

LOUIS SAINT-SIMON

MEMOIRS OF LOUIS XIV
AND HIS COURT AND OF
THE REGENCY. VOLUME
12

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**Memoirs of Louis XIV and His
Court and of the Regency. Volume 12**

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Duc de Saint-Simon

Memoirs of Louis XIV and His Court and of the Regency – Volume 12

CHAPTER LXXXVIII

The Abbe Alberoni, having risen by the means I have described, and acquired power by following in the track of the Princesse des Ursins, governed Spain like a master. He had the most ambitious projects. One of his ideas was to drive all strangers, especially the French, out of the West Indies; and he hoped to make use of the Dutch to attain this end. But Holland was too much in the dependence of England.

At home Alberoni proposed many useful reforms, and endeavoured to diminish the expenses of the royal household. He thought, with reason, that a strong navy was the necessary basis of the power of Spain; and to create one he endeavoured to economise the public money. He flattered the King with the idea that next year he would arm forty vessels to protect the commerce of the Spanish Indies. He had the address to boast of his disinterestedness, in that whilst working at all manner of business he had never received any grace from the King, and lived only on fifty pistoles, which the Duke of Parma, his master, gave him every month; and therefore he made gently some complaints against the ingratitude of princes.

Alberoni had persuaded the Queen of Spain to keep her husband shut up, as had the Princesse des Ursins. This was a certain means of governing a prince whose temperament and whose conscience equally attached him to his spouse. He was soon completely governed once more—under lock and key, as it were, night and day. By this means the Queen was jailoress and prisoner at the same time. As she was constantly with the King nobody could come to her. Thus Alberoni kept them both shut up, with the key of their prison in his pocket.

One of the chief objects of his ambition was the Cardinal's hat. It would be too long to relate the schemes he set on foot to attain his end. He was opposed by a violent party at Rome; but at last his inflexible will and extreme cunning gained the day. The Pope, no longer able to resist the menaces of the King of Spain, and dreading the vengeance of the all-powerful minister, consented to grant the favour that minister had so pertinaciously demanded. Alberoni was made Cardinal on the 12th of July, 1717. Not a soul approved this promotion when it was announced at the consistory. Not a single cardinal uttered a word in praise of the new confrere, but many openly disapproved his nomination. Alberoni's good fortune did not stop here. At the death, some little time after, of the Bishop of Malaga, that rich see, worth thirty thousand ecus a year, was given to him. He received it as the mere introduction to the grandest and richest sees of Spain, when they should become vacant. The King of Spain gave him also twenty thousand ducats, to be levied upon property confiscated for political reasons. Shortly after, Cardinal Arias, Archbishop of Seville, having died, Alberoni was named to this rich archbishopric.

In the middle of his grandeur and good luck he met with an adventure that must have strangely disconcerted him.

I have before explained how Madame des Ursins and the deceased Queen had kept the King of Spain screened from all eyes, inaccessible to all his Court, a very palace-hermit. Alberoni, as I have said, followed their example. He kept the King even more closely imprisoned than before, and allowed no one, except a few indispensable attendants, to approach him. These attendants were a small number of valets and doctors, two gentlemen of the chamber, one or two ladies, and the majordomo-major of the King. This last post was filled by the Duc d'Escalone, always called Marquis de Villena,

in every way one of the greatest noblemen in Spain, and most respected and revered of all, and justly so, for his virtue, his appointment, and his services.

Now the King's doctors are entirely under the authority of the majordomo- major. He ought to be present at all their consultations; the King should take no remedy that he is not told of, or that he does not approve, or that he does not see taken; an account of all the medicines should be rendered to him. Just at this time the King was ill. Villena wished to discharge the duties attached to his post of majordomo-major. Alberoni caused it to be insinuated to him, that the King wished to be at liberty, and that he would be better liked if he kept at home; or had the discretion and civility not to enter the royal chamber, but to ask at the door for news. This was language the Marquis would not understand.

At the end of the grand cabinet of the mirrors was placed a bed, in which the King was laid, in front of the door; and as the room is vast and long, it is a good distance from the door (which leads to the interior) to the place where the bed was. Alberoni again caused the Marquis to be informed that his attentions were troublesome, but the Marquis did not fail to enter as before. At last, in concert with the Queen, the Cardinal resolved to refuse him admission. The Marquis, presenting himself one afternoon, a valet partly opened the door and said, with much confusion, that he was forbidden to let him enter.

