

TWO LADIES OF THE COURT OF LOUIS XIV

BY ELIZABETH WALLACE

A LITTLE maid of eleven years, the daughter of Victor Amadeus II, Duke of Savoy, was the means chosen by her father and Louis XIV of France to seal an alliance and complete a tedious course of wily diplomacy resulting in the cession of long-disputed territory; Savoy was the gainer in land, while France welcomed a happy child who was to be the mother of Louis XV. She is called "A Rose of Savoy"¹ in the well-written record of her life and times by H. Noel Williams. Her freshness of spirit and gift of bestowing happiness were not diminished during her short life. From the first she bewitched Louis XIV, who at the time of her advent into his court was "old and respectable," living soberly under the influence of Madame de Maintenon. For many years France and Savoy had been fencing, the latter using every means, fair or foul, to circumvent its powerful antagonist, yet in itself a power largely because of its geographical position and political significance. Victor Amadeus II came as near success as possible in the dangerous feat of carrying water on both shoulders. His joy when at length his daughter was received as the bride of the Duc de Bourgogne, grandson of Louis XIV and prospective King of France, was almost grotesque in its manifestation. The author's command of facts and his lucid style lay the reader under a debt of obligation in the admirable presentation he makes of this period of history.

The little Princess Marie Adelaide welcomed the change from a somewhat restricted life in the companionship of her sadly neglected mother, the daughter of Philippe of Orleans, Louis XIV's younger brother.

She immediately captivated her royal great-uncle and Madame de Maintenon, treating them both more like human beings than they had ever been treated before. Indeed, the letters of Madame, second

wife of Philippe, her step-grandmother, disclose a critical and disapproving spirit, and frequent mention of bad manners laughed at and allowed in the child by her indulgent relatives. However, in the two years, beginning when she was eleven years old, spent at the French Court, really as a hostage to insure her father's good behavior, her manners improved and she won all hearts. At thirteen she was formally wedded to the Duc de Bourgogne amid great rejoicing. She became the gayest of the gay, fond of gaming, and devoted to extravagant dress. But these were common foibles and were regarded with complaisance.

The young Duc de Bourgogne had been an attached pupil of Fénelon, who instilled into his mind many noble principles of conduct and encouraged a certain gravity of demeanor. At first the two young people were most happy together; later the gay Duchesse laughed at the austerities of her spouse, and there was a lack of sympathy between them. The birth of sons, however, satisfied the desire of Louis XIV, and bound the Duc and Duchesse more closely.

But it is the court life and the part played in it by the young Duchesse, with the lively comments of contemporaries, that lead us to another view of the same period. We turn to the vivacious letters of Madame, second wife of Monsieur, Duc d'Orléans, for frank descriptions of great personages and free comment upon every detail of French court life. "A Lady of the Old Régime,"¹ Elizabeth Charlotte of Bavaria, became the step-mother of the Duchess of Savoy and a sharp critic of her little daughter upon her reception in France. She is described by her biographer, Ernest F. Henderson, as original, warm-hearted, and so natural that she stands out in bold relief against the artificial background of Louis XIV's Court. Her keen observation and pic-

¹A Rose of Savoy. By H. Noel Williams. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

¹A Lady of the Old Régime. By Ernest F. Henderson. The Macmillan Company, New York. \$2.80.

turesque, downright language make her letters to her aunt, Sophia, Electress of Hanover, most entertaining. Madame had been in France, taking notes, for twenty-five years before the little Duchesse arrived, and her knowledge of men and manners was quite extended and definite. As a bride she analyzed and contrasted the brothers, her husband and the King, in ruthless fashion. On the whole she gave the preference to the King, but, as she might have expressed it herself, she never could abide Madame de Maintenon. Proud of her own birth, she looked upon her as an upstart. "How should the Rumpumpel have learned to live with people of my kind?" she writes. "She has passed her life with people of another kind." Her hatred was implacable for years. She believed every evil of the "Pantocrate," as she called her. She laid the course pursued culminating in the revocation of the Edict of Nantes at the door of Madame de Maintenon, and exclaimed bitterly, "Where the devil cannot go himself he sends an old woman." She describes her as the King's shadow, and, "since the King has the sun for his emblem, one may well call the old woman the eclipse. . . . The spots of the real eclipse disappear in a few hours, but these spots will last as long as the old woman lives." In a brilliant book by the late Arvède Barine (Madame Charles Vincens) a new light is thrown upon this attitude of Madame. Her heart was true to her own country, and "the French never consoled her for being in France;" she seemed completely incapable of understanding the French mind. During the supremacy of Madame de Montespan, whom she abhorred, her real comradeship with the King was not disturbed. She brought to him all her troubles, and was kindly and sympathetically received. But upon the advent of Madame de Maintenon and her marriage to Louis XIV the atmosphere chilled. The province of friendship was invaded. The King turned from Madame to his wife, and, although the French courtiers smiled in amusement over the situation, seeing, what Madame was really unconscious of, that she was torn by jealousy, she only realized that her "idol," the King, was taken from her, and with all her strong nature she hated the woman who usurped her

