

# PIERRE DE BRANTÔME

THE BOOK OF THE LADIES

**Pierre Brantome**  
**The book of the ladies**

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*The book of the ladies Illustrious Dames: The Reign and Amours of the  
Bourbon Régime:*

# Содержание

INTRODUCTION. 1	4
DISCOURSE I.	31
DISCOURSE II.	54
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	91

# **The book of the ladies Illustrious Dames: The Reign and Amours of the Bourbon Régime**

## **INTRODUCTION. <sup>1</sup>**

THE title, “Vie des Dames Illustres,” given habitually to one volume of Brantôme’s Works, is not that which was chosen by its author. It was given by his first editor fifty years after his death; Brantôme himself having called his work “The Book of the Ladies.”

One of his earliest commentators, Castelnau, almost a cotemporary, says of him in his Memoirs: —

“Pierre de Bourdeille, Abbé de Brantôme, author of volumes of which I have availed myself in various parts of this history, used his quality as one of those warrior abbés who were called

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<sup>1</sup> Taken chiefly from the Essays preceding the various editions of Brantôme’s works published in the 18th and 19th centuries; some of which are anonymous; the more recent being those of M. H. Vignaud and M. Henri Moland. — Tr.

*Abbatès Milites* under the second race of our kings; never ceasing for all that to follow arms and the Court, where his services won him the Collar of the Order and the dignity of gentleman of the Bedchamber to the King.

“He frequented, with unusual esteem for his courage and intelligence, the principal Courts of Europe, such as Spain, Portugal (where the king honoured him with his Order), Scotland, and those of the Princes of Italy. He went to Malta, seeking an occasion to distinguish himself, and after that lost none in our wars of France. But, although he managed perfectly all the great captains of his time and belonged to them by alliance of friendship, fortune was ever contrary to him; so that he never obtained a position worthy, not of his merits only, but of a name so illustrious as his.

“It was this that made him of a rather bad humour in his retreat at Brantôme, where he set himself to compose his books in different frames of mind, according as the persons who recurred to his memory stirred his bile or touched his heart. It is to be wished that he had written a discourse on himself alone, like other seigneurs of his time. He would then have shown us much, if nothing were omitted in it; but perhaps he abstained from doing this in order not to declare his inclinations for the House of Lorraine at the very moment of the ruin of all its schemes; for he was greatly attached to that house, and it appears in various places that he had more respect than affection for the House of Bourbon. It was this that made him take part against the

Salic law, in behalf of Queen Marguerite, whom he esteemed infinitely, and whom he saw, with regret, deprived of the Crown of France.

“In many other matters he gives out sentiments which have more of the courtier than the abbé; indeed to be a courtier was his principal profession, as it still is with the greater part of the abbés of the present day; and in view of this quality we must pardon various little liberties which would be less pardonable in a sworn historian.

“I do not speak of the volume of the ‘*Dames Galantes*’ in order not to condemn the memory of a nobleman whose other Works have rendered him worthy of so much esteem; I attribute the crime of that book to the dissolute habits of the Court of his time, about which more terrible tales could be told than those he relates.

“There is something to complain of in the method with which he writes; but perhaps the name of ‘Notes’ may cover this defect. However that may be, we can gather from him much and very important knowledge on our History; and France is so indebted to him for this labour that I do not hesitate to say that the services of his sword must yield in value to those of his pen. He had much wit and was well read in Letters. In youth he was very pleasing; but I have heard those who knew him intimately say that the griefs of his old age lay heavier upon him than his arms, and were more displeasing than the toils and fatigues of war by sea or land. He regretted his past days, the loss of friends, and he saw nothing

that could equal the Court of the Valois, in which he was born and bred...”

“The family of Bourdeille is not only illustrious in temporal prosperities, but it is remarkable throughout antiquity for the valour of its ancestors. King Charlemagne held it in great esteem, which he showed by choosing, when the splendid abbey of Brantôme was founded in Périgord, that the Seigneur de Bourdeille should be associated in that pious work and be, with him, the founder of the Monastery. He therefore made him its patron, and obliged his posterity to defend it against all who might molest the monks and hinder them in the enjoyment of their property.

“If we may rely on ancient deeds [*pancartes*] still in possession of this family, we must accord it a first rank among those which claim to be descended from kings, inasmuch as they carry back its origin to Marcomir, King of France, and Tiloa Bourdelia, daughter of a king of England.

“The same old deeds relate that Nicanor, son of this Marcomir, being appealed to by the people of Aquitaine to assist them in throwing off the Roman yoke, and having come with an army very near to Bordeaux, was compelled to withdraw by the violence of the Romans, who were stronger than he, and also by a tempest that arose in the sea. Nicanor cast anchor at an island, uninhabited on account of the wild beasts that peopled it, and especially certain griffins, animals with four feet, and heads and wings like eagles.

“He had no sooner set foot on land with his men than he was forced to fight these monsters, and after battling with them a long time, not without loss of soldiers, he succeeded in vanquishing them. With his own hand he killed the largest and fiercest of them all, and cut off his paws. This victory greatly rejoiced all the neighbouring countries, which had suffered much damage from these beasts.

“On account of this affair, Nicanor was ever after surnamed ‘The Griffin’ and honoured by every one, like Hercules when he killed the Stymphalides in Arcadia, those birds of prey that feed on human flesh. This is the origin of the arms which the Seigneurs de Brantôme bear to this day, to wit: Or, two griffins’ paws gules, onglée azure, counter barred.”

Pierre de Bourdeille, third son of François, Vicomte de Bourdeille and Anne de Vivonne de la Châtaignerie, was born in the Périgord in 1537, under the reign of François I. The family of Bourdeille is one of the most ancient and respected in the Périgord, which province borders on Gascony and echoes, if we may say so, the caustic tongue and rambling, restless temperaments that flourish on the banks of the Garonne. “Not to boast of myself,” says Brantôme, “I can assert that none of my race have ever been home-keeping; they have spent as much time in travels and wars as any, no matter who they be, in France.”

As for his father, Brantôme gives an amusing account of him as a true Gascon seigneur. He began life by running away from home to go to the wars in Italy, and roam the world as an



adventurer. He was, says Brantôme, “a jovial fellow, who could say his word and talk familiarly to the greatest personages.” Pope Julius II. took a fancy to him. “One day they were playing cards together and the pope won from my father three hundred crowns and his horses, which were very fine, and all his equipments. After he had lost all, he said: ‘*Chadieu bénit!*’ (that was his oath when he was angry; when he was good-natured he swore: ‘*Chardon bénit!*’) – ‘*Chadieu bénit!* pope, play me five hundred crowns against one of my ears, redeemable in eight days. If I don’t redeem it I’ll give you leave to cut it off, and eat it if you like.’ The pope took him at his word; and confessed afterwards that if my father had not redeemed his ear, he would not have cut it off, but he would have forced him to keep him company. They began to play again, and fortune willed that my father won back everything except a fine courser, a pretty little Spanish horse, and a handsome mule. The pope cut short the game and would not play any more. My father said to him: ‘Hey! *Chadieu!* pope, leave me my horse for money’ (for he was very fond of him) ‘and keep the courser, who will throw you and break your neck, for he is too rough for you; and keep the mule too, and may she rear and break your leg!’ The pope laughed so he could not stop himself. At last, getting his breath, he cried out: ‘I’ll do better; I’ll give you back your two horses, but not the mule, and I’ll give you two other fine ones if you will keep me company as far as Rome and stay with me there two months; we’ll pass the time well, and it shall not cost you anything.’ My father answered: ‘*Chadieu!*

pope, if you gave me your mitre and your cap, too, I would not do it; I wouldn't quit my general and my companions just for your pleasure. Good-bye to you, rascal.' The pope laughed, while all the great captains, French and Italians, who always spoke so reverently to his Holiness, were amazed and laughed too at such liberty of language. When the pope was on the point of leaving, he said to him, 'Ask what you want of me and you shall have it,' thinking my father would ask for his horses; but my father did not ask anything, except for a license and dispensation to eat butter in Lent, for his stomach could never get accustomed to olive and nut oil. The pope gave it him readily, and sent him a bull, which was long to be seen in the archives of our house."

The young Pierre de Bourdeille spent the first years of his existence at the Court of Marguerite de Valois, sister of François I., to whom his mother was lady-in-waiting. After the death of that princess in 1549 he came to Paris to begin his studies, which he ended at Poitiers about the year 1556.

Being the youngest of the family he was destined if not for the Church at least for church benefices, which he never lacked through life. An elder brother, Captain de Bourdeille, a valiant soldier, having been killed at the siege of Hesdin by a cannon-ball which took off his head and the arm that held a glass of water he was drinking on the breach, King Henri II. desired, in recognition of so glorious a death, to do some favour to the Bourdeille family; and the abbey of Brantôme falling vacant at this very time, he gave it to the young Pierre de Bourdeille, then

sixteen years old, who henceforth bore the name of Seigneur and Abbé de Brantôme, abbreviated after a while to Brantôme, by which name he is known to posterity. In a few legal deeds of the period, especially family documents, he is mentioned as “the reverend father in God, the Abbé de Brantôme.”

Brantôme had possessed his abbey about a year when he began to dream of going to the wars in Italy; this was the high-road to glory for the young French nobles, ever since Charles VIII. had shown them the way. Brantôme obtained from François I. permission to cut timber in the forest of Saint-Trieix; this cut brought him in five hundred golden crowns, with which he departed in 1558, “bearing,” he says, “a matchlock arquebuse, a fine powder-horn from Milan, and mounted on a hackney worth a hundred crowns, followed by six or seven gentlemen, soldiers themselves, well set-up, armed and mounted the same, but on good stout nags.”

He went first to Geneva, and there he saw the Calvinist emigration; continuing his way he stayed at Milan and Ferrara, reaching Rome soon after the death of Paul IV. There he was welcomed by the Grand-Prior of France, François de Guise, who had brought his brother, the Cardinal of Lorraine, to assist in the election of a new pontiff.

This was the epoch of the Renaissance, – that epoch when the knightly king made all Europe resound with the fame of his amorous and warlike prowess; when Titian and Primaticcio were leaving on the walls of palaces their immortal handiwork; when

Jean Goujon was carving his figures on the fountains and the façades of the Louvre; when Rabelais was inciting that mighty roar of laughter which, in itself, is a whole human comedy; when the Marguerite of Marguerites was telling in her “Heptameron” those charming tales of love. François I. dies; his son succeeds him; Protestantism makes serious progress. Montgomery kills Henri II., and François II. ascends the throne only to live a year; and then it is that Marie Stuart leaves France, the tears in her eyes, sadly singing as the beloved shores over which she had reigned so short a while recede from sight: “Farewell, my pleasant land of France, farewell!”

Returning to France without any warrior fame but closely attached by this time to the Guises, Brantôme took to a Court life. He assisted in a tournament between the grand-prior, François de Guise, disguised as an Egyptian woman, “having on her arm a little monkey swaddled as an infant, which kept its baby face there is no telling how,” and M. de Nemours, dressed as a bourgeoisie housekeeper wearing at her belt more than a hundred keys attached to a thick silver chain. He witnessed the terrible scene of the execution of the Huguenot nobles at Amboise (March, 1560); was at Orléans when the Prince de Condé was arrested, and at Poissy for the reception of the Knights of Saint-Michel. In short, he was no more “home-keeping” in France than in foreign parts.

Charles IX., then about ten years old, succeeded his brother François II. in December, 1560. The following year Duc

François de Guise was commissioned to escort his niece, Marie Stuart, to Scotland. Brantôme went with them, saw the threatening reception given to the queen by her sullen subjects, and then returned with the duke by way of England. In London, Queen Elizabeth greeted them most graciously, deigning to dance more than once with Duc François, to whom she said: "Monsieur mon prieur" (that was how she called him) "I like you very much, but not your brother, who tore my town of Calais from me."

Brantôme returned to France at the moment when the edict of Saint-Germain granting to Protestants the exercise of their religion was promulgated, and he was struck by the change of aspect presented by the Court and the whole nation. The two armed parties were face to face; the Calvinists, scarcely escaped from persecution, seemed certain of approaching triumph; the Prince de Condé, with four hundred gentlemen, escorted the preachers to Charenton through the midst of a quivering population. "Death to papists!" – the very cry Brantôme had first heard on landing in Scotland, where it sounded so ill to his ears – was beginning to be heard in France, to which the cry of "Death to the Huguenots!" responded in the breasts of an irritated populace. Brantôme did not hesitate as to the side he should take, – he was abbé, and attached to the Guises; he fought through the war with them, took part in the sieges of Blois, Bourges, and Rouen, was present at the battle of Dreux, where he lost his protector the grand-prior, and attached himself

henceforth to François de Guise, the elder, whom he followed to the siege of Orléans in 1563, where the duke was assassinated by Poltrot de Méré under circumstances which Brantôme has vividly described in his chapter on that great captain.