"Insolent fellow," replied the Marquis, "stand aside," and he pushed the door against the valet and entered. In front of him was the Queen, seated at the King's pillow; the Cardinal standing by her side, and the privileged few, and not all of them, far away from the bed. The Marquis, who, though full of pride, was but weak upon his legs, leisurely advanced, supported upon his little stick. The Queen and the Cardinal saw him and looked at each other. The King was too ill to notice anything, and his curtains were closed except at the side where the Queen was. Seeing the Marquis approach, the Cardinal made signs, with impatience, to one of the valets to tell him to go away, and immediately after, observing that the Marquis, without replying, still advanced, he went to him, explained to him that the King wished to be alone, and begged him to leave.

"That is not true," said the Marquis; "I have watched you; you have not approached the bed, and the King has said nothing to you."

The Cardinal insisting, and without success, took him by the arm to make him go. The Marquis said he was very insolent to wish to hinder him from seeing the King, and perform his duties. The Cardinal, stronger than his adversary, turned the Marquis round, hurried him towards the door, both talking the while, the Cardinal with measure, the Marquis in no way mincing his words. Tired of being hauled out in this manner, the Marquis struggled, called Alberoni a "little scoundrel," to whom he would teach manners; and in this heat and dust the Marquis, who was weak, fortunately fell into an armchair hard by. Angry at his fall, he raised his little stick and let it fall with all his force upon the ears and the shoulders of the Cardinal, calling him a little scoundrel—a little rascal—a little blackguard, deserving a horsewhipping.

The Cardinal, whom he held with one hand, escaped as well as he could, the Marquis continuing to abuse him, and shaking the stick at him. One of the valets came and assisted him to rise from his armchair, and gain the door; for after this accident his only thought was to leave the room.

The Queen looked on from her chair during all this scene, without stirring or saying a word; and the privileged few in the chamber did not dare to move. I learned all this from every one in Spain; and moreover I asked the Marquis de Villena himself to give me the full details; and he, who was all uprightness and truth, and who had conceived some little friendship for me, related with pleasure all I have written. The two gentlemen of the chamber present also did the same, laughing in their sleeves. One had refused to tell the Marquis to leave the room, and the other had accompanied him to the door. The most singular thing is, that the Cardinal, furious, but surprised beyond measure at the blows he had received, thought only of getting out of reach. The Marquis cried to him from a distance, that but for the respect he owed to the King, and to the state in which he was, he would

give him a hundred kicks in the stomach, and haul him out by the ears. I was going to forget this. The King was so ill that he saw nothing.

A quarter of an hour after the Marquis had returned home, he received an order to retire to one of his estates at thirty leagues from Madrid. The rest of the day his house was filled with the most considerable people of Madrid, arriving as they learned the news, which made a furious sensation through the city. He departed the next day with his children. The Cardinal, nevertheless, remained so terrified, that, content with the exile of the Marquis, and with having got rid of him, he did not dare to pass any censure upon him for the blows he had received. Five or six months afterwards he sent him an order of recall, though the Marquis had not taken the slightest steps to obtain it. What is incredible is, that the adventure, the exile, the return, remained unknown to the King until the fall of the Cardinal! The Marquis would never consent to see him, or to hear him talked of, on any account, after returning, though the Cardinal was the absolute master. His pride was much humiliated by this worthy and just haughtiness; and he was all the more piqued because he left nothing undone in order to bring about a reconciliation, without any other success than that of obtaining fresh disdain, which much increased the public estimation in which this wise and virtuous nobleman was held.

CHAPTER LXXXIX

I must not omit to mention an incident which occurred during the early part of the year 1718, and which will give some idea of the character of M. le Duc d'Orleans, already pretty amply described by me.

One day (when Madame la Duchesse d'Orleans had gone to Montmartre, which she quitted soon after) I was walking alone with M. le Duc d'Orleans in the little garden of the Palais Royal, chatting upon various affairs, when he suddenly interrupted me, and turning towards me; said, "I am going to tell you something that will please you."

Thereupon he related to me that he was tired of the life he led, which was no longer in harmony with his age or his desires, and many similar things; that he was resolved to give up his gay parties, pass his evenings more soberly and decently, sometimes at home, often with Madame la Duchesse d'Orleans; that his health would gain thereby, and he should have more time for business; that in a little while I might rely upon it—there would be no more suppers of "roues and harlots" (these were his own terms), and that he was going to lead a prudent and reasonable life adapted to his age and state.

I admit that in my extreme surprise I was ravished, so great was the interest I took in him. I testified this to him with overflowing heart, thanking him for his confidence. I said to him that he knew I for a long time had not spoken to him of the indecency of his life, or of the time he lost, because I saw that in so doing I lost my own; that I had long since despaired of his conduct changing; that this had much grieved me; that he could not be ignorant from all that had passed between us at various times, how much I desired a change, and that he might judge of the surprise and joy his announcement gave me. He assured me more and more that his resolution was fixed, and thereupon I took leave of him, the hour for his soiree having arrived.

