations with in that day. But of all her family the one who got the lion's share of this prodigal profusion was the Princess Henrietta. The others took the wealth of the people, she won its heart.

In the bacchanal joy of the Restoration sentiment was conspicuous. The interest in the dramatic romance of the dynasty was heightened by the well-known sympathy between the King and his youngest sister. Though she had grown up unobserved in the French Court, England had been following her career. Cavaliers had noisily drunk her health on the Rhine, in the army of Condé, in the Highlands, and in whispers all over Cromwell-ridden England. Even the Puritans had heard with sentimental contempt—for there was sentiment in them too—of Charles Stuart's letters to the little girl in the Louvre, which bore the simple, pathetic address, "For my dear, dear sister." To this member of the family at least the nation was prepared to give no grudging welcome. The sudden and overwhelming gladness that had come into her life had transformed her into a fascinating girl of seventeen. Beautiful in the vulgar, plastic sense she was not, yet she created the impression of beauty. Like Madame de Pompadour, she possessed the *beauté sans traits*. The lights in her expressive eyes, the swift changes of her mobile face, spoke to all of the sympathy and gaiety of her temperament. The praises of Whitehall echoed in the coffee-houses, everybody talked of her, everybody wished to see her. Her public appearances were ovations. It was impossible to resist her smile. It was the smile of one who seems to desire nothing so much as to please. In a princess this is even more winning than tact in a king. "On dirait qu'elle demande le cœur," says M. Anatole France, "voilà le secret de Madame."

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Money was as necessary to her as to any of the others of her family; *she* had never had a farthing of her own. But to none of the Stuarts did the nation give so gracefully and so quickly. The House of Commons not only voted her a gift of ten thousand pounds, but sent her the money on the same day. But in the midst of all this popularity and joy a great gloom fell over Whitehall. Henrietta's youngest brother, the Duke of Gloucester, had died of small-pox just before she arrived in England; and now her only sister, the Princess of Orange, fell ill of the same disease and succumbed after a short illness. This tragedy occurring at such a time "wholly altered," says Evelyn, "the face and gallantry of the whole Court." Henrietta Maria, terrified lest she should lose her only surviving daughter, on whose future she built such high hopes, eagerly hastened to leave a country which seemed to bring nothing but disaster to her family. Their departure was facilitated by the impatience of the French Government to conclude the projected alliance with England—an impatience manifested through the anxiety of Monsieur in regard to the health of his *fiancée*. Within less than three months of leaving Paris for London the Princess was back in the city of her adoption, and shortly afterwards her marriage with the French king's only brother took place, by which she became, as regards rank, the second woman in the kingdom.

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Those who remembered what an insignificant girl she had been were amazed at the change in her. It was not, however, she who had changed, but merely the light in which she had stood. Heretofore, because it had not considered her, the world took it for granted that she was not worth considering. But now as the wife of the first prince of the blood all eyes were turned upon her, while she, like an understudy who suddenly finds herself in the *rôle* for which she has been trained, acted her part to the best of her ability. That she electrified the French Court as she had done Whitehall did not in the least surprise the few who had known her intimately; on the contrary, they confidently expected her success. Madame de Motteville, a shrewd observer who knew her well, had predicted that "when she appeared on the great theatre of the Court of France she would play one of the leading parts there."

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To her the *ancien régime* owed its two chief characteristics—its gaiety and its grace. She possessed "une vivacité d'esprit et une élégance de manières" that in casting their spell over women as well as men created a model which made France down to the Revolution the supreme arbiter of taste in Europe. Her own natural ability—a quality that very few of the Stuarts lacked—sharpened and refined by the careful education her mother had given her, made her readily discern true genius from its sham. The artistic and intellectual appealed to her strongly. In the searchlight that the people fix upon royalty she was never seen to better advantage than when in the company of the elect of the nation. If Louis XIV. may be compared to Augustus, Madame was his Mecænas. She more than he made his fame splendid. It was she who mined and refined the ore which Louis stamped with his name. La Rochefoucauld and Bussy-Rabutin, Bossuet and Boileau, Condé and Turenne, Madame de Sévigné and Madame de La Fayette, all alike found in her an eager, sympathetic, and even a critically discriminating admirer.

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In her day the peasants did not count as human beings; they were considered either as food for cannon or the mine that produced the gold of the upper classes. When the "people" were spoken of it was the *bourgeoisie*, the Third Estate, that was meant. The distance between this class and the throne was so bridgeless that only a revolution, one hundred and fifty years in the building, could span it. But across even this vast space the fascination of Madame penetrated. In the sublime *oraison funèbre* that the great Bossuet pronounced over her dead body, he merely stated the simple truth when he declared that the people of Paris shuddered when, like a clap of thunder, there resounded over the city the appalling news, "*Madame se meurt! Madame est morte!*"

That smile, "which seemed to ask for one's heart," had captured that of Paris as it had that of London.

Stories of her enthusiastic appreciation of genius were related everywhere, but none touched the people like those which showed her in the act of levelling the barriers between the idols of the masses and the heroes of the Court. Everybody knew that she wept over Racine. Everybody

had heard how Boileau had been drawn from his obscurity by a quotation from his unknown poem with which she had greeted him, when passing by chance through an ante-room in which the poor poet was waiting to solicit the patronage of some great lord. Everybody remembered that she had stood sponsor to the child of Molière, and had "Tartuffe" acted in her own house before the King while the Church was condemning the play and demanding that the author should be burnt alive. In a country like France such things strike the imagination. With the "people" Madame could not but be popular.

At the same time she became "toute la joie, tout le plaisir de la cour." If the long reign of Louis XIV. had a gorgeous summer in Athenais de Montespan, and a bleak winter in Madame de Maintenon, brightened for a brief moment by the sunshine of the lovely Duchess of Burgundy, it had a joyous spring in Henrietta of England. This Golden Age of France, as it has been termed, was never so happy as when Madame infected Fontainebleau and Versailles with her gaiety.

But the Court was not sincere like the people. Courts never are. Those who owed their places and pensions to the Queen Mother and the Queen naturally studied to please them, and nothing would have pleased Anne of Austria and Marie Thérèse, of Spain so much as the ruin of this radiant, *spirituelle* Madame who cast them into the shade. To the people of Paris, who shuddered when the couriers came from St. Cloud with the news of her tragic death, the Court of France appeared as dazzling as did the palace of Armida to Renaud before he crossed its threshold. It was only those within who had breathed its poisoned air, tasted its treacherous pleasures, and languished in its labyrinth of intrigue who knew how fatal it was. The roses that strewed the Court of France concealed death-traps. All who lived there walked gingerly, the first princess of the blood—aye, the Queen herself, no less than the courtiers. To some the sense of danger gives an added zest to the joy of living. Madame was one of these. All her ingenuity was requisitioned to outwit her enemies, of whom the chief were her mother-in-law, her sister-in-law, and her husband.

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The young King, who had been trained by his mother to play a great *rôle* on the throne of France, took his position even now very seriously. He was, however, naturally fond of amusement, and it was certainly not his Queen who could provide it for him. His Spanish cousin, whom he had married for reasons of high policy, bored him utterly. Marie Thérèse was very plain, very stupid, and very virtuous. She fenced herself round with etiquette, and lived on a sort of unscalable Olympian height in all the gloomy splendour of the Spanish Court in which she had been bred. Her only recreations appeared to be cards and eating. All the Bourbons were famous gluttons, but Marie Thérèse in this matter suffered none to take precedence of her. Louis was not long in drawing the inevitable comparison between his wife and his sister-in-law; and when he wished amusement, conformable to his dignity and agreeable to his temperament, it was to Madame he went. The more he saw of her the more he liked her. A word, a phrase, an opinion, would suddenly arrest his attention, and from going to Madame for amusement he began to go for something else as well.

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He seemed to have quite forgotten that he had ever looked upon her with disdain. But while she bore him no grudge for the slight he had put on her when there had been a question of her marrying him, she took a certain malicious, coquettish pleasure in encouraging his growing tenderness. What a sweet, innocent revenge it would be to make him fall in love with her! In a private station such a flirtation might have escaped attention, but in an Argus-eyed Court the first sigh will be suspected, the first understanding detected. The Queen, who possessed among the numerous qualities with which she bored her husband that of jealousy, complained to Anne of Austria that Madame was robbing her of her husband's affections. The Queen Mother, who liked to exercise over her family the influence which she no longer possessed in the Government, lent a ready ear to these confidences, and as she herself had a grievance against Madame for outshining her, she soon found the means of venting it. When Anne of Austria had a score to pay off she stopped at nothing. In this instance the means she employed were despicable. She set her younger son, Monsieur, against his wife.



**"MONSIEUR."  
(PHILIPPE D'ORLÉANS.)  
*After Wallerant Vaillant.***

The character of Philippe d'Orléans belongs to a type with which readers of latter-day fiction are very familiar. This prince of the seventeenth century was the beau-ideal decadent that many modern novelists have delighted to depict. His mother and Mazarin, warned by the troubles the previous King's brother, Gaston d'Orléans, had caused the throne, were determined that Philippe should be trained to play the most paltry part in affairs. Consequently, while Louis XIV. was given the education which fitted him to become an able king, Monsieur was encouraged in every tendency that could enfeeble him. "The prettiest child in France" had grown up a young man of striking beauty with not a redeeming virtue. The last Valois king was the most degenerate monarch that ever sat on the throne of France, but he was at least picturesque. Monsieur did not possess even this quality. To find his equal one would have to go back to the decline of the Roman Empire. In the third century he might have won the purple and worn it like Heliogabalus, and the Prætorians would have poisoned or strangled or slain him. But he had the luck to be born in a Christian and more indulgent era, and died peacefully in his bed after a life of incredible uselessness and scandal. Brought up entirely among women, he had acquired an effeminacy that, when clad in women's dress, a costume he frequently affected, made it difficult to believe he belonged to the other sex. The study of clothes was his chief consideration, he spent hours rouging and perfuming himself. Court functions, to which he looked forward like a child to a party, provided him with the opportunity to wear his gorgeous costumes. A State funeral afforded him as much pleasure as a State wedding.

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La Grande Mademoiselle declares that when her father, Gaston d'Orléans, died, the King on paying her his visit of condolence, said—

"To-morrow you will see Monsieur in a trailing violet mantle. He is enchanted to hear of your father's death so as to have the pleasure of wearing it."

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And as Louis predicted, Monsieur went to the funeral wearing a mantle of a "furieuse longueur."

Added to his taste for dress and pageants, he delighted in collecting precious furniture, pictures, and jewels. He also wrote neurotic verses and swore love-till-death friendships—most of which he betrayed. Of his literary accomplishments the Bibliothèque Nationale contains the voluminous and ridiculous correspondence with which he honoured the witty Madame de Sablé. As to the scandals into which his pleasures led him, perhaps the least said about them the better. Those who are interested in such things may learn all about them in the memoirs of his period. Shame was an emotion he never knew. When his favourite, the Chevalier de Lorraine, the most profligate man of his century, was banished, Monsieur sulked. He possessed, however, two traits that in a decadent of his type are rather surprising. He liked the society of women quite as much as that of his own sex. By his two marriages he had seven children, of whom no one ever doubted that he was the father. He was, also, with all his vanity and effeminacy, personally brave. When he served in the army it was said "that he was more afraid of spoiling his complexion than of bullets." Strange to say, the division he commanded covered itself with glory. At a certain siege he so distinguished himself that Louis, who was extremely jealous of the tributes paid to others, sarcastically shouted—

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"Take care, brother; I advise you to lie as flat on the ground as possible!"

Perhaps his degeneracy was not so much inherent as due to that remorseless tyranny known as "politics," which can find a host of plausible excuses to gain an end. Had Monsieur been given a fair chance he might have shown as much ability as Louis himself. After his first campaign, brilliant though it was, he was never given another command. He had been trained to fear his brother, but now and then he resented the dwarfing to which he was continually subjected. One cannot help feeling a certain satisfaction on reading that once in boyhood in a "fit of ungovernable passion he dashed a bowl of soup into his brother's face."

When Madame married him the process of degeneration was complete. "He was a woman," says Saint-Simon, "with all her faults and none of her virtues; childish, feeble, idle, gossiping, curious, vain, suspicious, incapable of holding his tongue, taking pleasure in spreading slander and making mischief." The union of this wretched creature and the fascinating Madame could not but be unhappy. It was a foregone conclusion that the *mignons* of Monsieur should be jealous of her influence. They had already roused all the paltry jealousy of his nature against her when Anne of Austria reinforced them with her malice. Not that Monsieur loved his wife and resented her coquetry with his brother. "I never loved her after the first fortnight," he confessed in later life. Monsieur's jealousy was purely personal. He was jealous of her popularity, of her wit, of her brains—in a word, of her superiority to himself.

He was also jealous of the attention the King paid her.

The family bickerings to which his attachment to his sister-in-law subjected Louis were irritating to his pride. To silence them Madame, who had no desire to forego a friendship that amused and flattered her as much as it pleased the King, devised a ruse by which everybody was thrown off the scent. In order to enable Louis to continue his visits and to divert in another direction the hostility to which they exposed her, it was agreed that the King should feign a passion for one of Madame's maids of honour. The one selected for this questionable purpose was a sweet, unsophisticated young girl fresh from Touraine—the celebrated Mademoiselle de la Vallière.

The ruse succeeded only too well. Madame's enemies were completely hoodwinked, but Louis fell head over ears in love with the maid of honour. Madame, who ought to have foreseen this *dénouement*, was at first astonished and mortified. She was, however, too amiable to cherish resentment, and, to show Louis how little she cared, she plunged more gaily than ever into a life of pleasure, whereby she became involved in another and more dangerous flirtation, famous in French history as: L'affaire Guiche-Madame.