In 1564 Brantôme entered the household of the Duc d'Anjou (afterwards Henri III.) as gentleman-in-waiting to the prince, on a salary of six hundred livres a year. But, being seized again by his passion for distant expeditions, he engaged during the same year in an enterprise conducted by Spaniards against the Emperor of Morocco, and went with the troops of Don Garcia of Toledo to besiege and take the towns on the Barbary coast. He returned by way of Lisbon, pleased the king of Portugal, Sebastiano, who conferred upon him his Order of the Christ, and went from there to Madrid, where Queen Élisabeth gave him the cordial welcome on which he plumes himself in his Discourse upon that princess. He was commissioned by her to carry to her mother, Catherine de' Medici, the desire she felt to have an interview with her; which interview took place at Bayonne, Brantôme not failing to be present.

In that same year, 1565, Sultan Suleiman attacked the island of Malta. The grand-master of the Knights of Saint-John, Parisot de La Valette, called for the help of all Christian powers. The French government had treaties with the Ottoman Porte which did not allow it to come openly to the assistance of the Knights; but many gentlemen, both Catholic and Protestant, took part as volunteers. Among them went Brantôme, naturally. "We were,"

he says, "about three hundred gentlemen and eight hundred soldiers. M. de Strozzi and M. de Bussac were with us, and to them we deferred our own wills. It was only a little troop, but as active and valiant as ever left France to fight the Infidel."

While at Malta he seems to have had a fancy to enter the Order of the Knights of Saint-John, but Philippe Strozzi dissuaded him. "He gave me to understand," says Brantôme, "that I should do wrong to abandon the fine fortune that awaited me in France, whether from the hand of my king, or from that of a beautiful, virtuous lady, and rich, to whom I was just then servant and welcome guest, so that I had hope of marrying her."

He left Malta on a galley of the Order, intending to go to Naples, according to a promise he had made to the "beautiful and virtuous lady," the Marchesa del Vasto. But a contrary wind defeated his project, which he did not renounce without regret. In after years he considered this mischance a strong feature in his unfortunate destiny. "It was possible," he says, "that by means of Mme. la marquise I might have encountered good luck, either by marriage or otherwise, for she did me the kindness to love me. But I believe that my unhappy fate was resolved to bring me back to France, where never did fortune smile upon me; I have always been duped by vain expectations: I have received much honour and esteem, but of property and rank, none at all. Companions of mine who would have been proud had I deigned to speak to them at Court or in the chamber of the king or queen, have long been advanced before me; I see them round as pumpkins and highly

exalted, though I will not, for all that, defer to them to the length of my thumb-nail. That proverb, 'No one is a prophet in his own country,' was made for me. If I had served foreign sovereigns as I have my own I should now be as loaded with wealth and dignities as I am with sorrows and years. Patience! if Fate has thus woven my days, I curse her! If my princes have done it, I send them all to the devil, if they are not there already."

But when he started from Malta Brantôme was still young, being then only twenty-eight years of age. "Jogging, meandering, vagabondizing," as he says, he reached Venice; there he thought of going into Hungary in search of the Turks, whom he had not been able to meet in Malta. But the death of Sultan Suleiman stopped the invasion for one year at least, and Brantôme reluctantly decided to return to France, passing through Piedmont, where he gave a proof of his disinterestedness, which he relates in his sketch of Marguerite, Duchesse de Savoie.

Reaching his own land he found the war he had been so far to seek without encountering it; whereupon he recruited a company of foot-soldiers, and took part in the third civil war with the title of commander of two companies, though in fact there was but one. Shortly after this he resigned his command to serve upon the staff of Monsieur, commander-in-chief of the royal army. After the battle of Jarnac (March 15, 1569), being sick of an intermittent fever, he retired to his abbey, where his presence throughout the troubles was far from useless. But always more eager for distant expeditions than for the dulness of civil war,



Brantôme let himself be tempted by a grand project of Maréchal Strozzi, who dreamed of nothing less than a descent on South America and the conquest of Peru. Brantôme was commissioned in 1571 to go to the port of Brouage and direct the preparations for the armament. It was this enterprise that prevented him from being present at the battle of Lepanto (October 7, 1571). "I should have gone there resolutely, as did that brave M. de Grillon," he says, "if it had not been for M. de Strozzi, who amused me a whole year with that fine embarkation at Brouage, which ended in nothing but the ruin of our purses, – to those of us at least who owned the vessels." But if the duties which kept him at Brouage robbed him of the glory of being present at the greatest battle of the age, it also saved him from being a witness of the Saint Bartholomew.

The treaty of June 24, 1573, put an end to the siege of Rochelle and the fourth civil war. Charles IX. died on May 30, 1574. Monsieur, elected the year before to the throne of Poland, was in that distant country when the death of his brother made him king of France. He hastened to return. Brantôme went to meet him at Lyons and was one of the gentlemen of his Bedchamber from 1575 to 1583. During the years just passed Brantôme, besides the principal events already named in which he participated, took part in various little or great events in the daily life of the Court, such as: the quarrel of Sussy and Saint-Fal, the splendid disgrace of Bussy d'Amboise, the death and obsequies of Charles IX., the coronation of Henri III., etc.

Throughout them all he played the part of interested spectator, of active supernumerary without importance; discontented at times and sulky, but always unable to make himself feared.

The years went by in this sterile round. He was now thirty-five years old. The hope of a great fortune was realized no more on the side of his king than on that of his beautiful, virtuous, and rich lady. He is, no doubt, "liked, known, and made welcome by the kings, his masters, by his queens and his princesses, and all the great seigneurs, who held him in such esteem that the name of Brantôme had great renown." But he is not satisfied with the Court small-change in which his services are paid. He is vexed that his own lightheartedness is taken at its word; he would be very glad indeed if that love of liberty with which he decked himself were put to greater trials. Philosopher in spite of himself, he finds his disappointments all the more painful because of his own opinion of his merits. He sees men to whom he believes himself superior, preferred before him. "His companions, not equal to him," he says in the epitaph he composed for himself, "surpassed him in benefits received, in promotions and ranks, but never in virtue or in merit." And he adds, with posthumous resignation: "God be praised nevertheless for all, and for his sacred mercy!"

Meantime, perchance a queen, Catherine de' Medici or Marguerite de Valois, deigns to drop into his ear some trifling word which he relishes with delight. Henri de Guise [le Balafré], who was ten years younger than himself, called him "my son;"

and the Baron de Montesquieu, the one that killed the Prince de Condé at Jarnac and was very much older than Brantôme, who had pulled him out of the water during certain aquatic games on the Seine, called him “father.” Such were the familiarities with which he was treated.

He was, it is true, chevalier of the Order of Saint-Michel, but that was not enough to console his ambition. He complained that they degraded that honour, no longer reserved to the nobility of the sword. He thinks it bad, for instance, that it was granted to his neighbour, Michel de Montaigne. “We have seen,” he says, “counsellors coming from the courts of parliament, abandoning robes and the square cap to drag a sword behind them, and at once the king decks them with the collar, without any pretext of their going to war. This is what was given to the Sieur de Montaigne, who would have done much better to continue to write his Essays instead of changing his pen into a sword, which does not suit him. The Marquis de Trans obtained the Order very easily from the king for one of his neighbours, no doubt in derision, for he is a great joker.” Brantôme always speaks very slightly of Montaigne because the latter was of lesser nobility than his own; but that does not prevent the Sieur de Montaigne from being to our eyes a much greater man than the Seigneur de Brantôme.

Brantôme continued to follow the Court. He accompanied the queen-mother when she went in 1576 to Poitou to bring back the Duc d’Alençon, who was dabbling in plots. He accompanied

her again when she conducted in 1578 her daughter Marguerite to Navarre; and at their solemn entry into Bordeaux he had the honour of being near them on the “scaffold,” or, as we should say in the present day, the platform. He had also the luck to hear at Saint-Germain-en-Laye King Henri III. make during his dinner, in presence of the Duc de Joyeuse (on whose nuptials the fluent monarch was destined to spend a million), a discourse worthy of Cato against luxury and extravagance.

In 1582, his elder brother, André de Bourdeille, seneschal and governor of the Périgord, died. He left a son scarcely nine years old. Brantôme had obtained from King Henri III. a promise that he should hold those offices until the majority of his nephew, on condition of transmitting them at that time. The king confirmed this promise on several occasions during the last illness of André de Bourdeille. But at the latter's death it was discovered that he had bound himself in his daughter's marriage contract to resign those offices to his son-in-law. The king considered that he ought to respect this family arrangement. Brantôme was keenly hurt. “On the second day of the year,” he says, “as the king was returning from his ceremony of the Saint-Esprit, I made my complaint to him, more in anger than to implore him, as he well understood. He made me excuses, although he was my king. Among other reasons he said plainly that he could not refuse that resignation when presented to him, or he should be unjust. I made him no reply, except: ‘Well, sire, I ought not to have put faith in you; a good reason never to serve you again as I have

served you.’ On which I went away much vexed. I met several of my companions, to whom I related everything. I protested and swore that if I had a thousand lives not one would I employ for a King of France. I cursed my luck, I cursed life, I loathed the king’s favour, I despised with a curling lip those beggarly fellows loaded with royal favours who were in no wise as worthy of them as I. Hanging to my belt was the gilt key to the king’s bedroom; I unfastened it and flung it from the Quai des Augustins, where I stood, into the river below. I never again entered the king’s room; I abhorred it, and I swore never to set foot in it any more. I did not, however, cease to frequent the Court and to show myself in the room of the queen, who did me the honour to like me, and in those of her ladies and maids of honour and of the princesses, seigneurs, and princes, my good friends. I talked aloud about my displeasure, so that the king, hearing of what I said, sent me a few words by M. du Halde, his head *valet de chambre*. I contented myself with answering that I was the king’s most obedient, and said no more.”

Monsieur (the Duc d’Alençon) took notice of Brantôme, and made him his chamberlain. About this time it was that he began to compose for this prince the “Discourses” afterwards made into a book and called “Vies des Dames Galantes,” which he dedicated to the Duc d’Alençon. The latter died in 1584, – a loss that dashed once more the hopes of Brantôme and of others who, like him, had pinned their faith upon that prince. After all, Brantôme had some reason to complain of his evil star.

Then it was that Brantôme meditated vast and even criminal projects, which he himself has revealed to us: "I resolved to sell the little property I possessed in France and go off and serve that great King of Spain, very illustrious and noble remunerator of services rendered to him, not compelling his servitors to importune him, but done of his own free will and wise opinion, and out of just consideration. Whereupon I reflected and ruminated within myself that I was able to serve him well; for there is not a harbour nor a seaport from Picardy to Bayonne that I do not know perfectly, except those of Bretagne which I have not seen; and I know equally well all the weak spots on the coast of Languedoc from Grasse to Provence. To make myself sure of my facts, I had recently made a new tour to several of the towns, pretending to wish to arm a ship and send it on a voyage, or go myself. In fact, I had played my game so well that I had discovered half a dozen towns on these coasts easy to capture on their weak sides, which I knew then and which I still know. I therefore thought I could serve the King of Spain in these directions so well that I might count on obtaining the reward of great wealth and dignities. But before I banished myself from France I proposed to sell my estates and put the money in a bank of Spain or Italy. I also proposed, and I discoursed of it to the Comte de La Rochefoucauld, to ask leave of absence from the king that I might not be called a deserter, and to be relieved of my oath as a subject in order to go wherever I should find myself better off than in his kingdom. I believe he could not have refused

my request; because everyone is free to change his country and choose another. But however that might be, if he had refused me I should have gone all the same, neither more nor less like a valet who is angry with his master and wants to leave him; if the latter will not give him leave to go, it is not reprehensible to take it and attach himself to another master.”

Thus reasoned Brantôme. He returns on several occasions to these lawless opinions; he argues, apropos of the Connétable de Bourbon and La Noue, against the scruples of those who are willing to leave their country, but not to take up arms against her. “I’faith!” he cries, “here are fine, scrupulous philosophers! Their quartan fevers! While I hold shyly back, pray who will feed me? Whereas if I bare my sword to the wind it will give me food and magnify my fame.”

Such ideas were current in those days among the nobles, in whom the patriotic sentiment, long subordinated to that of caste, was only developed later. These projects of treachery should therefore not be judged altogether with the severity of modern ideas. Besides, Brantôme is working himself up; it does not belong to every one to produce such grand disasters as these he meditates. Moreover, thought is far from action; events may intervene. People call them fate or chance, but chance will often simply aid the secret impulses of conscience, and bind our will to that it chooses.

“Fine human schemes I made!” Brantôme resumes. “On the very point of their accomplishment the war of the League broke

out and troubled things in such a way that no one would buy lands, for every man had trouble enough to keep what he owned, neither would he strip himself of money. Those who had promised to buy my property excused themselves. To go to foreign parts without resources was madness, – it would only have exposed me to all sorts of misery; I had too much experience to commit that folly. To complete the destruction of my designs, one day, at the height of my vigor and jollity, a miserable horse, whose white skin might have warned me of nothing good, reared and fell over upon me breaking and crushing my loins, so that for four years I lay in my bed, maimed, impotent in every limb, unable to turn or move without torture and all the agony in the world; and since then my health has never been what it once was. Thus man proposes, and God disposes. God does all things for the best! It is possible that if I had realized my plans I should have done more harm to my country than the renegade of Algiers did to his; and because of it, I might have been perpetually cursed of God and man.”