place. This is the explanation given by Arvède Barine in "Madame, Mother of the Regent,"¹ and she fortifies her position by quotations from the letters of Madame de Sévigné to her daughter. Poor Liselotte, as she was called by her family, had only a few years of happiness in her half-century of life in France, and these were dependent upon the favoring smiles of her King. She was continually harassed by the demands for help from her impecunious and wretched relatives, and it is intimated by her French biographer that she was incurably selfish toward them all. She pleaded "beggary," but the actual amounts of money she received from various sources tell another tale. Her later days were spent in writing voluminous letters shut up in her own apartments. She despised the courtiers, and was not a welcome member of the gay circle. It is an interesting study to contrast the English and French biographers' view-point in these two volumes. To return to Mr. Henderson's account: Naturally Madame would resent any friendship between the hated "old lady" and the little Duchesse. She accuses the latter of precocious diplomacy. "She pays little attention to her grandfather and hardly looks at my son or me; but the moment she sees Madame de Maintenon she smiles at her and goes to her with open arms. . . . We are all children once more," and apropos of a game of blind man's buff, Madame remarks, "It did me good to tear round a little." Later, however, Madame modified her severe judgments of the young Duc and Duchesse and heartily loved and admired them both. She objected more vigorously to the prudishness of the young Duc than to his devoutness, though she declared that she could not endure praying kings—"that is not what God put them on their thrones for. . . . Let them pray morning and evening, and make their subjects happy the rest of the time." She comments with biting sarcasm upon the "crazy" customs and fashions of France. She was supposed, upon her marriage, to have been made a good Catholic, but her adjuration of Protestantism was most perfunctory.

¹ Madame, Mother of the Regent. By Arvède Barine. Translated by Jeanne Mairé. G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York. \$3.

She argued with her confessor, and, though she attended church faithfully, she took refuge in sleep, declaring that she hated "to hear a fellow yelling in the pulpit whom one may not even interrupt." At first the King tried to keep her awake, but she writes later that "his Majesty lets me sleep in sermon now." She was the soul of virtue herself, but had no objection to associating with women less particular. "The way to associate with those who are so amusing, but of light conduct, is to believe nothing and only listen to their conversation. . . . I put up with all sorts of people," she said, as indeed she had to in the Court of Louis XIV. She regarded Madame de Montespan as the wickedest woman in the world; she was fond of Madame de la Vallière, and considered her more sinned against than sinning; of Madame de Maintenon she often expressed her opinion, yet in the last days of the King she softened toward her rival in Court influence.

Disciplined by the death of two sons and sobered by the necessity of meeting and destroying a plot to estrange her husband and herself from the King, the young Duchesse de Bourgogne rapidly matured. The terrible suffering from cold and famine in 1708 penetrated even to the Court, and the Duc and Duchesse were lavish in their charities. In Paris, Madame writes, the people died from cold like flies. "One cannot go out without being followed by people who are black with hunger." Food riots broke out in several towns. The Duc parted with his most valuable possessions, and in 1709, when he was told that the misery still continued, he gave to the curé of Versailles his gems, saying: "Since we have no money and the poor are dying of hunger, *dic ut lapides isti panes fiant*;" and the stones were changed into bread. In 1710 the future Louis XV was born, and his young mother frankly regarded him as "the prettiest child in the world." When the Duc succeeded to the title of Dauphin, on the death of his father, he and the Duchesse became immensely popular. The hopes of all France were centered in them. Even Madame admitted improvement, and declared in 1711 that the Dauphin now "preaches little," but devotes himself to projects for the good of

his people. Of the Dauphine, Madame de Maintenon writes, "There is no Frenchwoman more devoted to the welfare of this country than she."

But these hopes were not to be realized. The year 1712 saw the death of the two, upon whom the future of France hung, Saint-Simon is the chronicler of these great events, and philosophizes at length upon the tragedy. The death of the Dauphin and Dauphine was followed by the serious illness of their two sons and the death of the elder. In this cataclysm Madame is overcome with sympathy for the old King, and writes that she cannot look at him without tears coming into her eyes. She believes that the Dauphin died of grief, because they found his heart "withered and flat." Once more she was admitted freely to the King's private chamber, and tried to cheer him. She even softens toward Madame de Maintenon. Her own troubles are not light, and she writes bitter things of the régime of Madame de Berry, who was now first lady of the Court. Upon the death of the Duc de Berry, Madame reassumed the duties of first lady, and so in the turn of fortune's wheel her life extended from a quarter-century before the Rose of Savoy brightened the Court of France, through all the gay and tragic events, including the death of Louis XIV and the Regency of her son, until 1722. In all her grandeur and importance she retains her whimsical humor. In 1718 she laid a corner-stone, and says: "I had to give my blessing; that made me laugh—it's a fine thing, my blessing!" Upon the death of Madame de Maintenon, in 1719, Madame comments: "This morning I heard that the old Maintenon went round the corner yesterday between four and five in the evening. What a blessing if this had happened thirty and some years ago!" She was horrified at the wickedness of Paris under the Regency, and wondered that all France did not fall like Sodom and Gomorrah. She survived until the coronation, at Rheims, of Louis XV, in 1722, but the exertion of attendance upon that function was her death-blow.