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This "affaire" may be described as the historical parent of a numerous family of the purest French breed, of which some of the more familiar descendants are the Diamond Necklace, the Panama, the Dreyfus. Complexity of intrigue was to each what the "Austrian lip" is to the Hapsburgs—a family characteristic. Those who wish a graphic account of the story should read Dumas' "Vicomte de Bragelonne." We can do no more here than give a rough sketch of it.



ARMAND, COMTE DE GUICHE.  
*From a painting in the possession of the  
Duc de Gramont.*

Like all of the Gramonts, Armand de Guiche was an original character. His family, with the exception of the famous Chevalier, who, afterwards returned to favour, stood high at Court. His father, the Maréchal—Maréchal *Lampon* they called him in Paris, from the number of lampoons his doings had inspired—was held in great esteem by Louis, who forgave him his private life for the sake of his public worth. His sister, the flighty Princess of Monaco, of whom there are many curious stories in the memoirs of the period, was loved by Monsieur as much as he could ever love any one, and an intimate friend of Madame as well; as was also his aunt, the Marquise de Saint-Chaumont, who was afterwards governess to her children. He himself had passed all his life at Court, where till the infamous Chevalier de Lorraine came on the scene he was the bosom-friend of Monsieur.

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Fortune had been particularly kind to him. He possessed everything necessary to make him a general favourite: birth, wealth, good looks, winning manners. The consciousness, however, of these great advantages, says Madame de La Fayette, "gave him a certain scornful air that tarnished his merit not a little, yet one must own no one at Court had so much of it as he." The temperament of this hero was no less romantic than his appearance. His brain teemed with the most chivalrous and erotic ideas; he longed for a *grande passion*, but it must not be one of your commonplace, vulgar sort. He wanted a Guinevere to play Launcelot to, a Francesca to whom he might be the Paolo. And they married him when little more than a boy, much against his will, to an honest, prosaic girl. The marriage was, of course, unhappy—for the Comtesse de Guiche. She would have given half of her life to have been loved by him, but marriage had only served to make him long more than ever for the realisation of his extravagant, impossible ideal. Now and then he fancied for a moment he had found what he sought; one of these brief illusions was a girl who afterwards became the famous Princesse des Ursins.

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He was still seeking the unattainable when Madame returned from London and fascinated the Court. The high-flown imagination of the Comte de Guiche was at once inflamed. It pleased him to think that the danger of lifting his eyes to one so far removed from him added to the glory of such a passion. But Guiche's head was not yet so cracked that all sense had left it. Having learnt from the example of his uncle, the Chevalier de Gramont, how unwise it was to excite the jealousy of Louis in an affair of the heart, he prudently waited till the King had left the field before he entered it. But when his chance arrived he behaved in the most singular manner. Although they were thrown constantly together both at Fontainebleau and the Tuileries, Madame was as unaware of his infatuation as Dulcinea del Toboso of Don Quixote's. The Comte de Guiche, however, had no intention of concealing his passion from the rest of the world. The jealousy of Monsieur was aroused—the jealousy of a slighted husband and a slighted friend. He and Guiche quarrelled, and the latter "broke with the prince of the blood as if he were his equal."

The "*bruit*," as it was called, that this quarrel occasioned was the first intimation that Madame received of the devotion of her quixotic admirer. As she was not interested in the Comte de Guiche, who had now withdrawn from Court, the affair would have ended here but for Mademoiselle de Montalais, one of her maids of honour.

This girl was an *intrigante* of a type that abounded at the French Court throughout the *ancien régime*. Her object was to insinuate herself, so to speak, into fortune, by making herself useful to some great person. She sought an interview with the Comte de Guiche, and gained his confidence by assuring him that she would win him the favour of Madame. The means she employed did not at first meet with the slightest success. Madame refused to read the letters Guiche sent her through the maid of honour, or to hold any communication with him. But Montalais was not disheartened. By dint of continually harping to her mistress on the subject of the Count she succeeded in creating a certain impression on her mind; and one day, just as Madame was leaving Fontainebleau for Paris, Montalais with a mischievous air flung into her coach all Guiche's unopened letters. As the journey was tedious and Madame had nothing better to do she read the billets. The originality of their style, which was so obscure as to suggest that the writer had no idea what he meant, amused her. The whim seized her to reply—and the flirtation began.

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As her heart was not involved in the flirtation, her interest in her curious lover would no doubt speedily have waned. But love of excitement, the natural gaiety of her disposition, and the life she led with Monsieur, whose jealousy might more accurately be described as a malicious espionage, inclined Madame to coquetry. Moreover, the unexpected end to her flirtation with the King had created a sort of blank in her life; she was easily *ennuyée*, and when in this mood, like the Duchesse de Longueville, the pleasures she sighed for were not innocent. Her jaded gaiety required a fresh stimulant, and this the flirtation with Guiche gave her. The sense of the danger they both ran from detection pleased her as a child is pleased in playing with fire. Letters passed between them every day, four of Guiche's to Madame's one. One day Guiche disguised himself as an old woman and, aided by Montalais, visited his mistress. The skill with which he evaded recognition by Madame's ladies while he told them their fortunes would have done credit to a Rochester. But success may sometimes invite disaster.

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Montalais, believing that with persons of such consequence she was pulling the strings of an intrigue that would govern the State, wished to give an air of importance to an affair in which she was interested. So, under the pledge of the strictest secrecy, she confided to La Vallière all that had passed between Guiche and Madame. Poor La Vallière, who had sworn never to hide anything from her royal lover, kept the secret till it endangered her own happiness. For Louis, talking one day to his mistress about Madame, noticed that she became confused, whereupon he instantly suspected that something important was being hidden from him. As the unfortunate girl, whom he had seduced and was later to abandon heartlessly, could not deny that she had a secret from him and, owing to her promise to Montalais, would not betray it, the King left her in a

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passion, swearing never to see her again. But when twenty-four hours had elapsed and she neither saw nor heard from the man she loved as few kings have been loved, Mademoiselle de la Vallière lost her head and fled to a convent. Louis, however, was no sooner informed of her flight than he went after her; and at the sight of him the beautiful girl, whom the loss of her virtue and the loss of her lover had between them nearly driven mad, rushed to his arms and told him all she knew.



**MADemoiselle DE LA VALLIÈRE.**

The surprise of Madame—who had no idea that La Vallière was acquainted with her secrets—may be imagined when Louis coldly informed her that he was aware of her indiscretions. For her, the flirtation with which she had amused herself might easily have had serious consequences; but she was quick to discover the loop-hole by which she, and even Guiche—for she was not base enough to leave him to his fate—might escape. It was in Louis' infatuation for La Vallière that she discovered her opportunity. To him it was necessary that his mistress's flight should be hushed up by her return to the Court of Madame in the position from which she had fled. And as the cunning Madame would only agree to this on the condition that Guiche, whom she promised not to see again, should not be molested, ruin was thus averted.

At this point the Louis-Vallière intrigue became disentangled from that of Guiche-Madame, and wandered off into another and more intricate labyrinth, where after many adventures it was finally devoured by the dragon Montespan; while the Affaire Guiche-Madame, having anointed its wounds with the oil of intrigue, picked itself up and went on its perilous way more vigorously than ever.

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It began its new lease of life, however, with an indiscretion. The Comte de Guiche had a friend to whom he was in the habit of confiding all his secrets, and who now appeared on the scene to play the part of villain as consummately as ever it was interpreted. This individual was the famous or infamous Marquis de Vardes, one of the most polished and attractive men at Court. He was something of a Chevalier de Gramont on an inferior scale. His epigrams and *bons mots* were proverbial, and the dexterity with which he could turn an awkward situation to his advantage was unrivalled. He was quite universally popular, and even Louis allowed him to take an occasional liberty with him.

"De Vardes!" wrote Madame de Sévigné to her daughter; "toujours de Vardes! He is the gospel according to the day!"

This brilliant and popular Marquis was, however, as proficient in intrigue as Mademoiselle de Montalais herself, and utterly devoid of principle. The confidences of Guiche and perhaps, too, the fascination of Madame, had inspired him with the desire to win her heart. To achieve his end it was necessary that his friend Guiche should be got out of the way. On learning that the King knew of Madame's flirtation, he went to Guiche's father, the Maréchal de Gramont, and so cleverly worked on the old man's fears that he himself went to Louis and begged his Majesty to order his son to join his regiment in Lorraine. This the King willingly did, but when the news of Guiche's departure reached Madame, believing that Louis had not kept his word to her, she broke hers to him. Guiche persuaded her to grant him a farewell interview, and Montalais undertook to arrange matters. But while the Comte de Guiche, skilfully smuggled into the palace, was saying good-bye to Madame, who should be unexpectedly announced but Monsieur! The

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ever-vigilant Montalais had only time to whisper a warning, and the high-flown Guiche was obliged to fling dignity to the winds and escape like some ridiculous *bourgeois* lover in a similar predicament. When Monsieur entered his wife's apartment the Comte de Guiche was in the chimney!

This expedient, however, did not prevent the *dénouement* to which the foolish flirtation was now hurrying. Two of Madame's women, who were jealous of Montalais, having seen her smuggle Guiche into their mistress's bedroom, promptly went off to Anne of Austria and told her what they knew. Such a piece of news was too much for Anne to keep to herself, so she imparted it, with the usual exaggeration with which one embroiders a sensation, to Monsieur. His revenge was characteristic. Having packed Montalais out of the palace the next morning before his wife was awake, he went off to Henrietta Maria and complained of her daughter's conduct. But, thanks to Madame, the disagreeable notoriety this affair might have created was again averted. She frankly confessed to having acted foolishly, promised to treat Guiche for the future with the indifference she felt towards him, and begged her husband's forgiveness. Monsieur, disarmed by such straightforward conduct, and satisfied with having humbled his wife, agreed to a reconciliation, which, however, was not of long duration. As he had sense enough to understand that a scandal would damage him as much as Madame, he suffered Guiche to depart quietly for Lorraine, and contented himself with insisting on the dismissal of Montalais.

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The ground was now cleared for Vardes. His plans to make himself master of Madame by love if possible, otherwise by blackmail, were most skilfully laid. As it was, above all, necessary that he should not excite the jealousy of Monsieur against himself, he set to work to excite it against the young Prince de Marsillac, the eldest son of La Rochefoucauld. He succeeded so well that Marsillac was banished from the Court, and Monsieur treated Vardes with almost as much favour as he did his *mignon*, the Chevalier de Lorraine. Having been informed by his friend Guiche of all that had passed between him and Madame, Vardes was led to believe that the passion was mutual, and in his treacherous determination to supplant Guiche he did not hesitate to paint the absent lover in the worst possible light.

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But in turning Madame's indifference to Guiche into prejudice, Vardes made the mistake of keeping his memory alive. Deceived by Vardes' amiable and insinuating manners, and believing him to be her friend, Madame distinguished him with certain confidences that he interpreted as signs of a growing affection. Vardes was, however, rudely disillusioned at the very moment he fancied victory within grasp. One night, at some Court function, the conversation in the *entourage* of Madame chanced to turn on the Comte de Guiche, who from Lorraine had gone to Poland, where he was covering himself with glory and wounds. Among the stories told of him, it was related that in a battle, in which some of the fingers of his right hand had been shot off, a bullet had struck him on the breast, and that death was only averted by a "portrait he wore next his heart." Madame, remembering all that had passed between herself and Guiche, had no doubt the charmed portrait was her own, and, in spite of the prejudice against him that had been subtly instilled into her mind, she was sufficiently touched by what she heard to exclaim to Vardes that "she believed she liked the Comte de Guiche more than she thought."

Realising that he had failed, Vardes now resolved to be revenged on both Madame and Guiche.

At the time of her arrest Mademoiselle de Montalais had managed to save Guiche's letters to Madame, of which she had the care, from falling into the hands of Monsieur. These she carried with her to her convent prison, whence she had sent them for safer keeping, as she thought, to her lover, Malicorne. This man showed them to a certain Manicamp, a supposed friend of the Comte de Guiche, from whom Vardes artfully got possession of them. And from this rape of the letters sprung a numerous progeny of little intrigues, by means of which, in the usual French fashion, a crowd of minor persons set to work to weave the threads of their own fortunes into the general pattern of Vardes-Guiche-Madame.

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To enumerate all the adventures of this precious crew would require a book almost as long as the "Vicomte de Bragelonne." Perhaps only a Dumas could unravel all the threads of this curious tangle. And what a tangle it was! Think of the incriminating correspondence passing from a Montalais' hand to those of a Malicorne and a Manicamp, who wrote a libel on Madame and Guiche, printed in Holland, and bought up, all save one copy, by Madame's father-confessor, who travelled secretly to Holland for the purpose and had adventures not a few. Think of Vardes' forged letters from the Queen of Spain to ruin Madame—letters lost by the forgers. Think of the Comte de Guiche returning from Poland and discovering his friend's treachery; think of Guiche's attempts to clear himself in Madame's eyes—attempts in which the whole Gramont family lent a hand with daily consultations at the house of the famous Philibert and his La Belle Hamilton—attempts in which masked balls and lackey's liveries play a prominent part. If one thinks of the possibilities of such incidents, one will get some idea of the adventures the *Affaire Guiche-Madame* had to encounter. To stop it, once started, not even Vardes himself, had he wished, had the power. Like a Juggernaut, it continued to advance, crushing all who got in its way, the innocent and the evil alike.