Consequently, this great scheme remained a dream; no one need ever have known anything about it if Brantôme himself had not taken pains to inform us of it with much complacency.

The cruel fall which stopped his guilty projects must have occurred in 1585. At the end of three years and a half of suffering he met, he tells us, “with a very great personage and operator, called M. Saint-Christophe, whom God raised up for my good and cure, who succeeded in relieving me after many



other doctors had failed.” As soon as he was nearly well he began once more to travel. It does not appear that he frequented the Court after the death of Catherine de’ Medici, which took place in January, 1589; but he was present, in that year, at the baptism of the posthumous son of Henri de Guise, whom the Parisians adopted after the father’s murder at Blois, and named *Paris*. Agrippa d’Aubigné, in his caricature of the Procession of the League, gives Brantôme a small place as bearer of bells. But was he really there? It seems doubtful; he makes somewhere the judicious reflection that: “One may well be surprised that so many French nobles put themselves on the side of the League, for if it had got the upper hand it is very certain that the clergy would have deprived them of church property and wiped their lips forever of it, which result would have cut the wings of their extravagance for a very long while.” The secular Abbé de Brantôme had therefore as good reasons for not being a Leaguer as for not being a Huguenot.

In 1590 he went to make his obeisance to Marguerite, Queen of Navarre, then confined in the Château d’Usson in Auvergne. He presented to her his “discourse” on “Spanish Rhodomontades,” perhaps also a first copy of the life of that princess (which appears in this volume), and he also showed her the titles of the other books he had composed. He was so enchanted with the greeting Queen Marguerite, la Reine Margot, gave him, “the sole remaining daughter of the noble house of France, the most beautiful, most noble, grandest, most

generous, most magnanimous, and most accomplished princess in the world” (when Brantôme praises he does not do it by halves), that he promised to dedicate to her the entire collection of his works, – a promise he faithfully fulfilled.

His health, now decidedly affected, confined more and more to his own home this indefatigable rover, who had, as he said, “the nature of a minstrel who prefers the house of others to his own.” Condemned to a sedentary life, he used his activity as he could. He caused to be built the noble castle of Richemont, with much pains and at great expense. He grew quarrelsome and litigious; brought suits against his relations, against his neighbours, against his monks, whom he accused of ingratitude. By his will he bequeathed his lawsuits to his heirs, and forbade each and all to compromise them.

Difficult to live with, soured, dissatisfied with the world, he was not, it would seem, in easy circumstances. He did not spare posterity the recital of his complaints: “Favours, grandeurs, boasts, and vanities, all the pleasant things of the good old days are gone like the wind. Nothing remains to me but to *have been* all that; sometimes that memory pleases me, and sometimes it vexes me. Nearing a decrepit old age, the worst of all woes, nearing, too, a poverty which cannot be cured as in our flourishing years when nought is impossible, repenting me a hundred thousand times for the fine extravagances I committed in other days, and regretting I did not save enough then to support me now in feeble age, when I lack all of which I once possessed too much, – I see, with a

bursting heart, an infinite number of paltry fellows raised to rank and riches, while Fortune, treacherous and blind that she is, feeds me on air and then deserts and mocks me. If she would only put me quickly into the hands of death I would still forgive her the wrongs she has done me. But there is the worst of it; we can neither live nor die as we wish. Therefore, let destiny do as it will, never shall I cease to curse it from heart and lip. And worst of all do I detest old age weighed down by poverty. As the queen-mother said to me one day when I had the honour to speak to her on this subject about another person, ‘Old age brings us inconveniences enough without the additional burden of poverty; the two united are the height of misery, against which there is one only sovereign cure, and that is death. Happy he who finds it when he reaches fifty-six, for after that our life is but labour and sorrow, and we eat but the bread of ashes, as saith the prophet.’”

He continued, however, to write, retracing all that he had seen and garnered either while making his campaigns with the great captains of his time, or in gossiping with idle gentlemen in the halls of the Louvre. It was thus he composed his biographical and anecdotal volumes, which he retouched and rewrote at intervals, making several successive copies. That he had the future of his writings much at heart, in spite of a scornful air of indifference which he sometimes assumed, appears very plainly from the following clause in his will:

“I will,” he says, “and I expressly charge my heirs to cause to be printed my Books, which I have composed from my mind and

invention with great toil and trouble, written by my hand, and transcribed clearly by that of Mataud, my hired secretary; the which will be found in five volumes covered with velvet, black, tan, green, blue, and a large volume, which is that of 'The Ladies,' covered with green velvet, and another covered with vellum and gilded thereon, which is that of 'The Rhodomontades.' They will be found in one of my wicker trunks, carefully protected. Fine things will be found in them, such as tales, discourses, histories, and witticisms; which no one can disdain, it seems to me, if once they are placed under his nose and eyes. In order to have them printed according to my fancy, I charge with that purpose Madame la Comtesse de Duretal, my dear niece, or some other person she may choose. And to do this I order that enough be taken from my whole property to pay the costs of the said printing, and my heirs are not to divide or use my property until this printing is provided for. It is not probable that it will cost much; for the printers, when they cast their eyes upon the books, would pay to print them instead of exacting money; for they do print many gratis that are not worth as much as mine. I can boast of this; for I have shown them, at least in part, to several among that trade, who offered to print them for nothing. But I do not choose that they be printed during my life. Above all, I will that the said printing be in fine, large letters, in a great volume to make the better show, with license from the king, who will give it readily; or without license, if that can be. Care must also be taken that the printer does not put on another name than mine;

otherwise I shall be frustrated of all my trouble and of the fame that is my due. I also will that the first book that issues from the press shall be given as a gift, well bound and covered in velvet, to Queen Marguerite, my very illustrious mistress, who did me the honour to read some of my writings, and who thought them fine and esteemed them.”

This will was made about the year 1609. On the 15th of July, 1614, Brantôme died, after living his last years in complete oblivion; he was buried, according to his wishes, in the chapel of his château of Richemont. In spite of his express directions, neither the Comtesse de Duretal nor any other of his heirs executed the clause in his will relating to the publication of his works. Possibly they feared it might create some scandal, or it may be that they could not obtain the royal license. The manuscripts remained in the château of Richemont. Little by little, as time went on, they attracted attention; copies were made which found their way to the cabinets and libraries of collectors. They were finally printed in Holland; and the first volume, which appeared in Leyden from the press of Jean Sambix the younger, sold by F. Foppons, Brussels, 1665, was that which here follows: “The Book of the Ladies,” called by the publisher, not by Brantôme, “Lives of Illustrious Dames.”

It is not easy to distinguish the exact periods at which Brantôme wrote his works. “The Book of the Ladies,” first and second parts, —*Dames Illustres and Dames Galantes*, — were evidently the first written; then followed “The Lives of Great and

Illustrious French Captains,” “Lives of Great Foreign Captains,” “Anecdotes concerning Duels,” “The Rhodomontades,” and “Spanish Oaths.” Brantôme did not write his Memoirs, properly so-called; his biographical facts and incidents are scattered throughout the above-named volumes.

The following translation of the “Book of the Ladies” does not pretend to imitate Brantôme’s style. To do so would seem an affectation in English, and attract attention to itself which it is always desirable to avoid in translating. Wherever a few of Brantôme’s quaint turns of phrase are given, it is only as they fall naturally into English.

# DISCOURSE I.

## ANNE DE BRETAGNE, QUEEN OF FRANCE

INASMUCH as I must speak of ladies, I do not choose to speak of former dames, of whom the histories are full; that would be blotting paper in vain, for enough has been written about them, and even the great Boccaccio has made a fine book solely on that subject [*De claris mulieribus*].

I shall begin therefore with our queen, Anne de Bretagne, the most worthy and honourable queen that has ever been since Queen Blanche, mother of the King Saint-Louis, and very sage and virtuous.

This Queen Anne was the rich heiress of the duchy of Bretagne, which was held to be one of the finest of Christendom, and for that reason she was sought in marriage by the greatest persons. M. le Duc d'Orléans, afterwards King Louis XII., in his young days courted her, and did for her sake his fine feats of arms in Bretagne, and even at the battle of Saint Aubin, where he was taken prisoner fighting on foot at the head of his infantry. I have heard say that this capture was the reason why he did not espouse her then; for thereon intervened Maximilian, Duke of Austria, since emperor, who married her by the proxy of his uncle the Prince of Orange in the great church at Nantes. But

King Charles VIII., having advised with his council that it was not good to have so powerful a seigneur encroach and get a footing in his kingdom, broke off a marriage that had been settled between himself and Marguerite of Flanders, took the said Anne from Maximilian, her affianced, and wedded her himself; so that every one conjectured thereon that a marriage thus made would be luckless in issue.

Now if Anne was desired for her property, she was as much so for her virtues and merits; for she was beautiful and agreeable; as I have heard say by elderly persons who knew her, and according to her portrait, which I have seen from life; resembling in face the beautiful Demoiselle de Châteauneuf, who has been so renowned at the Court for her beauty; and that is sufficient to tell the beauty of Queen Anne as I have heard it portrayed to the queen-mother [Catherine de' Medici].

Her figure was fine and of medium height. It is true that one foot was shorter than the other the least in the world; but this was little perceived, and hardly to be noticed, so that her beauty was not at all spoilt by it; for I myself have seen very handsome women with that defect who yet were extreme in beauty, like Mme. la Princesse de Condé, of the house of Longueville.

So much for the beauty of the body of this queen. That of her mind was no less, because she was very virtuous, wise, honourable, pleasant of speech, and very charming and subtile in wit. She had been taught and trained by Mme. de Laval, an able and accomplished lady, appointed her governess by her father,



Duc François. For the rest, she was very kind, very merciful, and very charitable, as I have heard my own folks say. True it is, however, that she was quick in vengeance and seldom pardoned whoever offended her maliciously; as she showed to the Maréchal de Gié for the affront he put upon her when the king, her lord and husband, lay ill at Blois and was held to be dying. She, wishing to provide for her wants in case she became a widow, caused three or four boats to be laden on the River Loire with all her precious articles, furniture, jewels, rings and money, – and sent them to her city and château of Nantes. The said marshal, meeting these boats between Saumur and Nantes, ordered them stopped and seized, being much too wishful to play the good officer and servant of the Crown. But fortune willed that the king, through the prayers of his people, to whom he was indeed a true father, escaped with his life.

The queen, in spite of this luck, did not abstain from her vengeance, and having well brewed it, she caused the said marshal to be driven from Court. It was then that having finished a fine house at La Verger, he retired there, saying that the rain had come just in time to let him get under shelter in the beautiful house so recently built. But this banishment from Court was not all; through great researches which she caused to be made wherever he had been in command, it was discovered he had committed great wrongs, extortions and pillages, to which all governors are given; so that the marshal, having appealed to the courts of parliament, was summoned before that of Toulouse,

which had long been very just and equitable, and not corrupt. There, his suit being viewed, he was convicted. But the queen did not wish his death, because, she said, death is a cure for all pains and woes, and being dead he would be too happy; she wished him to live as degraded and low as he had been great; so that he might, from the grandeur and height where he had been, live miserably in troubles, pains, and sadness, which would do him a hundred-fold more harm than death, for death lasted only a day, and mayhap only an hour, whereas his languishing would make him die daily.

Such was the vengeance of this brave queen. One day she was so angry against M. d'Orléans that she could not for a long time be appeased. It was in this wise: the death of her son, M. le dauphin, having happened, King Charles, her husband, and she were in such despair that the doctors, fearing the debility and feeble constitution of the king, were alarmed lest such grief should do injury to his health; so they counselled the king to amuse himself, and the princes of the Court to invent new pastimes, games, dances, and mummeries in order to give pleasure to the king and queen; the which M. d'Orléans having undertaken, he gave at the Château d'Amboise a masquerade and dance, at which he did such follies and danced so gayly, as was told and read, that the queen, believing he felt this glee because, the dauphin being dead, he knew himself nearer to be King of France, was extremely angered, and showed him such displeasure that he was forced to escape from Amboise, where the Court then was,

and go to his château of Blois. Nothing can be blamed in this queen except the sin of vengeance, – if vengeance is a sin, – because otherwise she was beautiful and gentle, and had many very laudable sides.

When the king, her husband, went to the kingdom of Naples [1494], and so long as he was there, she knew very well how to govern the kingdom of France with those whom the king had given to assist her; but she always kept her rank, her grandeur, and supremacy, and insisted, young as she was, on being trusted; and she made herself trusted, so that nothing was ever found to say against her.