She wrote five days before her death, "Thank God I am prepared to die, and I only pray for strength to die bravely." She had not seen the correspondent to

whom she wrote these lines for fifty-two years, but had long written to her by every mail.

"Well might Saint-Simon say of Madame, 'She was capable of tender and inviolable friendship.'"

Each of the three books carries its own claim to consideration, and taken together they offer unusual attractions. "A Rose of Savoy" is distinguished by the clear-sighted justice of historical statement known to the readers of Mr. H. Noel Williams's writings. His admirable style is warmed by a deep human interest. In "A Lady of the Old Régime" Mr.

Henderson gossips engagingly and gives intimate glimpses of his subject, carefully guarding against any revelation that might bring a blush to the cheek of the British matron. Arvède Barine presents a glowing picture of the times, touches her pages with her own individuality, and discloses much besides mere facts. She expresses opinions, draws conclusions, and gives impressions that add much of value to her work.

The illustrations in all the volumes are excellent; taken together, they form a representative gallery of the times of Louis XIV.

THE NEW BOOKS

The two concluding stanzas of the verses introducing Mrs. Roger A. Pryor's charming reminiscences are of the same constant and cheerful spirit that shines throughout the entire record. In "My Day: Reminiscences of a Long Life" the author does not enter into the especial detail given in a previous volume upon the Civil War times. She recalls a happy, free girlhood, surrounded by many congenial friends and relatives, too soon shadowed by the coming storm. The picture of old-time Southern society, while easily paralleled in Northern circles, is peculiarly attractive and somewhat more demure and religious than we might expect. The atmosphere of grave theological thought in which Mrs. Pryor grew up stimulated her naturally bright mind and gave strength to her convictions of right. She commands a witty pen. She has keen perception and a most lovely and loyal womanhood. While never hesitating to describe the sufferings inflicted by war upon women and children, she also recognizes them as an inseparable part of the evil. She dwells lightly upon privations, and her humor and courage brighten many a page that must have been painful living for her and her family. Her regard for Southern traditions was broadened beyond narrow provincial bounds by later knowledge of life. After the war she and her "General," with their children, began life anew in Brooklyn. She accepted her strange surroundings with cheerfulness, and lived for a while in an obscurity almost grotesque when contrasted with her prominence and the wide social circle she had enjoyed all her life. Her stories of domestic exigencies in Brooklyn are hardly less entertaining than those she relates of her Southern experiences during the war. As General Pryor established himself in the law and the family fortunes recovered, Mrs. Pryor naturally entered into the activities of

her position, and met many interesting people. Mrs. Botta, Charlotte Cushman, Helena Modjeska, besides many officers of the Northern army, came within her attractive influence. Bishop Potter presented her to General Sherman, and she declares she was so wrought upon by the awful presence that she exclaimed: "Oh! General Sherman! *Never* did I think I should find myself in the same boat with *you*!" He looked at her gravely for a moment and replied, "Now see here, I'm not as black as I am painted." He asked permission to call, and did so later. Of the Saint-Gaudens statue she says: "The angel may bear, to some eyes, a palm of victory and proclamation, 'Fame, honor, immortality, to him whom I lead.' To the eye of the Southerner the winged figure bears a rod, and the bronze lips a warning—'Beware!'" General and Mrs. Hancock and General and Mrs. Grant were her warm friends. She met General and Mrs. Sheridan at a reception given by Mrs. Grant, thinking, "If he can stand it, I can." She won the admiration of the little warrior who had kept her a prisoner in her rooms for ten days while he and his staff occupied her house in Petersburg. In more recent years Mrs. Pryor has been efficient in public benefactions, managing successfully several large enterprises for raising relief money. The whole book sparkles with wit and glows with true pathos. Mrs. Pryor is one of a noble group of loyal, intelligent, cultivated women of good birth, found in every part of our country in the early sixties and before, who reflect honor upon the social conditions of their day. (The Macmillan Company, New York. \$2.25.)

So exceptional and vivid a personality as that of the beautiful granddaughter of Richard Brinsley Sheridan might inspire the most perfunctory biographer; but *when*,