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So cleverly had Vardes schemed, it seemed impossible that Madame, still unaware of his villainy, could escape destruction. She carried on an intimate correspondence with her brother, Charles II., in which neither concealed their thoughts of the people around them. One of these letters, not very flattering to Louis, Vardes got possession of and showed the King, to whom as gentleman of the bedchamber he had easy access. But this fatal shot missed fire owing to the treachery of his chief ally—his mistress, Olympe Mancini, Comtesse de Soissons. This woman, believing that Vardes' hatred of Madame was but a mask to conceal a passion as wild as Guiche's

for the Princess, had a quarrel with her lover, on whom in a fit of jealousy she revenged herself by having an *éclaircissement* with Madame. Horrified at the plot of which she was to be the victim, Madame went straight to the King and explained to him what she had learnt. Louis accepted her interpretation of the letter to her brother, and Vardes was sent to the Bastille.

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But now the Comtesse de Soissons, realising that her jealousy had not only utterly lost her her lover but freed her rival, resolved to be revenged on the Comte de Guiche. She had one of his letters, in which, in his romantic way, he had offered to make his regiment swear allegiance to Madame. But the day was long past when Olympe Mancini could make Louis XIV. eager to fulfil her requests. To the mortification and terror of the Comtesse, he went to consult Madame. By this time Madame's gaiety was sobered by experience; she had come to see the incredible folly of a woman of her position flirting with Guiche and making friends with a Vardes. Whatever affection she may have had for the Comte de Guiche was at an end, and she wished him out of the way. But she was shrewd enough to detect an enemy in the Comtesse de Soissons, and she resolved to save Guiche at her expense as the lesser of two evils. Louis was induced to pardon him if it could be proved that his faults were small in comparison to those of his enemies. As Madame now held all the court-cards in the game, this was easy to do. She gave the King a full and frank account of her flirtation with Guiche from its beginning, as well as the complications to which it had led, and wrote to Guiche to do the same, "assuring him that she had found plain dealing the best security against Court machinations." The indignation of Louis was aroused, and he lost no time in venting his anger. Vardes was taken from the Bastille—the *ancien régime's* prison for such persons as we nowadays call "first-class misdemeanants"—and immured in a dungeon at Montpellier. It was nearly thirty years before he saw the Court of France again.

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A much milder punishment was meted out to the Comtesse de Soissons. She was forced to retire into the country for a time; but, far from having a wholesome effect on her lawless spirit, this temporary exile seemed to have assisted its degeneration. When she returned to Court she took to poisoning, or was at least suspected of being implicated in the "Poison Affair," whereupon Louis had to banish her altogether from the country. She died in great misery, after a sensational vagabond life, just as the star of her son, Prince Eugene of Savoy, began to rise over Europe.

As for the Comte de Guiche, he and his Dulcinea never met again, in spite of all his attempts, in the last of which, disguised as a footman, he fainted in the very presence of Madame. Louis once more obliged him to carry his high-flown, imaginary passion off to the war then raging, in which, after a short but brilliant career, he perished. Of all those who had been entangled in this intrigue Madame alone succeeded in escaping with colours flying. But though the King's confidence in his brilliant sister-in-law was fully restored, and she was admitted to the secret councils of the Cabinet—a distinction that no other woman, save Madame de Maintenon, enjoyed in this reign—she could not win happiness. Monsieur was a constant thorn in her flesh. Perhaps it would have been impossible to overcome the resentment of his petty, contemptible nature; but Madame's attempt merely served to whet his dislike into hatred. Rightly guessing that his favourite, the Chevalier de Lorraine, fomented the discord between them, she determined that this man should be banished. The necessary excuse for effecting an object so thoroughly justifiable was provided for her by Louis, who disliked the Chevalier de Lorraine quite as much as she did herself. Instead of remonstrating with his brother on his behaviour, the King gave the Chevalier a lecture on the subject, who, by declaring that henceforth he would be answerable for Monsieur's good conduct, fell into the trap set for him.

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"What!" said Louis haughtily, "you answerable to me for *my* brother? Do you think that I choose to have such a guarantee? But, be it so, I shall hold you to your word."

As opportunities of objecting to Monsieur's conduct were innumerable, the Chevalier's impertinent boast was soon put to the test. One day, accordingly, without any warning, Louis sent to arrest him. He was seized in a room in which he was closeted with Monsieur, who fell into such a paroxysm of grief and rage as to give the widest publicity to a disagreeable scandal.

But the Chevalier de Lorraine in a dungeon at the Château d'If, or in exile in Italy, was even more dangerous to Madame's domestic happiness than when at the Palais Royal. From the day of his favourite's disgrace to his wife's strange death a few months later, Monsieur was an impossible husband for any woman to live with. He seemed now to have but two objects in life, to be possessed of two burning desires which dwelt in him evilly like demons. One was the return of his Chevalier, the other the death of Madame.

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The vindictive animosity that Monsieur displayed towards his wife was still further whetted by a singular mark of favour which Louis bestowed on his sister-in-law. Wishing to detach Charles II. from the alliances he had formed, the King of France thought that he could not find a more suitable instrument to accomplish his design than the insinuating Madame, whose relations with her brother were, as Vardes had proved to him, of the most cordial description. The Princess, when the subject was explained to her, willingly undertook to go to England and negotiate with Charles in person, having, according to one authority, the ulterior object of persuading her brother to afford her his protection in the not unlikely event of her separating from her husband, whose conduct was becoming more and more insupportable. Whether this was so or not, considering the character of Monsieur, it was extremely undesirable that he should be acquainted with the secret of her mission. Hereupon he availed himself of his conjugal rights with characteristic pettiness and forbade her to leave France. But Louis was not to be thwarted in a matter of such importance to him by his brother's paltry rancour, and he sternly told Monsieur "that she *should* go and that he would have no more obstacles thrown in his way."

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Madame consequently departed, accompanied by a brilliant suite which included the Comte



and Comtesse de Gramont and Anthony Hamilton. Charles and his whole Court went to Dover to meet her, and in his eagerness to see his sister again the King, like an impatient schoolboy, rowed out into the Channel to welcome her. The business transacted during this brief visit need not detain us here. On the ability she showed in negotiating the "Traité de Madame" her fame chiefly rests. When the articles of this treaty were made public she was censured as a traitress who had sold her country to France, and English historians generally have ever since accused her of an utter lack of principle. But considering that she was, in spite of her birth, far more French than English, the obloquy that attaches to her name seems to us to have been inspired more by a prejudice against the whole House of Stuart than by a love of fairness. At the time, however, her reception in England was not only brilliant but cordial, and proved that her popularity had not waned since her last visit. The ten or twelve days she passed at Dover were, perhaps, the brightest of her life. Certainly she never knew a happy day afterwards.

Whether she was as successful in the personal as she was in the political object of her mission is not known. All accounts on the subject are at variance; some declare that she came back from Dover radiant, others depressed. At any rate, the reception she met with from her husband was well calculated to damp the gayest spirits. Monsieur began at once to reproach her in regard to the Chevalier de Lorraine; "he told her plainly that he knew his favourite's banishment was her doing, that she should have no peace till she had him recalled, and even threatened her with worse if she did not comply with his wishes." As the recall of the Chevalier meant her humiliation, she refused to yield. The relations between them were at their worst when one morning, three weeks after her arrival at St. Cloud, as she finished drinking a glass of chicory-water she was seized with violent intestinal pains.

Her first exclamation was that she was poisoned. Every one in the palace was terrified, except Monsieur. He did not appear in the least put out. Word was despatched to Louis at Versailles, who immediately sent Vallot, his own physician, to St. Cloud. Shortly after he followed himself, accompanied by the Queen and La Grande Mademoiselle. When they arrived they were told, to their horror, that Madame was dying. They found her writhing on a couch, pale, dishevelled, and scarcely recognisable from the convulsive movements that distorted her features. No one, with the exception of her maids of honour who hung over her weeping, appeared the least alarmed. At the sight of the King she uttered a piercing cry and said she felt "a fire in her stomach." The doctors looked on in silence, without attempting to alleviate her sufferings.

"But," said Louis to them, "is it possible you will let a woman die like this without doing something?"

Vallot replied that the illness was not fatal. "It is," he explained, "a sort of colic which may last nine, ten, or even twenty-four hours at the most."

And people continued to go and come in the room, laugh and talk with an inhuman indifference that must have been heart-rending to the unhappy woman.

La Grande Mademoiselle was astonished that no one had thought of speaking to her of the state of her soul.

"At this moment," she writes, "Monsieur entered. I said to him, 'Madame is not in a fit state to die, and she should be confessed.'

"He answered that I was right, and told me that her confessor was a Capuchin who was good for nothing except to do her honour by appearing in public in her coach that people might see she had one.

"'A different sort of man,' he added, 'is needed to speak to her about death. Whom could we get that would sound well to put in the *Gazette*?'"

"'At such a time,' I said, 'the best qualification that a confessor could have was to be a pious man.'

"'Ah, I have it!' he replied; 'the Abbé Bossuet is the man. He has just been nominated for the bishopric of Condom.'"

Hereupon Louis, disgusted at such callousness, and unable to support the sight of Madame's sufferings, took an affectionate leave of her and hastened back to Versailles.

Bossuet was sent for, but in the meantime the rumour "*Madame se meurt!*" had reached Paris, and a host of persons flocked to St. Cloud. Among them were the great Condé and the old Maréchal de Gramont, father of the Comte de Guiche, who went to her bathed in tears. "She told him pathetically that he was losing a good friend, that she was dying, and at first she thought she had been poisoned by mistake." Then turning to her sincerest friend, whose simple narrative of her death should have made all others superfluous, she said with something of her old gaiety—

"'Madame de La Fayette, my nose has shrunk already.'

"I answered by my tears, for what she said was only too true, and I had noticed it before. The hiccough seized her. She told Esprit (one of the doctors) that it was the death-hiccough. She had asked several times how soon she should die; she repeated the question, and although she was answered as a person not near death, we saw well that she had no hope. Her thoughts never rested on life; she never uttered a word of reflection on the destiny which was taking her off in the prime of life; never questioned the doctors as to whether it were possible to save her; showed no impatience for remedies, except in so far as the violence of her pains made her long for them; exhibited a calmness in the certainty of death, in the suspicion of poison; in short, a courage of which no example can be found, and which it is difficult even to represent."

When Montague, the English Ambassador, arrived, she said—

"You see the sad condition I am in. I am going to die. Ah! how I pity the King, my brother, for I am sure he loses the person in the world who loves him best."

"A little while later," says Montague in a letter he wrote to Charles, "she called me again, bidding me *be sure* to say all the kind things in the world from her to her brother, and thank him for all his kindness and care of her."

"Pray tell my brother I never persuaded him to join France out of my own interest, but because I thought it for his honour and advantage, for I always loved him above all things in the world."

"I asked her in English if she believed herself poisoned. Some confessor standing near catching the word *poison*, which is the same in French as in English, quickly interposed—

"Madame, you must accuse nobody, but offer up your life as a sacrifice to God."

"So she only shrugged her shoulders."

Perhaps the most touching incident of this leave-taking was associated with Tréville. This man was the Captain of Monsieur's Mousquetaires, and one of the wittiest and best-educated men at Court. "To talk like Tréville, to be as learned as Tréville, was the highest compliment you could pay a man." He was one of the chiefs of the Port-Royal coterie, which was the centre of intellectual life in France—and he loved Madame. It was a love that did them both honour—a chivalrous devotion that never overstepped the bounds of respect. To approach Madame at such a moment and take leave of her for ever before the envious eyes of that crowded, callous room was impossible to Tréville. But, notwithstanding her hectic excitement and intense suffering, Madame observed him standing in the background.

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"Adieu, Tréville, adieu, mon ami!" she waved.

The simple farewell broke his heart. The next day he left the Court and the world for ever.

In these last terrible moments she forgot no one. Monsieur having left the room, she sent to call him back, and in bidding him farewell declared that "she had never been faithless to him." The solemnity of the occasion on which these words were uttered has inclined most of her biographers to acquit her of the adulteries with Louis and the Comte de Guiche of which she was suspected. There are other evidences, however, of Madame's virtue which might be cited quite as convincing as this; and in regard to the Comte de Guiche at all events, the various ladies for whom he sighed before he met Madame were all agreed in attributing a physical rather than a spiritual cause to the "Platonic" character of his amours.

Her strength now began to fail fast, and as a last resort the doctors decided to bleed her. The incision was made in her foot, but no blood flowed, and her exhaustion was so extreme that they thought she would die while her foot was still in the warm water. The doctors then declared that they would try one more remedy, but she begged them to give her the Extreme Unction before it was too late. It was given to her by a priest who was present, and who exhorted and rebuked her like a Scotch Calvinist. When he had finished she said meekly—

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"At what o'clock did Jesus Christ die? At three o'clock?"

"Do not mind that, Madame," he replied, "you must endure life and wait for death with patience."

At this moment Bossuet arrived. He was so overcome at the sight of her that he nearly fainted.

"He spoke to her of God," says Madame de La Fayette, "in a manner suitable to her condition and with that eloquence which marks all his sermons. He made her perform such little acts as he thought necessary, and she entered into all that he told her with zeal. While he was speaking a maid of honour approached to give her something of which she had need. She said to her in English, in order that Bossuet might not hear, and preserving till death the politeness characteristic of her—

"Remember to give M. Bossuet, when I am dead, the emerald ring that I have had made for him."

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"While he was praying with her he was nearly exhausted by the strain on his nature. Madame asked him gently if she might not take a few moments' rest; he told her that she might, and he would withdraw and pray for her. M. Feuillet" (the priest who had given her the Extreme Unction) "remained at her side, and almost at the same moment Madame begged him to recall M. Bossuet, for she felt she was about to die. M. Bossuet hurried back and gave her the crucifix. She took it and embraced it with ardour. M. Bossuet continued to speak to her, and she replied with the same clearness as if she had never been ill, keeping the crucifix pressed to her lips to the last. As her strength failed it fell from her hands, and she lost speech and life at the same time. Her agony lasted but a moment; and after two or three little convulsive movements of the mouth, she expired at half-past two in the morning, and nine hours after having been taken ill."