She felt great regret for the death of King Charles [in 1498], as much for the friendship she bore him as for seeing herself henceforth but half a queen, having no children. And when her most intimate ladies, as I have been told on good authority, pitied her for being the widow of so great a king, and unable to return to her high estate, – for King Louis [the Duc d'Orléans, her first lover] was then married to Jeanne de France, – she replied she would “rather be the widow of a king all her life than debase herself to a less than he; but still, she was not so despairing of happiness that she did not think of again being Queen of France, as she had been, if she chose.” Her old love made her say so; she meant to relight it in the bosom of him in whom it was yet warm. And so it happened; for King Louis [XII.], having repudiated Jeanne, his wife, and never having lost his early love, took her in marriage, as we have seen and read. So here was

her prophecy accomplished; she having founded it on the nature of King Louis, who could not keep himself from loving her, all married as she was, but looked with a tender eye upon her, being still Duc d'Orléans; for it is difficult to quench a great fire when once it has seized the soul.

He was a handsome prince and very amiable, and she did not hate him for that. Having taken her, he honoured her much, leaving her to enjoy her property and her duchy without touching it himself or taking a single louis; but she employed it well, for she was very liberal. And because the king made immense gifts, to meet which he must have levied on his people, which he shunned like the plague, she supplied his deficiencies; and there were no great captains of the kingdom to whom she did not give pensions, or make extraordinary presents of money or of thick gold chains when they went upon a journey; and she even made little presents according to quality; everybody ran to her, and few came away discontented. Above all, she had the reputation of loving her domestic servants, and to them she did great good.

She was the first queen to hold a great Court of ladies, such as we have seen from her time to the present day. Her suite was very large of ladies and young girls, for she refused none; she even inquired of the noblemen of her Court whether they had daughters, and what they were, and asked to have them brought to her. I had an aunt de Bourdeille who had the honour of being brought up by her [Louise de Bourdeille, maid of honour to Queen Anne in 1494]; but she died at Court, aged fifteen

years, and was buried behind the great altar of the church of the Franciscans in Paris. I saw the tomb and its inscription before that church was burned [in 1580.]

Queen Anne's Court was a noble school for ladies; she had them taught and brought up wisely; and all, taking pattern by her, made themselves wise and virtuous. Because her heart was great and lofty she wanted guards, and so formed a second band of a hundred gentlemen, – for hitherto there was only one; and the greater part of the said new guard were Bretons, who never failed, when she left her room to go to mass or to promenade, to await her on that little terrace at Blois, still called the Breton perch, "La Perche aux Bretons," she herself having named it so by saying when she saw them: "Here are my Bretons on their perch, awaiting me."

You may be sure that she did not lay by her money, but employed it well on all high things.

She it was, who built, out of great superbness, that fine vessel and mass of wood, called "La Cordelière," which attacked so furiously in mid-ocean the "Regent of England;" grappling to her so closely that both were burned and nothing escaped, – not the people, nor anything else that was in them, so that no news was ever heard of them on land; which troubled the queen very much.<sup>2</sup>

The king honoured her so much that one day, it being reported to him that the law clerks at the Palais [de Justice] and the

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix.

students also were playing games in which there was talk of the king, his Court, and all the great people, he took no other notice than to say they needed a pastime, and he would let them talk of him and his Court, though not licentiously; but as for the queen, his wife, they should not speak of her in any way whatsoever; if they did he would have them hanged. Such was the honour he bore her.

Moreover, there never came to his Court a foreign prince or an ambassador that, after having seen and listened to them, he did not send them to pay their reverence to the queen; wishing the same respect to be shown to her as to him; and also, because he recognized in her a great faculty for entertaining and pleasing great personages, as, indeed, she knew well how to do; taking much pleasure in it herself; for she had very good and fine grace and majesty in greeting them, and beautiful eloquence in talking with them. Sometimes, amid her French speech, she would, to make herself more admired, mingle a few foreign words, which she had learned from M. de Grignaux, her chevalier of honour, who was a very gallant man who had seen the world, and was accomplished and knew foreign languages, being thereby very pleasant good company, and agreeable to meet. Thus it was that one day, Queen Anne having asked him to teach her a few words of Spanish to say to the Spanish ambassador, he taught her in joke a little indecency, which she quickly learned. The next day, while awaiting the ambassador, M. de Grignaux told the story to the king, who thought it good, understanding his gay and lively

humour. Nevertheless he went to the queen, and told her all, warning her to be careful not to use those words. She was in such great anger, though the king only laughed, that she wanted to dismiss M. de Grignaux, and showed him her displeasure for several days. But M. de Grignaux made her such humble excuses, telling her that he only did it to make the king laugh and pass his time merrily, and that he was not so ill-advised as to fail to warn the king in time that he might, as he really did, warn her before the arrival of the ambassador; so that on these excuses and the entreaties of the king she was pacified.

Now, if the king loved and honoured her living, we may believe that, she being dead, he did the same. And to manifest the mourning that he felt, the superb and honourable funeral and obsequies that he ordered for her are proof; the which I have read of in an old "History of France" that I found lying about in a closet in our house, nobody caring for it; and having gathered it up, I looked at it. Now as this is a matter that should be noted, I shall put it here, word for word as the book says, without changing anything; for though it is old, the language is not very bad; and as for the truth of the book, it has been confirmed to me by my grandmother, Mme. la Seneschale de Poitou, of the family du Lude, who was then at the Court. The book relates it thus: —

"This queen was an honourable and virtuous queen, and very wise, the true mother of the poor, the support of gentlemen, the haven of ladies, damoiselles, and honest girls, and the refuge of learned men; so that all the people of France cannot surfeit

themselves enough in deploring and regretting her.

“She died at the castle of Blois on the twenty-first of January, in the year 1513, after the accomplishment of a thing she had most desired, namely: the union of the king, her lord, with the pope and the Roman Church, abhorring as she did schism and divisions. For that reason she had never ceased urging the king to this step, for which she was as much loved and greatly revered by the Catholic princes and prelates as the king had been hated.

“I have seen at Saint-Denis a grand church cope, all covered with pearls embroidered, which she had ordered to be made expressly to send as a present to the pope, but death prevented. After her decease her body remained for three days in her room, the face uncovered, and nowise changed by hideous death, but as beautiful and agreeable as when living.

“Friday, the twenty-seventh of the month of January, her body was taken from the castle, very honourably accompanied by all the priests and monks of the town, borne by persons wearing mourning, with hoods over their heads, accompanied by twenty-four torches larger than the other torches borne by twenty-four officers of the household of the said lady, on each of which were two rich armorial escutcheons bearing the arms emblazoned of the said lady. After these torches came the reverend seigneurs and prelates, bishops, abbés, and M. le Cardinal de Luxembourg to read the office; and thus was removed the body of the said lady from the Château de Blois...

“Septuagesima Sunday, twelfth of February, they arrived at



the church of Notre-Dame des Champs in the suburbs of Paris, and there the body was guarded two nights with great quantities of lights; and on the following Tuesday, the devout services having been read, there marched before the body processions with the crosses of all the churches and all the monasteries of Paris, the whole University in a body, the presidents and counsellors of the sovereign court of Parliament, and generally of all other courts and jurisdictions, officers and advocates, merchants and citizens, and other lesser officers of the town. All these accompanied the said body reverentially, with the very noble seigneurs and ladies aforementioned, just as they started from Blois, all keeping fine order among themselves according to their several ranks... And thus was borne through Paris, in the order and manner above, the body of the queen to be sepulchred in the pious church of Saint-Denis of France; preceded by these processions to a cross which is not far beyond the place where the fair of Landit is held.

“And to the spot where stands the cross the reverend father in God, the abbé, and the venerable monks, with the priests of the churches and parishes of Saint-Denis, vested in their great copes, with their crosses, came in procession, together with the peasants and the inhabitants of the said town, to receive the body of the late queen, which was then borne to the door of the church of Saint-Denis, still accompanied honourably by all the above-named very noble princes and princesses, seigneurs, dames, and damoiselles, and their train as already stated...

“And all being duly accomplished, the body of the said lady, Madame Anne, in her lifetime very noble Queen of France, Duchesse of Bretagne, and Comtesse d’Étampes, was honourably interred and sepulchred in the tomb for her prepared.

“After this, the herald-at-arms for Bretagne summoned all the princes and officers of the said lady, to wit: the chevalier of honour, the grand-master of the household, and others, each and all, to fulfil their duty towards the said body, which they did most piteously, shedding tears from their eyes. And, this done, the aforementioned king-at-arms cried three times aloud in a most piteous voice: ‘The very Christian Queen of France, Duchesse de Bretagne, our Sovereign Lady, is dead!’ And then all departed. The body remained entombed.

“During her life and after her death she was honoured by the titles I have before given: true mother of the poor; the comfort of noble gentlemen; the haven of ladies and damoiselles and honest girls; the refuge of learned men and those of good lives; so that speaking of her dead is only renewing the grief and regrets of all such persons, and also that of her domestic servants, whom she loved singularly. She was very religious and devout. It was she who made the foundation of the ‘Bons-Hommes’ [monastery of the order of Saint-François de Paule at Chaillot], otherwise called the Minimes; and she began to build the church of the said ‘Bons-Hommes’ near Paris, and afterwards that in Rome which is so beautiful and noble, and where, as I saw myself, they receive no monks but Frenchmen.”

There, word for word, are the splendid obsequies of this queen, without changing a word of the original, for fear of doing worse, – for I could not do better. They were just like those of our kings that I have heard and read of, and those of King Charles IX., at which I was present, and which the queen, his mother, desired to make so fine and magnificent, though the finances of France were then too short to spend much, because of the departure of the King of Poland, who with his suite had squandered and carried off a great deal [1574].

Certainly I find these two interments much alike, save for three things: one, that the burial of Queen Anne was the most superb; second, that all went so well in order and so discreetly that there was no contention of ranks, as occurred at the burial of King Charles; for his body, being about to start for Notre-Dame, the court of parliament had some pique of precedence with the nobility and the Church, claiming to stand in the place of the king and to represent him when absent, he being then out of the kingdom. [Henri III. was then King of Poland]. On which a great princess, as the world goes, who was very near to him, whom I know but will not name, went about arguing and saying: “It was no wonder if, during the lifetime of the king, seditions and troubles had been in vogue, seeing that, dead as he was, he was still able to stir up strife.” Alas! he never did it, poor prince! either dead or living. We know well who were the authors of the seditions and of our civil wars. That princess who said those words has since found reason to regret them.

The third thing is that the body of King Charles was quitted, at the church of Saint-Lazare, by the whole procession, princes, seigneurs, courts of parliament, the Church, and the citizens, and was followed and accompanied from there by none but poor M. de Strozzi, de Fumel, and myself, with two gentlemen of the bedchamber, for we were not willing to abandon our master as long as he was above ground. There were also a few archers of the guard, quite pitiable to see, in the fields. So at eight in the evening in the month of July, we started with the body and its effigy thus badly accompanied.

Reaching the cross, we found all the monks of Saint-Denis awaiting us, and the body of the king was honourably escorted, with the ceremonies of the Church, to Saint-Denis, where the great Cardinal de Lorraine received it most honourably and devoutly, as he knew well how to do.

The queen-mother was very angry that the procession did not continue to the end as she intended – save for Monsieur her son, and the King of Navarre, whom she held a prisoner. The next day, however, the latter arrived in a coach, with a very good guard, and captains of the guard with him, to be present at the solemn high service, attended by the whole procession and company as at first, – a sight very sad to see.

After dinner the court of parliament sent to tell and to command the grand almoner Amyot to go and say grace after meat for them as if for the king. To which he made answer that he should do nothing of the kind, for it was not before them he was

bound to do it. They sent him two consecutive and threatening commands; which he still refused, and went and hid himself that he might answer no more. Then they swore they would not leave the table till he came; but not being able to find him, they were constrained to say grace themselves and to rise, which they did with great threats, foully abusing the said almoner, even to calling him scoundrel, and son of a butcher. I saw the whole affair; and I know what Monsieur commanded me to go and tell to M. le cardinal, asking him to pacify the matter, because they had sent commands to Monsieur to send to them, as representatives of the king, the grand almoner if he could be found. M. le cardinal went to speak to them, but he gained nothing; they standing firm on their opinion of their royal majesty and authority. I know what M. le cardinal said to me about them, telling me not to say it, — that they were perfect fools. The chief president, de Thou, was then at their head; a great senator certainly, but he had a temper. So here was another disturbance to make that princess say again that King Charles, either living or dead, on earth or under it, that body of his stirred up the world and threw it into sedition. Alas! that he could not do.

I have told this little incident, possibly more at length than I should, and I may be blamed; but I reply that I have told and put it here as it came into my fancy and memory; also that it comes in *à propos*; and that I cannot forget it, for it seems to me a thing that is rather remarkable.

Now, to return to our Queen Anne: we see from this fine

last duty of her obsequies how beloved she was of earth and heaven; far otherwise than that proud, pompous queen, Isabella of Bavaria, wife of the late King Charles VI., who having died in Paris, her body was so despised it was put out of her palace into a little boat on the river Seine, without form of ceremony or pomp, being carried through a little postern so narrow it could hardly go through, and thus was taken to Saint-Denis to her tomb like a simple damoiselle, neither more nor less. There was also a difference between her actions and those of Queen Anne: for she brought the English into France and Paris, threw the kingdom into flames and divisions, and impoverished and ruined every one; whereas Queen Anne kept France in peace, enlarged and enriched it with her beautiful duchy and the fine property she brought with her. So one need not wonder that the king regretted her and felt such mourning that he came nigh dying in the forest of Vincennes, and clothed himself and all his Court so long in black; and those who came otherwise clothed he had them driven away; neither would he see any ambassador, no matter who he was, unless he were dressed in black. And, moreover, that old History which I have quoted, says: “When he gave his daughter to M. d’Angoulême, afterwards King François, mourning was not left off by him or his Court; and the day of the espousals in the church of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, the bridegroom and bride were vested and clothed” – so this History says – “in black cloth, honestly cut in mourning shape, for the death of the said queen, Madame Anne de Bretagne, mother of the bride, in

presence of the king, her father, accompanied by the princes of the blood and noble seigneurs and prelates, princesses, dames, and damoiselles, all clothed in black cloth made in mourning shape.” That is what the book says. It was a strange austerity of mourning which should be noted, that not even on the day of the wedding was it dispensed with, to be renewed on the following day.

From this we may know how beloved, and worthy to be beloved this princess was by the king, her husband, who sometimes in his merry moods and gayety would call her “his Breton.”

If she had lived longer she would never have consented to that marriage of her daughter; it was very repugnant to her and she said so to the king, her husband, for she mortally hated Madame d’Angoulême, afterwards Regent, their tempers being quite unlike and not agreeing together; besides which, she had wished to unite her said daughter to Charles of Austria, then young, the greatest seigneur of Christendom, who was afterwards emperor. And this she wished in spite of M. d’Angoulême coming very near the Crown; but she never thought of that, or would not think of it, trusting to have more children herself, she being only thirty-seven years old when she died. In her lifetime and reign, reigned also that great and wise queen, Isabella of Castile, very accordant in manners and morals with our Queen Anne. For which reason they loved each other much and visited one another often by embassies, letters, and presents; ‘tis thus

that virtue ever seeks out virtue.

King Louis was afterwards pleased to marry for the third time Marie, sister of the King of England, a very beautiful princess, young, and too young for him, so that evil came of it. But he married more from policy, to make peace with the English and to put his own kingdom at rest, than for any other reason, never being able to forget his Queen Anne. He commanded at his death that they should both be covered by the same tomb, just as we now see it in Saint-Denis, all in white marble, as beautiful and superb as never was.

Now, here I pause in my discourse and go no farther; referring the rest to books that are written of this queen better than I could write; only to content my own self have I made this discourse.

I will say one other little thing; that she was the first of our queens or princesses to form the usage of putting a belt round their arms and escutcheons, which until then were borne not inclosed, but quite loose; and the said queen was the first to put the belt.

I say no more, not having been of her time; although I protest having told only truth, having learned it, as I have said, from a book, and also from Mme. la Seneschale, my grandmother, and from Mme. de Dampierre, my aunt, a true Court register, and as clever, wise, and virtuous a lady as ever entered a Court these hundred years, and who knew well how to discourse on old things. From eight years of age she was brought up at Court, and forgot nothing; it was good to hear her talk; and I have seen our



kings and queens take a singular pleasure in listening to her, for she knew all, – her own time and past times; so that people took word from her as from an oracle. King Henri III. made her lady of honour to the queen, his wife. I have here used recollections and lessons that I obtained from her, and I hope to use many more in the course of these books.

I have read the epitaph of the said queen, thus made: —

“Here lies Anne, who was wife to two great kings,  
Great a hundred-fold herself, as queen two times!  
Never queen like her enriched all France;  
That is what it is to make a grand alliance.”

Gui Patin, satirist and jovial spirit of his time [he was born in 1601], attracted to Saint-Denis because a fair was held there, visits the abbey, the treasury, “where” he says, “there was plenty of silly stuff and rubbish,” and lastly the tombs of the kings, “where I could not keep myself from weeping to see so many monuments to the vanity of human life; tears escaped me also before the tomb of the great and good king, François I., who founded our College of Professors of the King. I must own my weakness; I kissed it, and also that of his father-in-law, Louis XII., who was the Father of his People, and the best king we have ever had in France.” Happy age! still neighbour to beliefs, when those reputed the greatest satirists had these touching naïvetés, these wholly patriotic and antique sensibilities.

Mézeray [born ten years later], in his natural, sincere and

expressive diction, his clear and full narration, into which he has the art to bring speaking circumstances which animate the tale, says in relation to Louis XII. [in his "History of France"]: "When he rode through the country the good folk ran from all parts and for many days to see him, strewing the roads with flowers and foliage, and striving, as though he were a visible God, to touch his saddle with their handkerchiefs and keep them as precious relics."

And two centuries later, Comte Rœderer, in his Memoir on Polite Society and the Hôtel de Rambouillet, printed in 1835, tells us how in his youth his mind was already busy with Louis XII., and, returning to the same interest in after years, he made him his hero of predilection and his king. In studying the history of France he thought he discovered, he says, that at the close of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth what has since been called the "French Revolution" was already consummated; that liberty rested on a free Constitution; and that Louis XII., the Father of his People, was he who had accomplished it. *Bonhomie* and goodness have never been denied to Louis XII., but Rœderer claims more, he claims ability and skill. The Italian wars, considered generally to have been mistakes, he excuses and justifies by showing them in the king's mind as a means of useful national policy; he needed to obtain from Pope Alexander VI. the dissolution of his marriage with Jeanne de France, in order that he might marry Anne de Bretagne and so unite the duchy with the kingdom. Rœderer makes King

Louis a type of perfection; seeming to have searched in regions far from those that are historically brilliant, far from spheres of fame and glory, into "the depths obscure," as he says himself, "of *useful* government for a hero of a new species."

More than that: he thinks he sees in the cherished wife of Louis XII., in Anne de Bretagne, the foundress of a school of polite manners and perfection for her sex. "She was," Brantôme had said, "the most worthy and honourable queen that had ever been since Queen Blanche, mother of the King Saint-Louis... Her Court was a noble school for ladies; she had them taught and brought up wisely; and all, taking pattern by her, made themselves wise and virtuous." Rœderer takes these words of Brantôme and, giving them their strict meaning, draws therefrom a series of consequences: just as François I. had, in many respects, overthrown the political state of things established by Louis XII., so, he believes, had the women beloved of François overturned that honourable condition of society established by Anne de Bretagne. Starting from that epoch he sees, as it were, a constant struggle between two sorts of rival and incompatible societies: between the decent and ingenuous society of which Anne de Bretagne had given the idea, and the licentious society of which the mistresses of the king, women like the Duchesse d'Étampes and Diane de Poitiers, procured the triumph. These two societies, to his mind, never ceased to co-exist during the sixteenth century; on the one hand was an emulation of virtue and merit on the part of the noble heiresses, alas, too eclipsed, of

Anne de Bretagne, on the other an emulation with high bidding of gallantry, by the giddy pupils of the school of François I. To Røederer the Hôtel de Rambouillet, that perfected salon, founded towards the beginning of the seventeenth century, is only a tardy return to the traditions of Anne de Bretagne, the triumph of merit, virtue, and polite manners over the license to which all the kings, from François I., including Henri IV., had paid tribute.

Reaching thus the Hôtel de Rambouillet and holding henceforth an unbroken thread in hand, Røederer divides and subdivides at pleasure. He marks the divers periods and the divers shades of transition, the growth and the decline that he discerns. The first years of Louis XIV.'s youth cause him some distress; a return is being made to the ways of François I., to the brilliant mistresses. Røederer, not concerning himself with the displeasure he will cause the classicists, lays a little of the blame for this return on the four great poets, Molière, La Fontaine, Racine, and Boileau himself, all accomplices, more or less, in the laudation of victor and lover. However, age comes on; Louis XIV. grows temperate in turn, and a woman, issuing from the very purest centre of Mme. de Rambouillet's society, and who was morally its heiress, a woman accomplished in tone, in cultivation of mind, in precision of language, and in the sentiment of propriety, – Mme. de Maintenon, – knows so well how to seize the opportunity that she seats upon the throne, in a modest half-light, all the styles of mind and merit which made the perfection of French society in its better days. The triumph

of Mme. de Maintenon is that of polite society itself; Anne de Bretagne has found her pendant at the other extremity of the chain after the lapse of two centuries.

*Sainte-Beuve, Causeries du Lundi, Vol. VIII.*

## **DISCOURSE II.**

# **CATHERINE DE' MEDICI, QUEEN, AND MOTHER OF OUR LAST KINGS**

I HAVE wondered and been astonished a hundred times that, so many good writers as we have had in our day in France, none of them has been inquisitive enough to make some fine selection of the life and deeds of the queen-mother, Catherine de' Medici, inasmuch as she has furnished ample matter, and cut out much fine work, if ever a queen did – as said the Emperor Charles to Paolo Giovio [Italian historian] when, on his return from his triumphant voyage in the “Goulette” intending to make war upon King François, he gave him a provision of ink and paper, saying he would cut him out plenty of work. So it is true that this queen cut out so much that a good and zealous writer might make an Iliad of it; but they have all been lazy, – or ungrateful, for she was never niggardly to learned men; I could name several who have derived good benefits from this queen, from which, in consequence, I accuse them of ingratitude.

There is one, however, who did concern himself to write of her, and made a little book which he entitled “The Life of

Catherine;”<sup>3</sup> but it is an imposture and not worthy of belief, as she herself said when she saw it; such falsities being apparent to every one, and easy to note and reject. He that wrote it wished her mortal harm, and was an enemy to her name, her condition, her life, her honour, and nature; and that is why he should be rejected. As for me, I would I knew how to speak well, or that I had a good pen, well mended, at my command, that I might exalt and praise her as she deserves. At any rate, such as my pen is, I shall now employ it at all hazards.

This queen is extracted, on the father’s side, from the race of the Medici, one of the noblest and most illustrious families, not only in Italy, but in Christendom. Whatever may be said, she was a foreigner to these shores because the alliances of kings cannot commonly be chosen in their kingdom; for it is not best to do so; foreign marriages being as useful and more so than near ones. The House of the Medici has always been allied and confederated with the crown of France, which still bears the *fleur-de-lys* that King Louis XI. gave that house in sign of alliance and perpetual confederation [the *fleur de Louis*, which then became the Florentine lily].

On the mother’s side she issued originally from one of the noblest families of France; and so was truly French in race, heart, and affection through that great house of Boulogne and county of Auvergne; thus it is hard to tell or judge in which of her two families there was most grandeur and memorable deeds. Here

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix.

is what was said of them by the Archbishop of Bourges, of the house of Beaune, as great a learned man and worthy prelate as there is in Christendom (though some say a trifle unsteady in belief, and little good in the scales of M. Saint-Michel, who weighs good Christians for the day of judgment, or so they say). it is given in the funeral oration which the archbishop made upon the said queen at Blois: —

“In the days when Brennus, that great captain of the Gauls, led his army throughout all Italy and Greece, there were with him in his troop two French nobles, one named Felsinus, the other named Bono, who, seeing the wicked design of Brennus, after his fine conquests, to invade the temple of Delphos and soil himself and his army with the sacrilege of that temple, withdrew, both of them, and passed into Asia with their vessels and men, advancing so far that they entered the sea of the Medes, which is near to Lydia and Persia. Thence, having made great conquests and obtained great victories, they were returning through Italy, hoping to reach France, when Felsinus stopped at a place where Florence now stands beside the river Arno, which he saw to be fine and delectable, and situated much as another which had pleased him much in the country of the Medes. There he built a city which to-day is Florence; and his companion, Bono, built another and named it Bononia, now called Bologna, the which are neighbouring cities. Henceforth, in consequence of the victories and conquests of Felsinus among the Medes, he was called *Medicus* among his friends, a name that remained to



the family; just as we read of Paulus surnamed *Macedonicus* for having conquered Macedonia from Perseus, and Scipio called *Africanus* for doing the same in Africa.”

I do not know where M. de Beaune may have taken this history; but it is very probable that before the king and such an assembly, there convened for the funeral of the queen, he would not have alleged the fact without good authority. This descent is very far from the modern story invented and attributed without grounds to the family of Medici, according to that lying book which I have mentioned on the life of the said queen. After this the said Sieur de Beaune says further, he has read in the chronicles that one named Everard de’ Medici, Sieur of Florence, went, with many of his subjects, to the assistance of the voyage and expedition made by Charlemagne against Desiderius, King of the Lombards; and having very bravely succoured and assisted him, was confirmed and invested with the lordship of Florence. Many years after, one Anemond de’ Medici, also Sieur of Florence, went, accompanied by many of his subjects, to the Holy Land, with Godefroy de Bouillon, where he died at the siege of Nicæa in Asia. Such greatness always continued in that family until Florence was reduced to a republic by the intestine wars in Italy between the emperors and the peoples, the illustrious members of it manifesting their valour and grandeur from time to time; as we saw in the latter days Cosmo de’ Medici, who, with his arms, his navy, and vessels, terrified the Turks in the Mediterranean Sea and in the distant East; so that none since his

time, however great he may be, has surpassed him in strength and valour and wealth, as Raffaele Volaterano has written.