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It is only natural that the suddenness and mystery of such an illness and death should have been fertile in historical speculation.

For about one hundred and fifty years the world generally took it for granted that Madame was poisoned—especially as some of the doctors privately expressed this opinion, which was

contrary to their official statement at the post-mortem. But in the early part of the nineteenth century the world suddenly changed its mind and declared that Madame died "naturally" of cholera morbus or peritonitis. As far as we are concerned one theory is as good as another. Our object is not to emulate the latest authorities and perform, like them, a literary autopsy on remains we have never seen. At this late day it is of not the least consequence to the world whether Madame was poisoned or not. By all means let us take it for granted, with M. Anatole France and many another of equal distinction, that her untimely end was natural. But as the other theory is thoroughly in keeping with seventeenth-century customs, it is, if no longer worthy of credence—which, after all, is not proved—at least pregnant with possibility.

As a good "poison story" it will always be worth telling; and as no one has ever told it more graphically than Saint-Simon we will give his version.

He says that when the news that Madame had expired reached Versailles—

"The King, who had gone to bed, rose, sent for Brissac, who was the captain of the guards and close at hand, and commanded him to choose six body-guards, trusty and secret, to go and take up Simon Morel, Madame's *maître d'hôtel*, and to bring him to him in his cabinet. This was done before morning. When the King saw him he ordered Brissac and his valet de chambre to withdraw, and assuming a most alarming aspect and tone—

"My friend,' said he, surveying him from head to foot, 'listen well to me. If you confess all and tell me the truth about what I want to know from you, whatever you may have done I pardon you; it shall never be mentioned again. But beware how you disguise the least thing, for if you do you are a dead man before you leave this place. Has not Madame been poisoned?'" [266]

"Yes, Sire,' answered Morel.

"And who has poisoned her and how?' said the King.

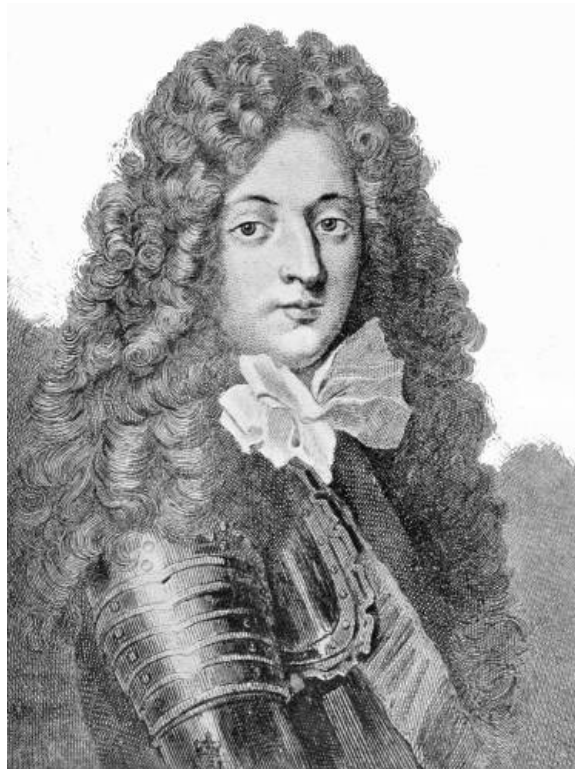
"He replied that it was the Chevalier de Lorraine, who had sent the poison from Italy to Beuvron and Effiat (two of Monsieur's equerries). Whereupon the King, redoubling his assurances of favour and threats of death, said—

"And my brother, did he know of it?'"

"No, Sire. None of us three were fools enough to tell him. He never keeps a secret, he would have ruined us.'

"At this reply, the King uttered a long 'Ah!' like a man oppressed, who all at once breathes again.

"Well,' said he, 'that is all I want to know.' And Brissac restored Morel to liberty."



**THE CHEVALIER DE LORRAINE.**

Saint-Simon further declares that a few days before Monsieur married his second wife Louis took her aside and told her these circumstances, assuring her that Monsieur was innocent of any participation in this crime, and that were he not convinced of it he would not have permitted his remarriage. This second Madame, or La Palatine, as she was called, who by this marriage became the mother of the Regent d'Orléans, and was not the least original of the many strikingly original persons of "*le grand siècle*," tells the story in another fashion, in that remarkable [267]

correspondence of hers from which as much historical ore has been mined as from Saint-Simon's memoirs:—

"It is only too true," she writes in her blunt, vigorous way, "that Madame was poisoned, but without the knowledge of Monsieur. While the villains were arranging the plan of poisoning the poor woman, they deliberated whether they should tell Monsieur or not.

"The Chevalier de Lorraine said, 'No, don't tell him, for he cannot hold his tongue. If he does not tell the first year, he may have us all hanged ten years afterwards.'

"They therefore made Monsieur believe that Madame had taken poison in Holland (on her way back from England), which did not act until she arrived at St. Cloud. Nor was it Madame's chicory-water that Effiat had poisoned, but the goblet. A valet de chambre, who was with Madame and afterwards in my service, told me that in the morning while Monsieur and Madame were at Mass, Effiat went to the sideboard, and taking Madame's glass rubbed the inside of it with a paper, and that he, the valet, said to him—

"Monsieur d'Effiat, what are you doing in this room, and why do you touch Madame's glass?"

"Effiat answered, 'I am dying with thirst, I wanted something to drink, and the glass being dirty I was cleaning it with some paper.'

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"After dinner Madame asked for some chicory-water, and as soon as she had swallowed it she cried out, 'I am poisoned!'

"All that were present drank of the same chicory-water, but not from the same glass, so, of course, it did them no harm."

Such are the most authoritative "poison" theories which nineteenth-century investigation has very brilliantly but not altogether exploded.

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Madame's death, as may be imagined, created a profound sensation throughout Europe. In London, considering how slight had been her connection with her native country, the indignation was remarkable. An infuriated mob rushed to the French Embassy, which but for the precautions taken by the Government to protect it they would have destroyed. Whitehall was utterly prostrated. Charles took to his bed for several days.

"Never," said Rochester, "was any one so regretted since dying was the fashion."

But for the good sense of the King, England would have declared war on France. Louis, whose grief was genuine, did all that he could to prove his regret—all but punish the suspected poisoners. On the contrary, Effiat was promoted and the Chevalier de Lorraine, whom he detested, to Monsieur's and his own delight, was recalled. Perhaps no other course was left open to him, if the report of foul play which threatened to plunge him into a war was not to be hushed up at all costs. But to prove to Charles II. and Europe that he was free from implication in this strange death, he at once ordered a post-mortem, at which English doctors and the English Ambassador were present. The verdict of the autopsy was "death from natural causes." It served to allay popular anger but not popular suspicion.

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Louis also gave Madame such a funeral as few kings have ever had.

"I do not think," wrote Madame de Sévigné, who was present, "that there will be any better music in heaven."

Bossuet pronounced over the corpse his masterpiece, which is familiar to every schoolboy in France. On his finger, placed there by Louis himself, there glittered the emerald Madame had bequeathed him with her dying breath, and which he wore till his own death. The body was buried at St. Denis beside that of Henrietta Maria. It was the first that the mob dug up one hundred and twenty-three years later when the tombs of the kings were desecrated. It was flung into a pit behind the church along with Louis' and the rest of his dynasty's. By a curious coincidence it—or what was supposed to be it—was the first body restored to its original resting-place after Waterloo.

By a still more curious coincidence, Madame's daughter, Marie Louise, whom they married to the last King of Spain, of the House of Austria, died at the same age and in the same strange way as her mother. There is something decidedly uncanny in the fate that decreed that Effiat, as French Ambassador at Madrid, should be the medium through whom her husband corresponded with her; that the Chevalier de Lorraine should be the man appointed to lead her to the altar; and that the Comtesse de Soissons should be the one to poison her!

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If happiness be the aim of prince and peasant alike, it was not, at all events, in the Armida-courts of the seventeenth century that it was to be found. It was of Madame, his friend and patron, that Molière was thinking when his *Alceste* sang—

"Si le roi me donnait,  
Paris sa grande ville,  
Et qu'il me fallut quitter  
L'amour de ma mie,  
Je dirais au roi Henri  
Reprenez votre Paris,  
J'aime mieux ma mie, ô gué,  
J'aime mieux ma mie."



**THE DUCHESS OF PORTSMOUTH.**  
*After Sir Godfrey Kneller.*

# LOUISE DE KÉROUAL, DUCHESS OF PORTSMOUTH

## A SPY OF THE RESTORATION

IF proof were required of anything so obvious as the cynicism of fame, one might cite the subject of this memoir as an example. Of European importance in her own day, and now—excepting Nell Gwynn—unquestionably the best remembered because the most odious of all the women of the Restoration, although "Madam Carwell," as the English people called her, has escaped oblivion, the mere spelling of her name has become a matter of indifference to history.

Kéroual, Kéroualle, Querouralles, Querouailles are some of the ways it is printed, and we only adopt the first as being the most frequent French mode.

A similar uncertainty attaches to her origin.

The Duchess of Portsmouth, however, had no doubt about it and was herself extremely proud of her ancestry, and boasted—when in England, be it understood—an ancient and distinguished lineage. It is characteristic of *parvenus*. Colbert, Louis XIV.'s famous Finance Minister, claimed a noble Scot, by name Cuthbert, who flourished in the reign of Macbeth or earlier, as the progenitor of his shopkeeper father. But there were many like Madame de Sévigné, whose opinions take precedence over those of most of her contemporaries, who had the greatest contempt for the Duchess of Portsmouth's family pretensions. Be the matter as it may, by Louise de Kéroual's first start in life there hangs a tale.

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Her father, whether or not he could trace his ancestry back to the fourteenth century as his daughter declared—when there was a saying in Brittany: "The Kérouals for antiquity, the Kermans for riches, and the Kergournadecs for chivalry"—went to Paris as a boy to seek his fortune. Of this he appears to have amassed in the wool trade sufficient to enable him to retire in middle life to his native Brittany, where, being from all accounts an honest and unpretentious man, he devoted his leisure to the bringing up of his son and two daughters, and dispensing modest hospitality. It was at his house in Brest that Evelyn made his acquaintance, "and being used very civilly, was obliged to return it in London," when "Monsieur Querouaille and his lady, parents to the famous beauty," paid the Duchess of Portsmouth a visit. Her Grace was then, adds Evelyn, "in the height of favour, but he never made any use of it." The bringing-up of his children, however, would seem to have been beyond the abilities of the civil wool merchant, and owing to the dissension of his daughters he placed Louise, the elder and prettier of the two, at a boarding-school in a neighbouring town. Here she developed the insinuating manners that later on were "to tie England and France together with her silken girdle."

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Having won the friendship of the head-mistress, she obtained certain social privileges, which, from the reports of the use she made of them, so alarmed the retired wool merchant that he sent her to Paris to the care of a widowed aunt. This lady, whose very name has long since been forgotten, owed in a great measure her means of subsistence to the generosity of the Duc de Beaufort, in whose service her husband had died. According to the author of the curious libel known as "The Secret History of the Duchess of Portsmouth," Louise got round her aunt as easily as she had got round the head-mistress of her boarding-school. For it was not long before she made the acquaintance of the Duc de Beaufort, and interested this powerful nobleman in her behalf. Whereby she was constrained to learn the rudiments of intrigue, a subject in which she was afterwards to become pre-eminently proficient.

It is easy to censure a girl who deliberately prefers to seek her happiness in immorality. It is done every day. But there are few girls of the alert, ambitious nature of Louise de Kéroual, who if placed in her position would not follow her example. What were her prospects? On the one hand she had the choice between returning home and marrying some petty, humdrum *bourgeois*, or immuring herself for the rest of her life in a convent. On the other, by prudently selling her virtue, she might have the riches, gaiety, and pleasure she craved, and still remain respectable. Of these two prospects, the first was impossible to Louise. But the second was an opportunity—one of those opportunities that Shakespeare says, "if taken at the flood, lead on to fortune"—the great opportunity of life that most of us sigh for and fail to recognise till too late. To Louise de Kéroual it came in the guise of a Duc de Beaufort, High Admiral of France. Her mind never suffered the slightest misgiving, her conscience the least qualm. Like all persons destined for success, she knew what she wanted and took it. A woman so *rusée* as Louise was not such a fool as to be found out. Her *liaison* with the Duc de Beaufort was never suspected.

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How long it lasted it is impossible to say, but it was brought to an abrupt end in the summer of 1669, when the Duc de Beaufort was given the command of the naval expedition which had for its object the relief of the Venetians who for twenty-four years had been besieged by the Turks in Crete. From this expedition he never returned, but before he sailed Louise took care to provide for her future by obtaining through his influence one of the posts of maid of honour to Madame which had just fallen vacant. This was the beginning of her fortune. The report that she accompanied Beaufort to Crete disguised as a page is a mere fabrication of her libeller. The Kéroual who accompanied the Duc de Beaufort to Crete was her younger brother, Sebastien, whom, no doubt, she now tried to provide for, as she did on a later occasion in England for her sister, Henriette. Sebastien, however, did not long enjoy the fruits of his sister's patronage; he died a few days after his return from Crete.