The temples and sacred shrines by him built, the hospitals by him founded, even in Jerusalem, are ample proof of his piety and magnanimity.

There were also Lorenzo de' Medici, surnamed the Great for his virtuous deeds, and two great popes, Leo and Clement, also many cardinals and grand personages of the name; besides the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosmo de' Medici, a wise and wary man, if ever there was one. He succeeded in maintaining himself in his duchy, which he found invaded and much disturbed when he came to it.

In short, nothing can rob this house of the Medici of its lustre, very noble and grand as it is in every way.

As for the house of Boulogne and Auvergne, who will say that it is not great, having issued originally from that noble Eustache de Boulogne, whose brother, Godefroy de Bouillon, bore arms and escutcheons with so vast a number of princes, seigneurs, chevaliers, and Christian soldiers, even to Jerusalem and the Sepulchre of our Saviour; and would have made himself, by his sword and the favour of God, king, not only of Jerusalem but of the greater part of the East, to the confusion of Mahomet, the Saracens, and the Mahometans, amazing all the rest of the world and replanting Christianity in Asia, where it had fallen to the lowest?

For the rest, this house has ever been sought in alliance by all

the monarchies of Christendom and the great families; such as France, England, Scotland, Hungary, and Portugal, which latter kingdom belonged to it of right, as I have heard Président de Thou say, and as the queen herself did me the honour to tell me at Bordeaux when she heard of the death of King Sebastian [in Morocco, 1578], the Medici being received to argue the justice of their rights at the last Assembly of States before the decease of King Henry [in 1580]. This was why she armed M. de Strozzi to make an invasion, the King of Spain having usurped the kingdom; she was arrested in so fine a course only by reasons which I will explain at another time.

I leave you to suppose, therefore, whether this house of Boulogne was great; yes, so great that I once heard Pope Pius IV. say, sitting at table at a dinner he gave after his election to the Cardinals of Ferrara and Guise, his creations, that the house of Boulogne was so great and noble he knew none in France, whatever it was, that could surpass it in antiquity, valour, and grandeur.

All this is much against those malicious detractors who have said that this queen was a Florentine of low birth. Moreover, she was not so poor but what she brought to France in marriage estates which are worth to-day twenty-six thousand *livres*, – such as the counties of Auvergne and Lauragais, the seigneuries of Leverons, Donzenac, Boussac, Gorrèges, Hondecourt and other lands, – all an inheritance from her mother. Besides which, her dowry was of more than two hundred thousand ducats, which are

worth to-day over four hundred thousand; with great quantities of furniture, precious stones, jewels, and other riches, such as the finest and largest pearls ever seen in so great a number, which she afterwards gave to her daughter-in-law, the Queen of Scotland [Mary Stuart], whom I have seen wearing them.

Besides all this, many estates, houses, deeds, and claims in Italy.

But more than all else, through her marriage the affairs of France, which had been so shaken by the imprisonment of the king and his losses at Milan and Naples, began to get firmer. King François was very willing to say that the marriage had served his interests. Therefore there was given to this queen for her device a rainbow, which she bore as long as she was married, with these words in Greek *φώς φέρι ἡδέ γαλήνην*. Which is the same as saying that just as this fire and bow in the sky brings and signifies good weather after rain, so this queen was a true sign of clearness, serenity, and the tranquillity of peace. The Greek is thus translated: *Lucem fert et serenitatem*— “She brings light and serenity.”

After that, the emperor [Charles V.] dared push no longer his ambitious motto: “Ever farther.” For, although there was truce between himself and King François, he was nursing his ambition with the design of gaining always from France whatever he could; and he was much astonished at this alliance with the pope [Clement VII.], regarding the latter as able, courageous, and vindictive for his imprisonment by the imperial forces at the

sack of Rome [1527]. Such a marriage displeased him so much that I have heard a truthful lady of the Court say that if he had not been married to the empress, he would have seized an alliance with the pope himself and espoused his niece [Catherine de' Medici], as much for the support of so strong a party as because he feared the pope would assist in making him lose Naples, Milan, and Genoa; for the pope had promised King François, in an authentic document, when he delivered to him the money of his niece's dowry and her rings and jewels, to make the dowry worthy of such a marriage by the addition of three pearls of inestimable value, of the excessive splendour of which all the greatest kings were envious and covetous; the which were Naples, Milan, and Genoa. And it is not to be doubted that if the said pope had lived out his natural life he would have sold the emperor well, and made him pay dear for that imprisonment, in order to aggrandize his niece and the kingdom to which she was joined. But Clement VII. died young, and all this profit came to nought.

So now our queen, having lost her mother, Magdelaine de Boulogne, and Lorenzo de' Medici, Duke of Urbino, her father, in early life, was married by her good uncle the pope to France, whither she was brought by sea to Marseille in great triumph; and her wedding was pompously performed, at the age of fourteen. She made herself so beloved by the king, her father-in-law, and by King Henri, her husband [not king till the death of François I.], that on remaining ten years without producing issue, and many persons endeavouring to persuade the king and the

dauphin, her husband, to repudiate her because there was such need of an heir to France, neither the one nor the other would consent because they loved her so much. But after ten years, in accordance with the natural habit of the women of the race of Medici, who are tardy in conceiving, she began by producing the Little King François II. After that, was born the Queen of Spain, and then, consecutively, that fine and illustrious progeny whom we have all seen, and also others no sooner born than dead, by great misfortune and fatality. All this caused the king, her husband, to love her more and more, and in such a way that he, who was of an amorous temperament, and greatly liked to make love and to change his loves, said often that of all the women in the world there was none like his wife for that, and he did not know her equal. He had reason to say so, for she was truly a beautiful and most amiable princess.

She was of rich and very fine presence; of great majesty, but very gentle when need was; of noble appearance and good grace, her face handsome and agreeable, her bosom very beautiful, white and full; her body also very white, the flesh beautiful, the skin smooth, as I have heard from several of her ladies; of a fine plumpness also, the leg and thigh very beautiful (as I have heard, too, from the same ladies); and she took great pleasure in being well shod and in having her stockings well and tightly drawn up.

Besides all this, the most beautiful hand that was ever seen, as I believe. Once upon a time the poets praised Aurora for her fine hands and beautiful fingers; but I think our queen would efface

her in that, and she guarded and maintained that beauty all her life. The king, her son, Henri III., inherited much of this beauty of the hand.

She always clothed herself well and superbly, often with some pretty and new invention. In short, she had many charms in herself to make her beloved. I remember that one day at Lyons she went to see a painter named Corneille, who had painted in a large room all the great seigneurs, princes, cavaliers, queens, princesses, ladies of the Court, and damoiselles. Being in the said room of these portraits we saw there our queen, painted very well in all her beauty and perfection, apparelled *à la Française* in a cap and her great pearls, and a gown with wide sleeves of silver tissue furred with lynx, – the whole so well represented to the life that only speech was lacking; her three fine daughters were beside her. She took great pleasure at the sight, and all the company there present did the same, praising and admiring her beauty above all. She herself was so ravished by the contemplation that she could not take her eyes from the picture until M. de Nemours came to her and said: “Madame, I think you are there so well portrayed that nothing more can be said; and it seems to me that your daughters do you proper honour, for they do not go before you or surpass you.” To this she answered: “My cousin, I think you can remember the time, the age, and the dress of this picture; so that you can judge better than any of this company, for you saw me like that, whether I was estimated such as you say, and whether I ever was as I there appear.” There was not one in

the company that did not praise and estimate that beauty highly, and say that the mother was worthy of the daughters, and the daughters of the mother. And such beauty lasted her, married and widowed, almost to her death; not that she was as fresh as in her more blooming years, but always well preserved, very desirable and agreeable.

For the rest, she was very good company and of gay humour; loving all honourable exercises, such as dancing, in which she had great grace and majesty.

She also loved hunting; about which I heard a lady of the Court tell this tale: King François, having chosen and made a company which was called “the little band of the Court ladies,” the handsomest, daintiest, and most favoured, often escaped from the Court and went to other houses to hunt the stag and pass his time, sometimes staying thus withdrawn eight days, ten days, sometimes more and sometimes less, as the humour took him. Our queen (who was then only Mme. la dauphine) seeing such parties made without her, and that even Mesdames her sisters-in-law were there while she stayed at home, made prayer to the king, to take her always with him, and to do her the honour to permit that she should never budge without him.

It was said that she, being very shrewd and clever, did this as much or more to see the king’s actions and get his secrets and hear and know all things, as from liking for the hunt.

King François was pleased with this request, for it showed the good-will that she had for his company; and he granted it



heartily; so that besides loving her naturally he now loved her more, and delighted in giving her pleasure in the hunt, at which she never left his side, but followed him at full speed. She was very good on horseback and bold; sitting with ease, and being the first to put the leg around a pommel; which was far more graceful and becoming than sitting with the feet upon a plank. Till she was sixty years of age and over she liked to ride on horseback, and after her weakness prevented her she pined for it. It was one of her greatest pleasures to ride far and fast, though she fell many times with damage to her body, breaking her leg once, and wounding her head, which had to be trepanned. After she was widowed and had charge of the king and the kingdom, she took the king always with her, and her other children; but while her husband, King Henri, lived, she usually went with him to the meet of the stag and the other hunts.

If he played at pall-mall she watched him play, and played herself. She was very fond of shooting with a cross-bow *à jalet* [ball of stone], and she shot right well; so that always when she went to ride her cross-bow was taken with her, and if she saw any game, she shot it.

She was ever inventing some new dance or beautiful ballet when the weather was bad. Also she invented games and passed her time with one and another intimately; but always appearing very grave and austere when necessary.

She was fond of seeing comedies and tragedies; but after "Sophonisbe," a tragedy composed by M. de Saint-Gélais,

was very well represented by her daughters and other ladies and damoiselles and gentlemen of her Court, at Blois for the marriages of M. du Cypièrre and the Marquis d'Elbœuf, she took an opinion that it was harmful to the affairs of the kingdom, and would never have tragedies played again. But she listened readily to comedies and tragi-comedies, and even those of "Zani" and "Pantaloon," taking great pleasure in them, and laughing with all her heart like any other; for she liked laughter, and her natural self was jovial, loving a witty word and ready with it, knowing well when to cast her speech and her stone, and when to withhold them.

She passed her time in the afternoons at work on her silk embroideries, in which she was as perfect as possible. In short, this queen liked and gave herself up to all honourable exercises; and there was not one that was worthy of herself and her sex that she did not wish to know and practise.

There is what I can say, speaking briefly and avoiding prolixity, about the beauty of her body and her occupations.

When she called any one "my friend" it was either that she thought him a fool, or she was angry with him. This was so well known that she had a serving gentleman named M. de Bois-Fevrier, who made reply when she called him "my friend": "Ha! madame, I would rather you called me your enemy; for to call me your friend is as good as saying I am a fool, or that you are in anger against me; for I know your nature this long time."

As for her mind, it was very great and very admirable, as

was shown in so many fine and signal acts by which her life has been made illustrious forever. The king, her husband, and his council esteemed her so much that when the king went his journey to Germany, out of his kingdom, he established and ordered her as regent and governor throughout his dominions during his absence, by a declaration solemnly made before a full parliament in Paris. And in this office she behaved so wisely that there was no disturbance, change, or alteration in the State by reason of the king's absence; but, on the contrary, she looked so carefully to business that she assisted the king with money, means, and men, and other kinds of succour; which helped him much for his return, and even for the conquest which he made of cities in the duchy of Luxembourg, such as Yvoy, Montmedy, Dampvilliers, Chimay, and others.

I leave you to think how he who wrote that fine life I spoke of detracted from her in saying that never did the king, her husband, allow her to put her nose into matters of State. Was not making her regent in his absence giving her ample occasion to have full knowledge of them? And it was thus she did during all the journeys that he made yearly in going to his armies.

What did she after the battle of Saint-Laurens, when the State was shaken and the king had gone to Compiègne to raise a new army? She so espoused affairs that she roused and excited the gentlemen of Paris to give prompt succour to their king, which came most apropos, both in money and in other things very necessary in war.

Also, when the king was wounded, those who were of that time and saw it cannot be ignorant of the great care she took for his cure: the watches she made beside him without ever sleeping; the prayers with which, time after time, she importuned God; the processions and visitation of churches which she made; and the posts which she sent about everywhere inquiring for doctors and surgeons. But his hour had come; and when he passed from this world into the other, she made such lamentations and shed such tears that never did she stanch them; and in memory of him, whenever he was spoken of as long as she lived, they gushed from the depths of her eyes; so that she took a device proper and suitable to her tears and her mourning, namely: a mound of quicklime, on which the drops of heaven fell abundantly, with these words writ in Latin: *Adorem extincta testantur vivere flamma*; the drops of water, like her tears, showing ardour, though the flame was extinct. This device takes its allegory from the nature of quicklime, which, being watered, burns strangely and shows its fire though flame is not there. Thus did our queen show her ardour and her affection by her tears, though flame, which was her husband, was now extinct; and this was as much as to say that, dead as he was, she made it appear by her tears that she could never forget him, but should love him always.

A like device was borne in former days by Madame Valentine de Milan, Duchesse d'Orléans, after the death of her husband, killed in Paris, for which she had such great regret that for all comfort and solace in her moaning, she took a watering-pot for

her device, on the top of which was an S, in sign, so they say, of *seule, souvenir, soucis, soupirer*, and around the said watering-pot were written these words: *Rien ne m'est plus; plus ne m'est rien*— “Nought is more to me; more is to me nothing.” This device can still be seen in her chapel in the church of the Franciscans at Blois.

The good King René of Sicily, having lost his wife Isabel, Duchesse de Lorraine, suffered such great grief that never did he truly rejoice again; and when his intimate friends and favourites urged him to consolation he led them to his cabinet and showed them, painted by his own hand (for he was an excellent painter), a Turkish bow with its string unstrung, beneath which was written: *Arco per lentare piaga non sana*— “The bow although unstrung heals not the wound.” Then he said to them: “My friends, with this picture I answer all your reasons: by unstringing a bow or breaking its string, the harm thus done by the arrow may quickly be mended, but, the life of my dear spouse being by death extinct and broken, the wound of the loyal love – the which, her living, filled my heart – cannot be cured.” And in various places in Angers we see these Turkish bows with broken strings and beneath them the same words, *Arco per lentare piaga non sana*; even at the Franciscan church, in the chapel of Saint-Bernardin which he caused to be decorated. This device he took after the death of his wife; for in her lifetime he bore another.

Our queen, around her device which I have told of, placed many trophies: broken mirrors and fans, crushed plumes, and

pearls, jewels scattered to earth, and chains in pieces; the whole in sign of quitting worldly pomp, her husband being dead, for whom her mourning never was remitted. And, without the grace of God and the fortitude with which he had endowed her, she would surely have succumbed to such great sadness and distress. Besides, she saw that her young children and France had need of her, as we have since seen by experience; for, like a Semiramis, or second Athalie, she foiled, saved, guarded, and preserved her said young children from many enterprises planned against them in their early years; and this with so much industry and prudence that everybody thought her wonderful. She, being regent of the kingdom after the death of her son King François during the minority of our king by the ordering of the Estates of Orléans, imposed her will upon the King of Navarre, who, as premier prince of the blood, wished to be regent in her place and govern all things; but she gained so well and so dexterously the said Estates that if the said King of Navarre had not gone elsewhere she would have caused him to be attainted of the crime of lèse-majesté. And possibly she would still have done so for the actions which, it was said, he made the Prince de Condé do about those Estates, but for Mme. de Montpensier, who governed her much. So the said king was forced to content himself to be under her. Now there is one of the shrewd and subtle deeds she did in her beginning.

Afterwards she knew how to maintain her rank and authority so imperiously that no one dared gainsay it, however grand and

disturbing he was, for a period of three months when, the Court being at Fontainebleau, the said King of Navarre, wishing to show his feelings, took offence because M. de Guise ordered the keys of the king's house brought to him every evening, and kept them all night in his room like a grand-master (for that is one of his offices), so that no one could go out without his permission. This angered the King of Navarre, who wished to keep the keys himself; but, being refused, he grew spiteful and mutinied in such a way that one morning suddenly he came to take leave of the king and queen, intending to depart from the Court, taking with him all the princes of the blood whom he had won over, together with M. le Connétable de Montmorency and his children and nephew.

The queen, who did not in any way expect this step, was at first much astonished, and tried all she could to ward off the blow, giving good hope to the King of Navarre that if he were patient he would some day be satisfied. But fine words gained her nothing with the said king, who was set on departing. Whereupon the queen bethought her of this subtle point: she sent and gave commandment to M. le connétable, as the principal, first, and oldest officer of the crown, to stay near the king, his master, as his duty and office demanded, and not to leave him. M. le connétable, wise and judicious as he was, being very zealous for his master and careful of his grandeur and honour, after reflecting on his duty and the command sent to him, went to see the king and present himself as ready to fulfil his office; which

greatly astonished the King of Navarre, who was on the point of mounting his horse expecting M. le connétable, who came instead to represent his duty and office and to persuade him not to budge himself nor to depart; and did this so well that the King of Navarre went to see the king and queen at the instigation of the connétable, and having conferred with their Majesties, his journey was given up and his mules were countermanded, they having then arrived at Melun. So all was pacified to the great content of the King of Navarre. Not that M. de Guise diminished in any way his office, or yielded one atom of his honour, for he kept his pre-eminence and all that belonged to him, without being shaken in the least, although he was not the stronger; but he was a man of the world in such things, who was never bewildered, but knew very well how to brave all and hold his rank and keep what he had.

It is not to be doubted, as all the world knows, that, if the queen had not bethought her of this ruse regarding M. le connétable, all that party would have gone to Paris and stirred up things to our injury; for which reason great praise should be given to the queen for this shift. I know, for I was there, that many persons said it was not of her invention, but that of Cardinal de Tournon, a wise and judicious prelate; but that is false, for, old stager though he was, i' faith the queen knew more of wiles than he, or all the council of the king together; for very often, when he was at fault, she would help him and put him on the traces of what he ought to know, of which I might produce a number



of examples; but it will be enough to give this instance, which is fresh, and which she herself did me the honour to disclose to me. It is as follows: —

When she went to Guyenne, and lately to Coignac, to reconcile the princes of the Religion and those of the League, and so put the kingdom in peace, for she saw it would soon be ruined by such divisions, she determined to proclaim a truce in order to treat of this peace; at which the King of Navarre and the Prince de Condé were very discontent and mutinous, — all the more, they said, because this proclamation did them great harm on account of their foreigners, who, having heard of it, might repent of their coming, or delay it; and they accused the said queen of having made it with that intention. So they said and resolved not to see the queen, and not to treat with her unless the said truce were rescinded. Now finding her council, whom she had with her, though composed of good heads, very ridiculous and little to be honoured because they thought it impossible to find means to rescind the said truce, the queen said to them: “Truly, you are very stupid as to the remedy. Know you not better? There is but one means for that. You have at Maillezais the regiment of Neufvy and de Sorlu, Huguenots; send me from here, from Niort, all the arquebusiers that you can, and cut them to pieces, and there you have the truce rescinded and undone without further trouble.” As she commanded so it was executed; the arquebusiers started, led by the Capitaine l’Estelle, and forced their fort and their barricades so well that there they were quite defeated, Sorlu

killed, who was a valiant man, Neufvy taken prisoner with many others, and all their banners captured and brought to Niort to the queen; who, using her accustomed turn of clemency, pardoned all and sent them away with their ensigns and even with their flags, which, as regards the flags, is a very rare thing. But she chose to do this stroke, rare or not, so she told me, to the princes; who now knew they had to do with a very able princess, and that it was not to her they should address such mockery as to make her rescind a truce by the very heralds who had proclaimed it; for while they were thinking to make her receive that insult, she had fallen upon them, and now sent them word by the prisoners that it was not for them to affront her by asking unseemly and unreasonable things, because it was in her power to do them both good and evil.

That is how this queen knew how to give and teach a lesson to her council. I might tell of many such things, but I have now to treat of other points: the first of which must be to answer those whom I have often heard say that she was the first to rouse to arms, and so was cause of our civil wars. Whoso will look to the source of the matter will not believe that; for the triumvirate having been created, she, seeing the proceedings which were preparing and the change made by the King of Navarre, – who from being formerly Huguenot and very reformed had made himself Catholic, – and knowing that through that change she had reason to fear for the king, the kingdom, and her own person that he would move against them, reflected and puzzled her mind

to discover to what such proceedings, meetings, and colloquies held in secret tended. Not being able, as they say, to come at the bottom of the pot, she bethought her one day, when the secret council was in session in the room of the King of Navarre, to go into the room above his, and by means of a tube which she had caused to be slipped surreptitiously under the tapestry she listened unperceived to their discourse. Among other things she heard one thing that was very terrible and bitter to her. The Maréchal de Saint-André, one of the triumvirate, gave it as his opinion that the queen should be put in a sack and flung into the river, for that otherwise they could never succeed in their plans. But the late M. de Guise, who was very good and generous, said that must not be; for it were too unjust to make the wife and mother of our kings perish thus miserably, and he opposed it all. For this the said queen has always loved him, and proved it to his children after his death by giving them his estates.

I leave you to suppose what this sentence was to the queen, having heard it thus with her own ears, and whether she had no occasion for fear, although she was thus defended by M. de Guise. From what I have heard tell by one of her most intimate ladies, she feared they would strike the blow without the knowledge of M. de Guise, as indeed she had reason to do; for in deeds so detestable an upright man should always be distrusted, and the act not communicated to him. She was thus compelled to consider her safety, and employ those she saw already under arms [the Prince de Condé and other Protestant leaders], begging

them to have pity for a mother and her children.

That is the whole cause, just as it was, of the civil war. She would never go to Orléans with the others, nor give them the king and her children, as she could have done; and she was very glad that in the hurly-burly of arms she and the king her son and her other children were in safety, as was reasonable. Moreover, she requested and held the promise of the others that whenever she should summon them to lay down their arms they would do so; which, nevertheless, they would not do when the time came, no matter what appeals she made to them, and what pains she took, and the great heat she endured at Talsy, to induce them to listen to the peace she could have made good and secured for all France had they then listened to her; and this great fire and others we have since seen lighted from this first brand would have been forever extinguished in France if they would then have trusted her. I know what I myself have heard her say, with the tears in her eyes, and with what zeal she endeavoured to do it.

This is why they cannot charge her with the first spark of the civil war, nor yet with the second, which was the day of Meaux; for at that time she was thinking only of a hunt, and of giving pleasure to the king in her beautiful house at Monceaux. The warning came that M. le Prince and others of the Religion were in arms and advancing to surprise and seize the king under colour of presenting a request. God knows who was the cause of this new disturbance, and without the six thousand Swiss then lately raised, who knows what might have happened? This levy

of Swiss was only the pretext of their taking up arms, and of saying and publishing that it was done to force them to war. In fact it was they, themselves, as I know from being at Court, who requested that levy of the king and queen, on the passage of the Duke of Alba and his army, fearing that under colour of reaching Flanders he might descend upon the frontiers of France; and they urged that it was the custom to arm the frontiers whenever a neighbouring State was arming. No one can be ignorant how urgent for this they were to the king and queen by letters and embassies, – even M. le Prince himself and M. l'amiral [Coligny] coming to see the king on this subject at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, where I saw them.

I would also like to ask (for all that I write here I saw myself) who it was who took up arms on Shrove Tuesday, and who suborned and solicited Monsieur the king's brother, and the King of Navarre, to give ear to the enterprises for which Mole and Coconas were executed in Paris. It was not the queen, for it was by her prudence that she prevented them from uprising, – by keeping Monsieur and the King of Navarre so locked in to the forest of Vincennes that they could not set out; and on the death of King Charles she held them so tightly in Paris and the Louvre, barring their windows one morning, – at any rate those of the King of Navarre, who was lodged on the lower floor (the King of Navarre, told me this himself with tears in his eyes), – that they could not escape as they intended, which would greatly have embroiled the State and prevented the return of Poland to the

King, which was what they were after. I know all this from having been invited to the *fricassée*, which was one of the finest strokes ever made by the queen. Starting from Paris she conducted them to Lyons to meet the king so dexterously that no one who saw them would ever have supposed them prisoners; they went in the same coach with her, and she presented them herself to the king, who, on his side, pardoned them soon after.

Also, who was it that enticed Monsieur the king's brother to leave Paris one fine night and the company of his brother who loved him well, and whose affection he cast off to go and take up arms and embroil all France? M. de La Noue knows well, and also the secret plots that began at the siege of Rochelle, and what I said to him about them. It was not the queen-mother, for she felt such grief at seeing one brother banded against another brother and his king, that she swore she would die of it, or else replace and reunite them as before – which she did; for I heard her say at Blois, in conversation with Monsieur, that she prayed for nothing so much as that God would grant her the favour of that reunion, after which he might send her death and she would accept it with all her heart; or else she would gladly retire to her houses of Monceaux and Chenonceaux, and never mix further in the affairs of France, wishing to end her days in tranquillity. In fact, she truly wished to do the latter; but the king implored her to abstain, for he and his kingdom had great need of her. I am assured that if she had not made this peace at that time, all was over with France, for there were in the country fifty thousand

foreigners, from one region or another, who would have aided in humbling and destroying her.