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It was probably through this event that Louise became acquainted with the Comte de Sault,

who on Beaufort's death appears to have taken Sebastien into his service, in which he was at the time of his death. This Comte de Sault was the eldest son of the Duc de Lesdiguières, and one of the best-known men at Court. He had won the chief prize a few years before in the famous jousts in front of the Tuileries, which gave their name to the Place du Carrousel. The Comte de Sault soon occupied more or less publicly the same place in the maid of honour's affections that had previously been held by the Duc de Beaufort. In fact, there was so little privacy about their relations that Madame de Sévigné and Louvois did not hesitate to put the worst construction on them, while several years later in England "a great peer taunted her insultingly with the recollection of this old scandal."

This affair was, however, decently conducted, as such things were in France, and Mademoiselle de Kéroual's social standing did not suffer. Perhaps she may have hoped to arrest the notice of the King himself, but if so she was disappointed. During the short time that she was in Madame's service the monarch's attention was too much absorbed by the beautiful Mademoiselle de la Vallière to be diverted by Mademoiselle de Kéroual. From all accounts Louis was scarcely aware of her existence till she was recommended to him as an agent likely to be of use in binding Charles II. hand and foot in the toils of French diplomacy.

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As the Imperial policy of Louis XIV. was never so successful as when Louise de Kéroual queened it at Whitehall, some account of the obstacles opposed to it is necessary in order to understand the nature of the game she was unexpectedly called upon to play.

The "hereditary enmity" which until quite recent times so long estranged France and England might be compared to the feud between the Capulets and the Montagues. From time to time, however, this ancient feud was patched up, so to speak, by romantic Romeo and Juliet *ententes*, which, unfortunately, owing to national incompatibility of temper, always ended, as such love-affairs only too often do in real life, in mutual mistrust and animosity. In no instance was the cause of estrangement ever the same. In the age of Louis XIV. the bone of contention was Religion. It is impossible in this day of religious indifference to realise the force of the passions that tormented these two foolish nations then. England was passionately Protestant, and the Civil War and ten years of Cromwell had made her democratic. For the first time in her history England had found an ideal. France, on the other hand, never found hers till the Revolution, but as the "eldest daughter of the Church" she was bigotedly Catholic, and Richelieu and Mazarin had converted her to despotism. The temper of the two neighbours being such, strife was only a question of time, and the political interests of each only served to whet animosity. By the middle of the seventeenth century it was evident that the great House of Austria was slowly dying in Spain, and France, governed by a vigorous and ambitious king who was surrounded with the ablest brains in Europe, determined by fair means or foul to be its heir. Louis XIV. cast a covetous eye on Flanders, and at the bare thought of having such a virile neighbour in the place of this old decrepit one Protestant Holland turned uneasily towards England. The plunder of Spain did not at that time tempt England. Nor was there any particular reason why she should fight Holland's battles, especially as Holland had come out of the recent Thirty Years' War her commercial rival. On the contrary, it would have been to England's interest to see Holland weakened. But a nation with an ideal has "principles," and England made hers the excuse to defy Catholic and despotic France to plunder Spain at the expense of Protestant and democratic Holland. Consequently England joined the Triple League.

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To break this formidable barrier, which prevented him from achieving his ambition, was the object of Louis XIV. It was for this purpose that he had sent Madame to England, and when she returned with the treaty she had coaxed out of her brother it not unnaturally seemed to him that his end was in sight. But within three weeks of leaving Dover Madame had died under circumstances that suggested foul play, and Charles all but tore up the "Traité de Madame." Louis instantly despatched the tactful Marécha de Bellefonds to Whitehall to assure Charles of his sincere grief at the untimely end of his sister and to save the treaty if possible. But the King of England was in no mood to be beguiled by expressions of friendship.

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"When do they intend to let the Chevalier de Lorraine back to Court?" he asked rudely of the Marécha when that envoy arrived.

It was evident that Louis' road to Flanders and Madrid was blocked again. Madame's death had aroused to a fever heat the hatred of Protestant England for Catholic France. The people were crying out for vengeance on the murderers of their king's sister. Charles, had he wished for war, would have had the support of the nation.

"Must we abandon the great affair?" wrote the French Ambassador in London to his master at Versailles. "It is feared that the grief of the King of England, which is deeper than can be imagined, and the malevolent talk and rumours of our enemies will spoil everything."

But Charles on this occasion was cooler than his people. He contented himself with coldly accepting Louis' sympathy. The Court of Versailles, which dreaded nothing so much at that moment as a war, breathed freely again, and immediately set to work to restore Charles to the good-humour in which he was before Madame's death. French money poured into England, ministers and mistresses fattened on it. For ten thousand livres a year "wanton Shrewsbury" guaranteed "to make Buckingham do whatever the French King wished." Corruption was everywhere. The French Ambassador was prepared to buy both Houses of Parliament and the "principles" of the nation as well. Even Algernon Sidney, who in the eyes of English Liberalism is surrounded with the nimbus of martyrdom, took five hundred pounds every Parliamentary session from Louis. Charles had as great a weakness for French gold as any of his subjects, but though he willingly sold himself, he never gave full value in return if he could possibly avoid it.

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Protestant England was not long in discovering this slippery trait in its own dealings with its sovereign. It is a mistake to imagine that Monk jockeyed Charles on to the throne. The crown of his ancestors was enthusiastically restored to him by an overwhelming majority of the nation. The Restoration of Charles II. was the result of, perhaps, the most honest *plebiscite* in history. Monk was merely the means the English people employed to notify Charles they wanted him. But in their ardour the foolish people forgot to demand security for the power they gave him; they merely contented themselves with an implied understanding that he was to be, so to speak, the junior partner in the national business. Alas for human credulity! Who would have thought that the amiable, charming King, whose frivolity and sensuality seemed to guarantee a weak and pliable nature, would prove to be more than a match for his people? The versatile and shifty monarch made his power felt from the start, and clearly let it be understood that in the firm of Charles Stuart, England and Company, it was he who furnished the brains and England the capital. In such partnerships as a rule the capitalist buys experience dearly. And so it was in this case. Under that good-natured, happy-go-lucky manner of Charles there lurked the cunning of a Mazarin. Totally devoid of "principles" himself, he secretly despised his people for having them, and perhaps, also, for having given him power, such as no sovereign since Elizabeth had possessed, without a guarantee as to how he would use it. What wonder that with such a king and such a people Charles II. should have sat on the English throne, till he tumbled from it in apoplexy, as securely as a cowboy on a broncho? The comparison is apt; for, spurred by Exclusion Bills, Popish Plots, French harlots, and French gold, England, aglow with its new-found ideal of faith and freedom, bucked furiously and in vain with the subtle and ever-popular (!) Charles on its back. To put the bit into this man's mouth as he had put it into that of his country was one of the chief objects of the reign of Louis XIV.

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LOUIS XIV.  
*After Charles le Brun*

In the nineteenth century it was customary to treat the Grand Monarque and his Grand Siècle with contempt. It was one of those momentary fits of rage into which Progress falls when it beholds its father's ghost in history. The rage has passed—in France at all events—and Louis XIV. and his famous century are receiving more flattery now than even Voltaire bestowed on them. They have become national monuments. Every schoolboy has parsed one of Bossuet's *oraisons funèbres*; every soldier has heard of Condé, every woman remembers the romance of Mademoiselle La Beaume Le Blanc de la Vallière. And there isn't a Socialist workman who goes with his wife and children on a Sunday to see the fountains play at Versailles but has some difficulty in choking the "*Vive la France!*" that sneaks in his throat as he strolls through the historic pile dedicated to All the Glories. For everybody has been taught that Louis XIV. in his long reign of seventy-two years—the longest, by the way, in history—did something more than powder his hair with gold-dust, wear high-heeled shoes, and tamely submit to Madame de Maintenon. Among his many shining endowments he possessed the royal faculty of recognising and appreciating talent in others. As in the earlier part of his reign, at all events, there happened to be a profusion of ability in France, he was served as only the very great are ever served. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the agents he sent to England. They were first-rate diplomatists. Their despatches were sprinkled with all sorts of gossip, *on dits*, and trivial details, which were awaited with impatience and devoured with avidity at Versailles. An English despatch was not unlike a brilliant society novel. Thus it happened that the *personnel* of Whitehall was as

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familiar to Louis as that of Versailles; the English people and their "principles" as well known as the condition of his own country; and the life, character, and habits of Charles II. better understood than, perhaps, those of any other person in Europe.

To one so well informed as Louis the key to the riddle, "How is the slippery Charles to be held?" was "Woman." At the time of the death of Madame there was no sultana in the seraglio at Whitehall. This was Louis' chance. His Ambassador and his creatures, the English Ministers, assured him that the Duchess of Cleveland had ceased to be worth her price, that Charles had appeared much smitten with Mademoiselle de K roual when she came to England with Madame, and that in their opinion French interests could not better be served than by sending the aforesaid maid of honour to England as soon as possible. Louis and his Council gave the matter their due consideration, and Louise de K roual, only too willingly, as her fortunes were now at a very low ebb, started for Whitehall. She was clearly given to understand the capacity in which she was going, the influence that sent her, and the duties expected of her. Buckingham engaged to take her back with him after Madame's funeral, but "he totally forgot both the lady and his promise, and leaving the disconsolate nymph at Dieppe to manage as she could, passed over to England by way of Calais." The English Ambassador in Paris, who was not a "Buckingham man" but an "Arlington" one, never gave Buckingham the time to atone for his forgetfulness. He at once sent Mademoiselle de K roual over to Lord Arlington at his own expense, whereby he adroitly made a friend of the future *ma trese en titre* for himself and Arlington. For, says Bishop Burnet, "the Duke of Buckingham lost all the merit he might have pretended to, and brought over a mistress whom his own strange conduct threw into the hands of his enemies."

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The purpose of this visit was pretty well known to the public, to whom "Madam Carwell" at once became an object of detestation. She was, however, favourably received at Whitehall. Dryden, the laureate at the time, and St. Evremond welcomed her in verse, of which the former is too dull and the latter too indecent to quote. At the sight of her Charles at once brightened up, and appointed her to be one of the maids of honour to Queen Catherine, giving as his excuse that it was out of a "decent tenderness" for his sister's memory. Poor Catherine, knowing the purpose for which her new maid of honour had been appointed, disliked her from the first. But Catherine had learnt wisdom in the course of her married life, and though she hated the new favourite as much as she had ever hated the Castlemaine, she accepted her without a protest.

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Not so her Grace of Cleveland. She fought with her characteristic fury to retain her threatened power, and owing to the subtle coyness of Louise appeared to keep her ascendancy over the King. For the cunning Breton girl understood that to yield to Charles at the first assault was not the way to keep him, so she adopted the tactics of La Belle Stuart and played the prude. But it was some time before this strategy was appreciated by Louis and his creatures at Whitehall. The French Ambassador became alarmed. "I think it safe," he wrote to Louis, "while undermining the Duchess of Cleveland to keep her on our side by appearing to be with her."

The correspondence that passed between the French Ambassador and the French Court on this subject gives a more vivid impression of the way the game of politics was played by the Great Powers at the time of the Restoration than any history on the subject.

At length the Ambassador was able to write to Louvois, "I believe I can assure you that she has so got round King Charles as to be of the greatest service to our sovereign and master, if she only does her duty."

This news revived the drooping spirits of the Court of France, but it was still impatient for some proof of her power. Arlington, one of the Cabal Ministers, who was as much interested in her success as Louis himself, therefore decided to bring about the long-anticipated *d nouement* by inviting the Court to Euston, his palatial country seat, where by a counter-strategy it was hoped the cautious Louise would be forced to yield. The Ambassador, in imparting this information to Louvois, wrote:—

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"Milord Arlington told me to advise Mademoiselle de K roual to cultivate the King's good graces, and so to manage that he should only find in her society enjoyment, peace, and quiet. He added that if Lady Arlington took his advice she would urge the new favourite to yield unreservedly to the King or to retire to a French convent.... The King did me the honour yesterday to sup at the Embassy, when he proved to me, by indulging in a gay and unfettered debauch, that he does not mistrust us."

The satisfaction this news gave to Louis may be judged from the following extract from Louvois' reply:—

"His Majesty was vastly amused with all that was in your letter about Mademoiselle de K roual, and will have pleasure in hearing the progress she makes in the King's favour. He even jested on the subject, and says there must either be small love felt for the mistress or great confidence felt in you to suffer you to go to Euston in such jolly company."

As may be imagined, the house party at Euston produced the result expected of it, and the way in which this result was effected is as illuminating as the above correspondence. It was quite in keeping with the total absence of morality which characterised all who were engaged in the intrigue. "Lady Arlington," says Forneron, "under the pretext of killing the tedium of October evenings in a country house, got up a burlesque wedding, in which Louise de K roual was the bride and the King the bridegroom, with all the immodest ceremonies which marked, in the good old times, the retirement of the former into her nuptial chamber."

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As this book is not conceived in a prurient spirit we shall forbear to give the reader a description of the "ceremonies" connected with this mock-marriage. Suffice it to say that the

French Ambassador's report of the "nights at Euston" reads like an account of a Palais Royal farce. In an age of such unashamed publicity as the Restoration, no attempt was made to keep the doings of the Arlingtons' house party out of the press; consequently the pamphlets of the day revelled in reporting the spicy details of this Euston saturnalia with as much zest and in the same spirit of hypocrisy as the press of the present takes in a smart society lawsuit. While the coffee-houses, which corresponded to our modern clubs, rung with gossip of the new French mistress of the King, who was reported to have protested to some noble lord against the scurrility to which she was subjected by the public: "Me no bad woman. If me taut me was one bad woman, me would cut mine own trote."

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Of course, what happened at Euston was much exaggerated. Evelyn, who was a guest of the Arlingtons, declares that he never witnessed any of the things the newspapers and lampoons reported. Nevertheless, he admits that he was only twice admitted to the royal circle. At any rate, the sequel that occurred nine months later afforded Louis XIV. and "Madam Carwell" the greatest satisfaction. It is well known that next to a mistress Charles loved nothing so much as a child.

After the visit at Euston Louise de K roual was the acknowledged *ma trese en titre* in place of the termagant Cleveland, retired. Charles appointed her lady of the bedchamber to the Queen, the duties of which post she had the delicacy to abandon to a deputy, and created her Duchess of Portsmouth. At the same time, as there was every prospect that she would hold long what she had conquered, and as a reward for her services, Louis paid her in advance, so to speak, by giving her the title of Duchesse d'Aubigny. As she played the *r le* of *ma trese en titre* as it was played in France there is nothing in her story henceforth to shock the most modest susceptibilities. All the *grossi ret s* with which the Duchess of Cleveland, whom she supplanted, embellished the post were by her Grace of Portsmouth refined into political intrigues.

Among the many services she was expected to render to her "master," the French King, the principal were:—

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1. To induce Charles to declare war against Holland (!)
2. To convert Charles to Roman Catholicism (!!)
3. To persuade the Duke of York, the King's brother and heir to the throne, to marry a French princess.

For Charles to have plunged his newly restored kingdom into a war with Holland, considering the "principles" of the English nation on the subject, would seem incredible. It was, however, the easiest of the Duchess of Portsmouth's tasks. The "principles" were circumvented, reasoned, excused, explained away, conscientiously, be it understood—oh, very conscientiously!—as is always the way with a brave "principle" when confronted with an interest. At the bottom England was jealous of Holland's naval and commercial supremacy. Charles, like the cowboy, knew his broncho; he declared war on Holland to please his mistress and win his French subsidy, and England bucked, and bucked—and fought.

On the other hand, Charles, being no fool, and knowing his broncho thoroughly, was not to be induced to change the form of faith he professed. He had too vivid a recollection of his exile to play any practical jokes on Fortune. If, as is extremely doubtful, he was a Catholic at bottom, it was certainly not from religious conviction. His Huguenot grandfather, Henri Quatre, had said that "Paris was well worth a Mass." Precisely in the same way he reasoned that the throne of England was well worth a confirmation. The Duchess of Portsmouth was far too indifferent herself on this subject to disagree with Charles, and far too cunning to risk her position in England in order to help Louis XIV. weaken the country with another civil war. She therefore made up her mind, says Forneron, "that there was but a single course to follow. It was by slow degrees to habituate the English to a revival of Catholic ideas, rites, and ceremonies." This was but a polite way of telling Louis that if the conversion of England to Catholicism depended on her it would never be converted. Also, knowing the displeasure such a declaration coming from her would create at the French Court, she made it on purpose to show Louis that she was no mere contemptible spy to be ordered about and scolded, but the Duchess of Portsmouth, *ma trese en titre* to His Britannic Majesty. This show of independence was based, no doubt, on the certainty of her hold on Charles. For at this time the French Ambassador wrote angrily to Louvois of her Grace: "She has got the notion that it is possible she may yet be Queen of England. She talks from morning till night of the Queen's ailments as if they were mortal."

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Scarcely less inferior in importance to Louis than making Charles declare war on Holland and converting him to Popery was the subjection of his heir, the Duke of York. Louis XIV. thought of the future as much as the present. It was above all things necessary to him that if Charles should be unexpectedly carried off his successor should be the friend of France. The surest way of securing this appeared to be by making a match between James, whose wife, Anne Hyde, the daughter of Clarendon, had just died, and a princess of France. Louis, knowing James as well as he did Charles, was aware that he was one of those men who would be governed entirely by his wife. Consequently he proposed a member of his own family, the Duchesse de Guise, the sister of La Grande Mademoiselle and daughter of his uncle, Gaston d'Orl ans. But Madame, before her death, had given her brother such an unfavourable account of this widowed princess, who was exceedingly plain, and had "laid in thrice in two years," that James positively refused to consider her. The French Court hereupon got angry at being defied by a stupid Duke of York, and ordered the Duchess of Portsmouth to put on the screw. But here again she was wiser than her employers. For under the pressure of being urged to do what he disliked there was danger that James might suddenly show resentment and marry an enemy of France.

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The Duchess of Portsmouth, therefore, suggested that the distinction it was proposed to confer on the Duchesse de Guise should lapse in favour of her own nominee. This was one of the Mesdemoiselles d'Elbœuf, of the princely family of Lorraine. There was no doubt an *arrière pensée* in this suggestion by which "little Kéroual," as they scornfully called her at Versailles, wished the world to see that she had risen to a height in which she could patronise princesses of Lorraine. Louis, however, had a grudge of some sort against the d'Elbœufs, and Mary of Modena was chosen instead. But the Duchess of Portsmouth refused to give up the cause of her *protégées* without a struggle, if only to show Louis what a power his spy had become, and quarrelled with the French Ambassador, the Arlingtons, and the French faction generally. It is true peace was made again between the spy and her employers, but she had gained one thing of the greatest importance to her by the quarrel, and that was the recognition by Louis that "little Kéroual" for the future was to be treated with the respect due so great a personage as the Duchess of Portsmouth.

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The independence she displayed in this intrigue was made not from any disloyalty to Louis, but from the necessity of enhancing the value of her services—of making hay, as the saying is, while the sun was shining. No one understood better than she the extreme precariousness of her position. Mistrusted and unpopular at Whitehall, and cordially hated by the people, there was nothing between her and ruin but the slippery, fickle King. It was not enough to be Duchess of Portsmouth with ten thousand pounds a year paid out of the wine licenses; if Charles discarded her she would be forced to return to France as poor as she left it, and it was not from the Court of France that she would get protection then. She had to provide against this emergency, and she did it with a cunning and determination for which no one, judging from her "childish, simple, and baby face," as Evelyn described it, would have given her credit. To bleed Louis as well as Charles was her object, and she pursued it with a rapacity that rivalled that of her Grace of Cleveland.

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It was comparatively easy to get what she wanted out of Charles. Nell Gwynn had declared that she would be content with five hundred a year, but she managed to mulct the Treasury of sixty thousand pounds in one year and get her son created Duke of St. Albans, with suitable revenues to maintain the dignity. But the spoils of Nell were modest compared with those of the Duchess of Portsmouth. She was never addicted to gambling to the same extent as the Mazarin and the Cleveland, but she could afford to lose five thousand pounds at one sitting, as she once did. The drafts she made on the national exchequer were enormous. Her allowance of ten thousand pounds was generally swollen to forty thousand, and one year she succeeded in drawing the huge sum of £136,668. Like the Duchess of Cleveland, she sold every office that fell vacant; but she went a step further than her Grace, and took commissions on the bribes with which Louis bought his creatures in England, trafficked in royal pardons, and did a good business in selling convicts to West Indian planters. This rapacity never flagged during her reign. Immediately after Charles's death she put in a claim for ten thousand pounds of her pension, which was in arrears, and his successor did not hesitate to pay it.

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The furniture that she accumulated in her apartments at Whitehall represented a fortune far greater than her father had amassed in the wool trade.

"Following his Majesty this morning, through the gallery," said Evelyn, who gives a graphic inventory of her sumptuous abode, "I went with the few who attended him to the Duchess of Portsmouth's dressing-room, within her bedchamber, where she was in her loose morning-gown, her maids combing her, newly out of bed, his Majesty and gallants standing about her. But that which engaged my curiosity was the rich and splendid furniture of this woman's apartment, now twice or thrice pulled down and rebuilt to satisfy her prodigality and expensive pleasures, while her Majesty's does not exceed some gentlemen's wives in furniture and accommodation. Here I saw the new fabric of French tapestry" (from the Gobelins looms just founded by Louis XIV.), "for design, tenderness of work, and incomparable imitation of the best paintings, beyond anything I ever beheld. Some pieces had Versailles, St. Germain's, and other palaces of the French king, with huntings, figures, and landscapes, exotic fowls and all to the life, rarely done. Then for Japan cabinets, screens, pendule clocks, great vases of wrought plate, table-stands, chimney-furniture, sconces, branches, braseras, &c., all of massive silver and out of number, besides some of his Majesty's best paintings."

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Evidently a virtuoso, this mistress-spy, in which connection we cannot help reflecting on the deep and intimate knowledge that Charles, the most cynical and light-hearted of kings, must have had of women. What with meek, faithful Catherines, devoted, antique-chivalrous Flora Macdonalds, coarse, virago Clevelands, neurotic Mazarins, prudish, cunning Stuarts, gay, insinuating Madames, subtle, artistic Kérouals, Nell Gwynns, Moll Davises, Lady Shannons, Lady Dorchesters, and others too numerous to mention, being an intelligent man, his experience of the fair sex must have been wonderfully illuminating.

But even more important to this curious "little Kéroual," of the "childish, simple, and baby face," than the accumulation of plunder in England was the feathering of a nest in France. Much as she valued her English ducal title, in spite of the mockery heaped upon it, there was an honour in her own country that she valued far more. To this thoroughly patriotic Frenchwoman to be Duchess of Portsmouth was a small thing in comparison with the right to a *tabouret* at Versailles. This was the supreme ambition of a Frenchwoman in the *ancien régime*. Volumes could be written on the intrigues that the desire to obtain this distinction caused. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that some of the greatest events in European history have arisen in the quest of a *tabouret*. "To think," said Sobieski, the hero-king of Poland, who had married a Frenchwoman whose life was spent in the attempt to get this supreme feminine honour—"to think how she longs for that miserable stool on which nobody can sit at ease!"

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The intrigues of the Duchess of Portsmouth to win her *tabouret* at Versailles might be likened to a game of bridge in which she and Charles II.—whose hand she played—were opposed to Louis XIV. and his Ambassador, Colbert de Croissy (a brother of the famous Colbert). In this diplomatic bridge the cards were so evenly distributed that the odd trick was only to be won by the most careful play. In any case, from the start the honours, so to speak, were held by the Duchess and Charles. We have stated that in recognition for her services at Euston, of which the immediate effect was the declaration by England of war on Holland, Louis XIV. had conferred on his spy the title of Duchesse d'Aubigny. The history of this duchy is rather interesting, and the title was an ace in her Grace's hand.

Aubigny was a French ducal fief that two hundred and fifty years before had been conferred by a King of France upon a cadet of the House of Stuart. It was to return to the French Crown on the demise of the last male heir of the line, and this event had just taken place by the death of La Belle Stuart's husband, who was the last Duke of Richmond as well as of Aubigny. The latter title having been conferred on Louise de K roual by Louis, and both having for so long been borne by the head of the same family, she determined to secure the former for her son by Charles, who would thus as her heir once more reunite the two. This, in fact, was effected without the least trouble, and the Dukes of Richmond are also Ducs d'Aubigny down to the present day. But the empty title of Duchesse d'Aubigny by no means satisfied this cunning woman. She wished the ducal *terres* as well. To possess them was to possess the coveted *tabouret* at Versailles, to win the odd trick in this game of bridge. For to be able to have the sublime distinction of sitting on a stool in the presence of the King of France one must not only be a duchess in name but own one's duchy in fact. This, then, was the manner in which the Duchess of Portsmouth sought to provide against a rainy day at Whitehall. [296]

Considering that, in spite of inducing Charles to declare war on Holland for the benefit of France, she had failed to convert him to Roman Catholicism, and shown an independence, most unwelcome to the French Court, in the Duke of York's marriage affair, Colbert de Croissy did his best to defeat her. Clever diplomatist though he was, the contempt with which she had treated him during the business of marrying the Duke of York secretly rankled, and he could not resist the temptation to thwart an enemy. To describe all the moves and counter-moves in this sordid intrigue is impossible here. Suffice it to say the Duchess was too much for the Ambassador. Louis was obliged to replace him by the more tactful Ruvigny, an honest Huguenot, who found the work he was required to do such a "filthy traffic" that he too was recalled and replaced by the sly Courtin, at the time the Duchesse de Mazarin suddenly alighted at Whitehall and in a trice all but ruined Louis' subtle schemes. [297]

But the very eagerness the Duchess of Portsmouth displayed in regard to the *tabouret* gave Louis, who had begun to mistrust her independence, an advantage. He promised to gratify her on the condition that she obeyed him unquestioningly for the future, and gave proof of her loyalty by completing some very delicate business he was now engaged in. The business was indeed delicate, but nothing in comparison with the difficulties the spy had to encounter in performing it. With the *tabouret* in sight, however, she set to work right bravely.

Louis XIV., having taken the opportunity while England and Holland were at war to plunder Spain of Flanders, was now anxious to swallow the Franche Comt  and the Palatinate. Hereupon all Europe became terrified, and England and Holland hastened to patch up their differences. All the Ministers and Members of Parliament whom Louis had bought suddenly turned against him. The patriotism of the whole nation was profoundly stirred. Even Buckingham turned Puritan—for a time. With his broncho bucking like this Charles was obliged to exert all his skill to save himself from being thrown. He disbanded the regiments, to keep up which, in case he should need them, Louis had paid him eight million livres. Moreover, at this critical time, when the Duchess of Portsmouth was of the utmost consequence to Louis, she fell seriously ill. The less said of this illness the better, it was anything but creditable to her royal lover. Misfortune seldom comes alone, and to discourage her Grace still more a large sum of money and her jewels were stolen, while at the same time the Duchesse de Mazarin arrived and fascinated Charles. Never had Louise de K roual been so near utter ruin. Even Louis began to neglect her now. "She who was so plucky and fertile in resources," says Forneron, "began to lose courage. Courtin wrote to Louis to communicate to him a scene that took place in her apartment. He went to visit her at Whitehall and found her weeping. She opened her heart to him in the presence of her two French maids, who stood with downcast eyes close to the wall, as if glued to it. Tears flowed from their mistress's eyes; sighs and sobs interrupted her speech. M. Courtin stayed with her until midnight, trying to soothe her wounded spirit. Louvois made fun of her troubles, and coarsely wrote that the scene of *la Signora adolorata* had vastly amused his Majesty." [298]

But perhaps to "little K roual," now so sunk in favour, hourly expecting to be dismissed by the fickle Charles, and to be publicly disgraced like Jane Shore, nothing seemed so hard to bear as the ridicule showered upon her by Nell Gwynn.