It was, therefore, not the queen who called to arms at this time to satisfy the State-Assembly at Blois, the which, wanting but one religion and proposing to abolish that which was contrary to their own, demanded, if the spiritual blade did not suffice to abolish it, that recourse should be had to the temporal. Some have said that the queen had bribed them; that is false. I do not say that she did not bribe them later, which was a fine stroke of policy and intelligence; but it was not she who called together the said Assembly; so far from that, she blamed them for all, and also because they lessened greatly the king's authority and her own. It was the party of the Religion which had long demanded that Assembly, and required by the terms of the last peace that it should be called together and assembled; to which the queen objected strongly, foreseeing abuses. However, to content them because they clamoured for it so much, they had it, to their own confusion and damage, and not to their profit and contentment as they expected, so that finally they took up arms. Thus it was still not the queen who did so.

Neither was it she who caused them to be taken up when Mont-de-Marsan, La Fère in Picardy, and Cahors were taken. I remember what the king said to M. de Miossans, who came to him on behalf of the King of Navarre; he rebuffed him harshly, and told him that while those princes were cloying him with fine words they were calling to arms and taking cities.

Now that is how this queen was the instigator of all our wars and civil fires, the which, while she never lighted them, she spent her pains and labour in striving to extinguish, abhorring to see so many of the nobles and men of honour die. And without that, and without her commiseration, they who have hated her with mortal hatred would have been ill-off, and their party underground and not flourishing as it now is; which must be imputed to her kindness, of which we now have sore need, for, as every one says and the poor people cry, "We have no longer the queen-mother to make peace for us." It was not her fault that peace was not made when she went to Guyenne lately to treat of it with the King of Navarre and the Prince de Condé.

They have tried to accuse her also of being an accomplice in the wars of the League. Why, then, should she have brought about the peace of which I speak if she were that? Why should she have pacified the riot of the barricades in Paris? Why should she have reconciled the king and the Duc de Guise only to destroy the latter and kill him?

Well, let them launch into such foul abuse against her all they will, never shall we have another queen in France so good for peace.

They have accused her of that massacre in Paris [the Saint-Bartholomew]; that is a sealed book to me, for at that time I was preparing to embark at Brouage; but I have often heard it said that she was not the chief actress in it. There were three or four others, whom I might name, who were more ardent in it than she



and pushed her on, making her believe, from the threats uttered on the wounding of M. l'amiral, that the king was to be killed, and she with all her children and the whole Court, or else that the country would be in arms much worse than ever. Certainly the party of Religion did very wrong to make the threats it is said they made; for they brought on the fate of poor M. l'amiral, and procured his death. If they had kept themselves quiet, said no word, and let M. l'amiral's wound heal, he could have left Paris at his ease, and nothing further would have come of it. M. de La Noue was of that opinion. He and M. Strozzi and I have often spoken of it, he not approving of such bravados, audacities, and threats as were made at the very Court of the king in his city of Paris; and he greatly blamed M. de Theligny, his brother-in-law, who was one of the hottest, calling him and his companions perfect fools and most incapable. M. l'amiral never used such language as I have heard from others, at least not aloud. I do not say that in secret and private with his intimate friends he never spoke it. That was the cause of the death of M. l'amiral and the massacres of his people, and not the queen; as I have heard say by those who know well, although there are many from whose heads you could never oust the opinion that this train was long laid and the plot long in hatching. It is all false. The least passionate think as I have said; the more passionate and obstinate believe the other way; and very often we give credit for the ordering of events to kings and great princes, and say after those events have happened how prudent and provident they were, and how well they knew

how to dissimulate, when all the while they knew no more about them than a plum.

To return again to our queen; her enemies have put it about that she was not a good Frenchwoman. God knows with what ardour I saw her urge that the English might be driven from France at Havre de Grâce, and what she said of it to M. le Prince, and how she made him go with many gentlemen of his party, and the crown-companies of M. d'Andelot, and other Huguenots, and how she herself led the army, mounted usually on a horse, like a second beautiful Queen Marfisa, exposing herself to the arquebusades and the cannonades as if she were one of her captains, looking to the making of the batteries, and saying she should never be at ease until she had taken that town and driven the English out of France; hating worse than poison those who had sold it to them. And thus she did so much that finally she made the country French.

When Rouen was besieged, I saw her in the greatest anger when she beheld supplies entering the town by means of a French galley captured the year before, she fearing that the place, failing to be taken by us, would come under the dominion of the English. For this reason she pushed hard at the wheel, as they say, to take it, and never failed every day to come to the fort Sainte-Catherine to hold council and see the firing. I have often seen her passing along the covered way of Sainte-Catherine, the cannonades and arquebusades raining round her, and she caring nothing for them.

Those who were there saw her as I did; there are still many

ladies, her maids of honour who accompanied her, to whom the firing was not too pleasant; I knew this for I saw them there; but when M. le connétable and M. de Guise remonstrated with her, telling her some misfortune would come of it, she only laughed and said: Why should she spare herself more than they, inasmuch as she had as good courage as they had, though not their strength, which her sex denied her? As for fatigue, she endured that well, whether on foot or on horseback. I think that for long there had never been a queen or a princess better on horseback, sitting with such grace, – not appearing, for all that, like a masculine dame, in form and style a fantastic amazon, but a comely princess, beautiful, agreeable, and gentle.

They said of her that she was very Spanish. Certainly as long as her good daughter lived [Élisabeth, wife of Philip II.] she loved Spain; but after her daughter died we knew, at least some of us, whether she had reason to love it, either country or nation. True it is that she was always so prudent that she chose to treat the King of Spain as her good son-in-law, in order that he in turn should treat better her good and beautiful daughter, as is the custom of good mothers; so that he never came to trouble France, nor to bring war there, according to his brave heart and natural ambition.

Others have also said that she did not like the nobility of France and desired much to shed its blood. I refer for that to the many times that she made peace and spared that blood; besides which, attention should be paid to this, namely: that while she

was regent, and her children minors, there were not known at Court so many quarrels and combats as we have seen there since; she would not allow them, and forbade expressly all duelling and punished those who transgressed that order. I have seen her at Court, when the king went away to stay some days and she was left absolute and alone, at a time when quarrels had begun again and were becoming common, also duelling, which she never would permit, – I have known her, I say, give a sudden order to the captain of the guards to make arrests, and to the marshals and captains to pacify the quarrel; so that, to tell the truth, she was more feared than the king; for she knew how to talk to the disobedient and the dissolute, and rebuke them terribly.

I remember that once, the king having gone to the baths of Bourbon, my late cousin La Chastaignerie had a quarrel with Pardailhan. She had him searched for, in order to forbid him, on his life, to fight a duel; but not being able to find him for two whole days, she had him tracked so well that on a Sunday morning, he being on the island of Louviers awaiting his enemy, the grand provost arrived to arrest him, and took him prisoner to the Bastille by order of the queen. But he stayed there only one night; for she sent for him and gave him a reprimand, partly sharp and partly gentle, because she was really kind, and was harsh only when she chose to be. I know very well what she said to me also when I was for seconding my said cousin, namely: that as the older I ought to have been the wiser.

The year that the king returned to Poland a quarrel arose

between Messieurs de Grillon and d'Entraigues, two brave and valiant gentlemen, who being called out and ready to fight, the king forbade them through M. de Rambouillet, one of his captains of the guard then in quarters, and he ordered M. de Nevers and the Maréchal de Retz to make up the quarrel, which they failed in doing. That evening the queen sent for them both into her room; and as their quarrel was about two great ladies of her household, she commanded them with great sternness, and then besought them both in all gentleness, to leave to her the settlement of their differences; inasmuch as, having done them the honour to meddle in it, and the princes, marshals, and captains having failed in making them agree, it was now a point of honour with her to have the glory of doing so: by which she made them friends, and they embraced without other forms, taking all from her; so that by her prudence the subject of the quarrel, which was delicate, and rather touched the honour of the two ladies, was never known publicly. That was the true kindness of a princess! And then to say she did not like the nobility! Ha! the truth was, she noticed and esteemed it too much. I think there was not a great family in the kingdom with whom she was not acquainted; she used to say she had learned from King François the genealogies of the great families of his kingdom; and as for the king, her husband, he had this faculty, that when he had once seen a nobleman he knew him always, in face, in deeds, and in reputation.

I have seen the queen, often and ordinarily, while the king,

her son, was a minor, take the trouble to present to him herself the gentlemen of his kingdom, and put them in his memory thus: "Such a one did service to the king your grandfather, at such and such times and places; and this one served your father;" and so on, — commanding him to remember all this, and to love them and do well by them, and recognize them at other times; which he knew very well how to do, for, through such instruction, this king recognized readily all men of character and race and honour throughout his kingdom.

Detractors have also said that she did not like her people. What appears? Were there ever so many tailles, subsidies, imposts, and other taxes while she was governing during the minority of her children as have since been drawn in a single year? Was it proved that she had all that hidden money in the banks of Italy, as people said? Far from that, it was found after her death that she had not a single sou; and, as I have heard some of her financiers and some of her ladies say, she was indebted eight thousand crowns, the wages of her ladies, gentlemen, and household officers, due a year, and the revenue of the whole year spent; so that some months before her death her financiers showed her these necessities; but she laughed and said one must praise God for all and find something to live on. That was her avarice and the great treasure she amassed, as people said! She never amassed anything, for she had a heart wholly noble, liberal, and magnificent, like her great uncle, Pope Leo, and that magnificent Lorenzo de' Medici. She spent or gave away everything; erecting

buildings, spending in honourable magnificences, and taking pleasure in giving recreations to her people and her Court, such as festivals, balls, dances, tournaments and spearing the ring [*couremens de bague*], of which latter she held three that were very superb during her lifetime: one at Fontainebleau on the Shrove Tuesday after the first troubles; where there were tourneys and breaking of lances and combats at the barrier, – in short, all sorts of feats of arms, with a comedy on the subject of the beautiful Genevra of Ariosto, which she caused to be represented by Mme. d'Angoulême and her most beautiful and virtuous princesses and the ladies and damoiselles of her Court, who certainly played it very well, and so that nothing finer was ever seen. The second was at Bayonne, at the interview between the queen and her good daughter Élisabeth, Queen of Spain, where the magnificence was such in all things that the Spanish, who are very disdainful of other countries than their own, swore they had never seen anything finer, and that their own king could not approach it; and thus they returned to Spain much edified.

I know that many in France blamed this expense as being superfluous; but the queen said that she did it to show foreigners that France was not so totally ruined and poverty-stricken because of the late wars as they thought; and that if for such tourneys she was able to spend so much, for matters of importance she could surely do better, and that France was all the more feared and esteemed, whether through the sight of such wealth and richness, or through that of the prowess of

her gentlemen, so brave and adroit at arms; as indeed there were many there very good to see and worthy to be admired. Moreover, it was very reasonable that for the greatest queen of Christendom, the most beautiful, the most virtuous, and the best, some great solemn festival above all others should be held. And I can assure you that if this had not been done, the foreigners would have mocked us and gone back to Spain thinking and holding us all in France to be beggars.

Therefore it was not without good and careful consideration that this wise and judicious queen made this outlay. She made another very fine one on the arrival of the Poles in Paris, whom she feasted most superbly in her Tuileries; after which, in a great hall built on purpose and surrounded by an infinite number of torches, she showed them the finest ballet that was ever seen on earth (I may indeed say so); the which was composed of sixteen of her best-taught ladies and damoiselles, who appeared in a great rock [*roc*, grotto?] all silvered, where they were seated in niches, like vapours around it. These sixteen ladies represented the sixteen provinces of France, with the most melodious music ever heard; and after having made, in this rock, the tour of the hall, like a parade in camp, and letting themselves be seen of every one, they descended from the rock and formed themselves into a little battalion, fantastically imagined, with violins to the number of thirty sounding a warlike air extremely pleasant; and thus they marched to the air of the violins, with a fine cadence they never lost, and so approached, and stopped before their Majesties.



After which they danced their ballet, most fantastically invented, with so many turns, counterturns, and gyrations, such twining and blending, such advancing and pausing (though no lady failed to find her place and rank), that all present were astonished to see how in such a maze order was not lost for a moment, and that all these ladies had their judgment clear and held it good, so well were they taught! This fantastic ballet lasted at least one hour, the which being concluded, all these sixteen ladies, representing, as I have said, the sixteen provinces, advanced to the king, the queen, the King of Poland, Monsieur his brother, the King and Queen of Navarre, and other grandees of France and Poland, presenting to each a golden salver as large as the palm of the hand, finely enamelled and beautifully chased, on which were engraved the fruits and products of each province in which they were most fertile, such as citrons and oranges in Provence, cereals in Champagne, wines in Burgundy, and in Guyenne warriors, – great honour that for Guyenne certainly! And so on, through the other provinces.

At Bayonne the like presents were made, and a combat fought, which I could represent very well, with the presents and the names of those who received them, but it would be too long. At Bayonne it was the men who gave to the ladies; here, it was the ladies giving to the men. Take note that all these inventions came from no other devising and brain than that of the queen; for she was mistress and inventress of everything; she had such faculty that whatever magnificences were done at Court, hers surpassed

all others. For which reason they used to say there was no one like the queen-mother for doing fine things. If such outlays were costly, they gave great pleasure; and people often said she wished to imitate the Roman emperors, who studied to exhibit games to their people and give them pleasures, and so amuse them as not to leave them leisure to do harm.

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