Nell inspired her with fear as well as hate. In the bottom of her heart Louise de K roual knew what she was; every time she looked into her mirror it was not a duchess but a prostitute she saw reflected in it; in many a moment of triumph shame leered at her suddenly from under the flattery of Ambassadors and Ministers, Court ladies and serving-maids. A prostitute and a prostitute's fate haunted her everywhere. It was to escape the terror of this ghost that she tried to disguise herself as a Duchess of Portsmouth and a Duchesse d'Aubigny. The same reason induced her to make people in England believe she was closely related to the illustrious family of Rohan by going into mourning when one of its junior members died. It was also the underlying motive of her desire to possess the right of a *tabouret*, whereby she hoped to strangle the scorn [299]

of Versailles. And Nell Gwynn stripped her masks from her and dragged her down to her own unspeakable level in a way that no art could baffle. A specimen of Nell's method of torturing her rival would scarcely be suffered in print nowadays, but some idea of it may be got from the following style in which Madame de Sévigné describes it, taking advantage herself of the occasion to sneer at "Kéroual":—

"This is how Gwynn argues: 'That hoity-toity French duchess sets up to be of grand quality. Every one of rank in France is her cousin. The moment some grand lord or lady over there dies, she orders a suit of deep mourning. Well, if she's of such high station, why is she such an (unprintable)? She ought to be ashamed of herself! If I were reared to be a lady, I am sure I should blush for myself. But it's my trade to be a (likewise unprintable), and I was never anything else. The King keeps me; ever since he has done so I have been true to him. He has had a son by me, and I'm going to make him own the brat, for he is as fond of me as of his French miss.'" [300]

She had to endure Nell Gwynn just as Queen Catherine had to endure herself and the Duchess of Cleveland.

It is not likely that Courtin was touched by the sight of her dejection when he paid her the visit mentioned above. Louis XIV.'s Ambassadors in England never wasted sympathy on those who were falling from power. But an event unexpectedly occurred at this critical juncture that proved advantageous to the spy. The Duchesse de Mazarin, "that female Buckingham," as Mrs. Jameson very aptly calls her, recklessly threw her great opportunity away by falling madly in love with the Prince of Monaco, "who came to England for two weeks and prolonged his visit for two years." Hereupon the sly Courtin advised her Grace of Portsmouth to dry her eyes and entertain. This advice was followed with considerable success, and Charles's lukewarmness was once more turned to boiling heat when Louise, who had gone away to Bath to take the waters, returned more blooming than ever. With the restoration of her health all her energy and cunning returned. Feeling the need of powerful English friends, and perhaps, too, from the devotion she always showed to her family, she sent to France for her sister Henriette, and married her to the Earl of Pembroke, on which occasion Charles gave the bride away, and a handsome dowry as well. Her power over her royal lover being once more established, and as an incentive to her loyalty of which at such a critical situation Louis had more need than ever, he now bestowed on her the ducal estates of Aubigny, with the right of transmission to her son, and the coveted *tabouret*. About the same time Charles created the issue of this amour Duke of Richmond. [301]

The cunning of the Duchess of Portsmouth was never better displayed than on this occasion. For Charles, who was still afraid of her Grace of Cleveland, in order to allay her jealousy, had created his eldest son by this former mistress Duke of Grafton. But far from allaying the jealousy of the Duchess of Cleveland, it aroused that of the Duchess of Portsmouth as well. Each determined that her own son should take precedence of the other's; this could only be settled by one woman getting the letters patent signed before the other. The Duchess of Portsmouth now gave evidence of the ingenuity she possessed, for learning that the Minister whose duty it was to affix the seals to these patents was starting for Bath, she went to him at night just as he was stepping into his carriage, and thus "did" her rival, who arrived the first thing the next morning to find him gone and her object defeated. History does not relate her Grace of Cleveland's language on this occasion.

Fortune once more smiling on "Madam Carwell," she worked for Louis with a right good will. "It is to her," says Forneron very fittingly, "more than to any statesman, that France is indebted for French Flanders, the Franche Comté, her twice secular possession of Alsace, her old ownership of the valley of the Mississippi and Canada, and her lately revived claim on Madagascar." Louis thoroughly understood that if his dream of empire was ever to be realised, it could only be by the aid of England. But the English people were in a white rage with France, due to the unblushing policy of Louis, which directly menaced the existence of England. And political fear was kept alive by religious hate. "They will vote anything against us in the House of Commons," reported Courtin, "and they say they are ready to sell their shirts off their backs to keep the Netherlands from being seized by us. These are the very words they make use of." Active assistance, an alliance, was clearly out of the question. And the temper of the English people being such, could even their passive aid be counted on, would they be content merely to look on angrily while Louis carved up the map of Europe to suit him? [302]

To Courtin this seemed improbable. "Make haste to conquer what you can," he wrote to Louvois dejectedly. "Clearly not the man for the delicate work he has to do," thought Louis. So Courtin was recalled, like Colbert de Croissy and Ruvigny before him. All three were men of exceptional ability—men trained in the school of Mazarin to specialise their talents, and to each of them the Court of Whitehall proved a labyrinth whose man-devouring Minotaur was the Imperial policy of Louis Quatorze. [303]

Courtin was succeeded by Barillon, who, says Forneron, "was master in the art of corrupting men, and of hiding his contempt for those whom he corrupted. He resembled those Ambassadors of Phillip II. who showered doubloons on the Catholic conspirators, affected interest in the democracy of the League, saw their heads fall without a shudder, and when the game was lost, prepared coolly for a new one." As if to render the Machiavellian abilities of this man still more dangerous, nature had gifted him with warm human affections and an exquisite sense of the Beautiful! Barillon is probably the greatest Ambassador that ever represented a foreign nation at the English Court.

He came to do what Courtin had considered improbable, and what would have been impossible but for the help he received from the Duchess of Portsmouth. Between Barillon and

the spy there was the most perfect understanding. Only a miracle could keep England passive while Louis XIV. crossed the Rhine, but the two magicians performed it. With all his cunning Charles II. had at last over-reached himself in his dealings with the nation. He had squandered his Fortunatus' purse of power and, like all spendthrifts, he was forced to go to the usurers. There were only two in Europe able to advance Charles the sums he required. These were his partner, England, and Louis Quatorze. The usury exacted by the former became with each call higher and higher; by this fortuitous means the English people were gradually recovering the liberties they had allowed themselves to be swindled out of at the beginning of the reign. At each session of Parliament Charles was obliged by his extravagance to relinquish more and more power. He had so fallen into the hands of this usurer that it was even proposed in the House of Lords to impeach the Duchess of Portsmouth. Whereupon one peer cynically remarked "that they ought rather to erect statues to the ladies who made their lover dependent on Parliament for his subsistence."

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Charles was faced with the humiliating prospect of sinking from the head of the firm to the position of mere clerk, when Barillon and the Duchess of Portsmouth offered to set him on his feet again. They stipulated for one condition only: that he would calmly look on while Louis ate up Spain, Holland, Germany, and even the Pope. To have escaped from the hands of the Parliament Charles would willingly have consented if Louis had proposed to make himself master of Asia, Africa, and America as well. But the sum he required to clear him of his difficulties staggered Louis; there was such a thing as paying too big a price even for Europe. "The plea," says Mrs. Jameson, "used by Charles to persuade Louis to come to his terms was, 'that it would render England for ever dependent on him, and put it out of the power of the English to oppose him.' *These were the King's own words.*" France had already spent immense sums in bribes without any satisfactory remuneration, but Louis now exacted usury for the money he advanced. The English Parliament was to be dissolved *sine die*, in order that Charles should do Louis' bidding without the remonstrance of his subjects. In return for this independence Charles was to receive four million pounds, the receipt of which he was to acknowledge duly. In this way if Charles tried to be slippery Louis could threaten him with exposure. Barillon admits that he had orders to blackmail him the moment he attempted to be independent. Charles's receipts are still to be seen in the French Archives. He had fallen from the frying-pan into the fire with a vengeance. One had to have one's wits about one to get the better of Louis XIV.

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The rage of the English people at finding themselves "done" in this way by their King was overmastering. Totally ignorant of Charles's compact with Louis, they nevertheless beheld the result in the triumph of France against coalesced Europe. Nor was England's rage at this triumph lessened by the knowledge that it was due to her own neutrality. "The English people," says Forneron, "were carried away against the Catholics by one of those frenzies of contagious hatred which sometimes take hold of a nation like an epidemic. When a nation is possessed by a fit of such fury, there is always a statesman ready to pander to it."

It is not here that we can describe the character of Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, and all the details of that tissue of iniquity known as the Popish Plot. For this English Dreyfus Affair the reader is recommended to any History of England. "Shiftsbury," or "the most vicious dog in England," as Charles called him, was a seventeenth-century opportunist with a truly marvellous faculty of recognising psychological moments. He was also that exceedingly rare individual, a genuinely bad man. He organised the Popish Plot, and sprung it on the nation at the ripe moment to clear the road for his own ambition. On the wave of terror it created he was carried to power. In the intense excitement of the time the life of no Catholic in the country was safe, and Shaftesbury's creature, Titus Oates, accused even poor Queen Catherine. The Catholic Duke of York, like the coward he was, fled from England; the King himself, for his own security, dismissed his band of French musicians and was ready, if necessary at a moment's notice, to abandon his favourites to the popular fury. Revolution was shaking the throne. Among the strange phenomena that were witnessed in this period of chaos not the least curious was that of Nell Gwynn, posing as the head of the Protestants. It is, perhaps, not too much to say that the part she played in this religious convulsion of the English people explains the leniency, closely resembling popularity, with which she alone of Charles's mistresses is regarded by posterity. Of all the volumes that have been written on the Restoration no light has ever been shed so clearly on the character of the times as the *fact* that Protestant England could hail with acclaim a king's mistress as its champion. A while before it had been the Duchesse de Mazarin, now it was Nell's turn. The atmosphere of the Restoration had contaminated even morality itself.

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In such a state of affairs the position of the Duchess of Portsmouth was very grave. Both Houses of Parliament demanded her impeachment, and the people clamoured that she should be executed in the Tower along with the fallen minister, Danby, who was already there. She fell ill from sheer fright. Barillon, however, alone of mortals, kept his head. He advised her, if possible, to make friends with Shaftesbury, and this, as if to make confusion still more confounded, she succeeded in doing. But in this hour of unparalleled success Shaftesbury made the first blunder of his political career. A severe attack of malignant fever threatening the King's life, the question of the succession became acute. Shaftesbury proposed the Protestant Duke of Monmouth, the King's eldest bastard, as the heir to the throne in place of the Duke of York, and the Duchess of Portsmouth got drawn into this Monmouth intrigue. Hereupon the Prince of Orange, afterwards William III., as a Protestant and the next legitimate *male* heir after the Duke of York, appeared on the scene—the Prince of Orange, a cold Northern Machiavelli, with an openly avowed and undying hatred of Louis XIV. and France. Shaftesbury and the Popish Plot had turned England into a pandemonium.

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"I believe," wrote Barillon to Louis, "each now wishes to save himself at the cost of the others."

A profound darkness seemed to have fallen on the frenzied nation, in which for a time Barillon and the Duchess of Portsmouth became separated. Monmouth was effaced by the lampoons which, owing to the imprudence of her Grace's maid, Mrs. Wall, connected him with the hated Duchess. Shaftesbury was dislodged from power by his rival Sunderland, who maintained himself largely by the aid of the cunning Frenchwoman who by her devotion, by the knowledge she had of Charles's shameful secret understanding with Louis, and by her ability, with which she deeply impressed her royal lover, still continued *maîtresse en titre* and spy of the Court of France at Whitehall.

But in the darkness in which all groped the adventures of none were more curious than Louis'. He bribed lavishly every one he stumbled against, so to speak, to show him the way towards the light. No price was too great to pay, no abasement too shameless, that would keep the Prince of Orange from succeeding Charles II. History has revealed the extraordinary spectacle of the Presbyterians hobnobbing with his Most Christian Majesty, the Republican party in England allied to the French tyrant!

"Baber continues to work the Presbyterians," wrote Barillon. "It is through him that I have gained two popular preachers who can insinuate things that it would never do to say openly. I know that they have spoken in the pulpit of a matter which would not count anywhere else, unless here, but which in England is no trifle. *It is that the Prince of Orange hunts on Sundays.*"

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Barillon had got into the skin of the nation to which he was accredited. Whether Louis laughed at the depth of religious hypocrisy that took his bribes and objected to hunting on Sundays, is not recorded; perhaps not, the situation was too serious even for his sardonic humour.

The first to emerge from the labyrinth of the Popish Plot was the Duchess of Portsmouth. On her heels came Louis and Barillon. Behind them in the dark groped Shaftesbury and Sunderland, Monmouth and the Prince of Orange, and a host of "faith and freedom" men who were taking French money and saving their consciences by trying to cheat those who gave it to them. The tide of revolution was ebbing fast; a calm succeeded the tempest. Whitehall recovered its gaiety and levity; the Restoration its license; King Charles his health and cynicism. By the help of Louis he believed himself secure for the rest of his life, and he did not care in the least what happened to England and the House of Stuart afterwards. Reresby has given us the following account of a typical day in his life at Newmarket about this time: "He walked in the morning till ten o'clock, then he went to the cock-pit till dinner-time. About three he went to the horse-races; at six he returned to the cock-pit for an hour only. Then he went to the play, though the actors were but of a terrible sort; from thence to supper, then to the Duchess of Portsmouth's till bedtime, and so to his own apartment to take his rest."

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In this distribution of his time it will be seen that no mention is made of business. As a matter of fact he did none, because, Parliament being dissolved indefinitely, there was none. Such routine work as there was Sunderland and the Duchess did between them. The only business that the English King was called upon to transact was the signing of the receipt for his French subsidy every quarter, which he managed to get paid in advance. The extraordinary indifference he manifested in his department accounts entirely for the Duchess of Portsmouth's continued favour. She had long ceased to be his mistress in anything but name, yet never was her position so secure. She had become one of the habits to which Charles had enslaved himself. The dream of her life had been to appear at Versailles for a brief moment and have the exquisite satisfaction of sitting on her *tabouret*, and compelling the proud, contemptuous ladies of the French Court to treat her as their equal. And it was now that, absolutely confident of her place, she dared to run the risk of losing it by visiting France. She, however, took the precaution to draw her quarter's pension in advance. Her reception at the Court of France was triumphal. "There has never been a parallel for the treatment she meets with," says Saint-Simon. "When, on a high holiday, she went to visit the Capucines in the Rue St. Honoré, the poor monks, who were told beforehand of her intention, came out processionally to receive her, with cross, holy-water, and incense. They received her just as if she had been the Queen, which threw her all in a heap, as she did not expect so much honour." Perhaps it was at this time that "her portrait as the Madonna with her son as the Child was painted for a rich convent in France, and used as an altar-piece."

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Her Grace's ostensible reason for visiting her native country had been to take the waters of Bourbon, and on completing her cure she gave herself the pleasure of visiting Aubigny. So pleased was she with her feudal castle, feudal rights, and feudal acres that she could have received the worst news from England with but little genuine distress. Her presence, however, was required at Whitehall as much by Charles as Louis, and after a four months' holiday she returned to England. Her visit was not without profit. Among the items of private business she transacted during her absence were the investing of her English fortune in French securities; the wheedling of an abbey out of Louis for one of her aunts who was a nun; and her recognition of the Duke of York's right to the Succession, whereby she made a friend of James, whose star was once more in the ascendant.

The splendour of her social success in France was, on her return to Whitehall, reflected in the cordiality with which she was welcomed by the great English peeresses who had formerly snubbed her. Far from losing ground during her absence, she had gained it if possible. The English Court regarded her quite as one of the royal family. She received the foreign envoys even before they presented their credentials to the King. For speaking slightly of her the Dutch

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Ambassador was obliged to apologise in person; while for the same reason she complained to Queen Catherine of one of her maids of honour, who was punished for her insolence by the loss of a quarter's salary. She effaced Charles's unfortunate consort more completely even than had the Duchess of Cleveland. In justice to her, however, it must be confessed that her conduct to Catherine was nearly always respectful. From the time of the Popish Plot to the end of the reign, nothing of any importance transpired without her initiative or sanction. When Louis decided that it was time to marry the Princess Anne, the Duchess of Portsmouth provided the necessary husband in Prince George of Denmark. It is true she had many enemies, notably the Duchess of York, who despised her, but none of them dared offend her. She was virtually the proconsul whom Louis XIV. had appointed to govern England, which he had reduced to a "province of France."



**PHILIPPE DE VENDÔME,  
GRAND PRIEUR DE FRANCE.  
*From an old print in the British  
Museum.***

So complete was her power that her life dragged monotonously till there came one to colour it in the person of Philippe de Vendôme, Grand Prieur de France. This man was the grandson of Henri IV. and the Charmante Gabrielle, and his mother was Mazarin's eldest niece, Laure Mancini, the only one about whom there was never any scandal, and who had died shortly after his birth. He was, consequently, a nephew of the Duchesse de Mazarin. He was also the younger brother of the famous Duc de Vendôme of whom Saint-Simon has said so many infamous things. But perhaps his special attraction in the eyes of the Duchess of Portsmouth was that he was the nephew of the Duc de Beaufort, her first lover, and the man who had given her her first start in life. He had been banished from France, for what reason is not clear. Perhaps it was for the cowardice he had displayed in action, for he was an arrant coward and braggart. "He slipped out of a duel," says Forneron, "about the Duchesse de Ludre with M. de Vivonne by riding off to the country and out of the army on the eve of the battle in which Turenne was killed." Be this as it may, he had been obliged to quit France. Like most exiles in the seventeenth century, his personal knowledge of the various countries of Europe was extensive and intimate—especially of the "night-life" of Courts and capitals. Among his adventures was the partnership, terminable without notice, that he formed at Rome with his cousin, the Duchesse de Mazarin's daughter, the Marquise de Richelieu, "a wanderer like himself." If one may believe Saint-Simon, whose portraits of the Vendôme brothers are of the kind that one is inclined to consign to the flames with the tongs, the Grand Prieur "never went to bed sober during thirty years, but was always carried there dead drunk; was a liar, a swindler, and a thief; a rogue to the marrow of his bones, rotted with vile diseases, the most contemptible and yet most dangerous fellow in the world."

Saint-Simon made these agreeable remarks about the Grand Prieur many years after his visit to England. At the time the Duchess of Portsmouth "retained him in London with a tenderness so undisguised as to excite the raillery of the whole Court," he was a handsome and attractive rake of twenty-eight. At first mere love of notoriety made him pay his attentions to the Duchess, who, from some motive best known to herself, appeared to be flattered by them, whereupon King Charles did the Grand Prieur the honour to be jealous of him. As a scandal was the last thing the prematurely worn-out epicurean Charles wished, he dared not show his jealousy openly by ordering Vendôme out of the country. He preferred to apply to Barillon to help him get rid of his

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odious rival. Barillon, at once alarmed at the consequences the King's jealousy might have upon the Duchess of Portsmouth's position, expostulated with the Grand Prieur. But the grandson of Henri IV. and the charming Gabrielle, recognising from Charles's jealousy and Barillon's anxiety to what profit to himself he could put certain letters her Grace had had the imprudence to write him, refused to quit Whitehall. Tableau: Charles in a white-hot rage (very, very rare with him); the Duchess of Portsmouth in terror; Barillon in a state of stupefaction. Louis, however, helped her Grace out of her scrape by paying the blackmailing Grand Prieur his price, which was the privilege to return to France.

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There is no proof whatever that the Duchess was guilty in this affair of anything more serious than the indiscretion of confiding to paper the fascination her dashing countryman had for her. And though her name was coupled wantonly with the Duke of Monmouth, Sunderland, and her favourite minister Danby, it is perhaps safe to say that the Duchess of Portsmouth was the most faithful to Charles of all his mistresses. Certainly, in spite of the *ennui* the security of her power might have induced, she never again ran the risk of dissipating it by flirtations with unprincipled Grand Priours.

*Ennui*, however, was not an emotion that even a Duchess of Portsmouth, sated with power, could long experience at such a Court as Whitehall. Shortly after her Vendôme fright came the Rye House Plot. This plot within a plot had for its object the guaranteeing of the Protestant Succession. It was really the backwash of the Popish Plot, and was the last vain effort of Shaftesbury to regain power by compelling Charles to summon a Parliament, in which he and his party intended by a *coup d'état* to humble or, if necessary, to banish the dynasty. By some fatality a group of fanatical Protestants were at the same time independently conspiring to bring about Shaftesbury's end by murdering both Charles and the Duke of York. One of their number proved a traitor. Charles was warned and the assassins captured. The Court, which was perfectly aware of the political aspirations of Shaftesbury and his party, unscrupulously but adroitly seized the opportunity to implicate the principal members of the Protestant or Whig party in the Assassination Plot of which they were wholly ignorant. Never was a triumph more remorseless and complete. With Shaftesbury fled and the others beheaded, the Catholics more than got their revenge for what they had suffered at the time of the Popish Plot. There was no longer any question but that the Duke of York would succeed his brother and France continue to direct the policy of England. Louis XIV. promptly seized Luxemburg. The Grand Siècle was now at its zenith.

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The French king, however, was not destined to drink deep of the wine of success; the cup he had so craftily fashioned was to be dashed from his lips by William of Orange, and his fair vineyard utterly devastated by the Duke of Marlborough. But who now would have thought, while under a cloudless sky Louis pressed the juice from his grapes, that at fifty-five Charles II.'s race was run? Or that in three short years "France's Poland" would have for ever freed herself from the Sun King? Certainly not the Duchess of Portsmouth, when one Sunday night in February, 1685, Death entered the Grand Gallery at Whitehall, and in a twinkling confounded all the deep and cunning intrigues of the subtlest brains in Europe.

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Everybody remembers the justly celebrated passage in which Macaulay has described the voluptuous scene Whitehall presented on that fatal night. What a picture in the Gallery of History it is, this English tableau of the literary Delaroche! What wealth of colour and detail! Fancy that great gallery of Whitehall, "an admirable relic of the magnificence of the Tudors, crowded with revellers and gamblers," in which Charles sat "chatting and toying" with the Duchesses of Cleveland, Mazarin, and Portsmouth, and listening to the clink of "gold heaped in mountains" at the basset-table while the Mazarin's "French page, a handsome boy, whose vocal performances were the delight of Whitehall, warbled some amorous verses." Then picture the consternation of all those revellers and gamblers in that splendid corridor when the King, suddenly stricken with apoplexy, tumbles into the arms of a courtier standing near! For lack of a lancet they opened his vein with a penknife; a hot warming-pan is placed on his head. "A loathsome volatile salt, extracted from human skulls, was forced into his mouth. He recovered his senses; but was evidently in a situation of extreme danger." For a week he lingers, begging the people who crowd his death-room pardon for the unconscionable time he takes in dying; polite, witty, good-natured to the end, and not forgetting to recommend his mistresses to the care of his successor!

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No king that we can recall has ever died in such pomp of flippancy as Charles II. Louis XV. dismissing du Barry and making his *amende honorable* to God; the Regent d'Orléans dropping dead in the arms of the Duchesse de Falaris; and Louis XIV. solemnly setting out for the Plutonian kingdom with all the etiquette of Versailles, are historic death-scenes that strike the imagination. But to us they all seem to pale beside the studied, godless levity of Charles's. It was characteristic of the era which died with him, for in reality the death-bed of Charles II. was likewise that of the Restoration.

And how fared the Duchess of Portsmouth in this catastrophe? "I found her," wrote Barillon to Louis, "in great grief. But instead of bemoaning her own sad and altered position she took me into a little room and said, 'Monsieur l'Ambassadeur, I am now going to tell you a secret, although its public revelation would cost me my head. The King of England is at the bottom of his heart a Catholic, and there he is, surrounded with Protestant Bishops! There is nobody to tell him of his state or speak to him of God. I cannot decently enter his room. Besides, the Queen is now there constantly.'" (Poor little Catherine, who went into convulsions and sent to beg his pardon, at which Charles exclaimed, "Alas, poor lady! She beg my pardon! I beg hers with all my heart.") "The Duke of York is too busy with his own affairs to trouble himself about the King's conscience. Go and tell him that I have conjured you to warn him that the end is near, and that it is his duty

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to save without loss of time his brother's soul."

This forethought of the Duchess of Portsmouth, who was religious *au fond* like all Bretons, for the salvation of Charles's soul disarms criticism. To scold her for not conforming to our twentieth-century code of morals is preposterous in its presumption. And as we are quite unable to satisfy ourselves as to the exact standard of the morals of her own day, we had better not bother about her morals at all.

An hour after Charles's death King James paid her a visit of condolence. James's object, no doubt, was to keep well with Louis through her. But his reign was short and stormy, and the Duchess of Portsmouth was too clever not to foresee the disaster of 1688. After settling her affairs in England she returned to France. But her interests obliged her to be ever in close relations with the former country, which in the wars waged between the two for nearly twenty-five years exposed her to many humiliating suspicions. On one occasion Louis threatened to exile her; on another William of Orange refused to allow her to land in England. Her worthless son ran away from her and compromised her politically. Her wealth took to itself wings and flew away. In the fire that destroyed the Palace of Whitehall she lost all her precious furniture. For years she was pursued by creditors and haunted by bailiffs. But Louis was grateful for her past services and protected her from the law as far as he could. He gave her a pension to make up for the loss of her English one, and this the Regent doubled. She who had had countless thousands a year was reduced to a paltry eight hundred. But she still had her titles, and till old age overtook her she frequently made use of her *right* to sit on a *tabouret* at Versailles, and as Duchess of Portsmouth and ex-mistress of Charles II. swelled the ranks of the Jacobites at St. Germain, much to the disgust of Queen Mary. The last years of her life were passed at Aubigny in a strange mixture of miserliness and religious devotion, completely forgotten by the world in which she had played so great a part.

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Fifty years after the death of Charles she died in the full possession of her faculties at the age of eighty-five, having seen all she had toiled for undone, the House of Stuart driven from England and even from its refuge in France. She had outlived Louis and all his splendour and all her contemporaries. It was time for this relic of a crumbling despotism to depart. The mills of God had begun to grind. Another fifty years and the Revolution was to sweep the *ancien régime* away for ever.

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## Transcriber's Notes

Simple typographical errors were corrected.

Punctuation and spelling were made consistent when a predominant preference was found in this book; otherwise they were not changed.

Irregular page numbering made consistent.

Page [147](#): unbalanced quotation mark repaired with balanced single quotation marks.

Removed illustrations' references to the pages they should face.

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HISTORIETTES OF THE RESTORATION \*\*\*

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