The next day I learned from people to whom the roues had just related it, that M. le Duc d'Orleans was no sooner at table than he burst out laughing, and applauded his cleverness, saying that he had just laid a trap for me into which I had fallen full length. He recited to them our conversation, at which the joy and applause were marvellous. It is the only time he ever diverted himself at my expense (not to say at his own) in a matter in which the fib he told me, and which I was foolish enough to swallow, surprised by a sudden joy that took from me reflection, did honour to me, though but little to him. I would not gratify him by telling him I knew of his joke, or call to his mind what he had said to me; accordingly he never dared to speak of it.

I never could unravel what fantasy had seized him to lead him to hoax me in this manner, since for many years I had never opened my mouth concerning the life he led, whilst he, on his side, had said not a word to me relating to it. Yet it is true that sometimes being alone with confidential valets, some complaints have escaped him (but never before others) that I ill-treated him, and spoke hastily to him, but all was said in two words, without bitterness, and without accusing me of treating him wrongfully. He spoke truly also; sometimes, when I was exasperated with stupidity or error in important matters which affected him or the State, or when he had agreed (having been persuaded and convinced by good reasons) to do or not to do some essential thing, and was completely turned from it by his feebleness, his easy-going nature (which he appreciated as well as I)—cruelly did I let out against him. But the trick he most frequently played me before others, one of which my warmth was always dupe, was suddenly to interrupt an important argument by a 'sproposito' of buffoonery. I could not stand it; sometimes being so angry that I wished to leave the room. I used to say to him that if he wished to joke I would joke as much as he liked, but to mix the most serious matters with tomfoolery was insupportable. He laughed heartily, and all the more because, as the thing often happened, I ought to have been on my guard; but never was, and was vexed both at the joke and at being surprised; then he returned to business. But princes must sometimes banter and amuse themselves with those whom

they treat as friends. Nevertheless, in spite of his occasional banter, he entertained really sincere esteem and friendship for me.

By chance I learnt one day what he really thought of me. I will say it now, so as to leave at once all these trifles. M. le Duc d'Orleans returning one afternoon from the Regency Council at the Tuileries to the Palais Royal with M. le Duc de Chartres (his son) and the Bailli de Conflans (then first gentleman of his chamber) began to talk of me, passing an eulogium upon me I hardly dare to repeat. I know not what had occurred at the Council to occasion it. All that I can say is that he insisted upon his happiness in having a friend so faithful, so unchanging at all times, so useful to him as I was, and always had been; so sure, so true, so disinterested, so firm, such as he could meet with in no one else, and upon whom he could always count. This eulogy lasted from the Tuileries to the Palais Royal, the Regent saying to his son that he wished to teach him how to make my acquaintance, as a support and a source of happiness (all that I relate here is in his own words); such as he had always found in my friendship and counsel. The Bailli de Conflans, astonished at this abundant eloquence, repeated it to me two days after, and I admit that I never have forgotten it. And here I will say that whatever others might do, whatever I myself (from disgust and vexation at what I saw ill done) might do, the Regent always sought reconciliation with me with shame, confidence, confusion, and he has never found himself in any perplexity that he has not opened his heart to me, and consulted me, without however always following my advice, for he was frequently turned from it by others.

He would never content himself with one mistress. He needed a variety in order to stimulate his taste. I had no more intercourse with them than with his rouses. He never spoke of them to me, nor I to him. I scarcely ever knew anything of their adventures. His rouses and valets were always eager to present fresh mistresses to him, from which he generally selected one. Amongst these was Madame de Sabran, who had married a man of high rank, but without wealth or merit, in order to be at liberty. There never was a woman so beautiful as she, or of a beauty more regular, more agreeable, more touching, or of a grander or nobler bearing, and yet without affectation. Her air and her manners were simple and natural, making you think she was ignorant of her beauty and of her figure (this last the finest in the world), and when it pleased her she was deceitfully modest. With much intellect she was insinuating, merry, overflowing, dissipated, not bad-hearted, charming, especially at table. In a word, she was all M. le Duc d'Orleans wanted, and soon became his mistress without prejudice to the rest.

As neither she nor her husband had a rap, they were ready for anything, and yet they did not make a large fortune. One of the chamberlains of the Regent, with an annual salary of six thousand livres, having received another appointment, Madame de Sabran thought six thousand livres a year too good to be lost, and asked for the post for her husband. She cared so little for him, by the way, that she called him her "mastiff." It was she, who, supping with M. le Duc d'Orleans and his rouses, wittily said, that princes and lackeys had been made of one material, separated by Providence at the creation from that out of which all other men had been made.

All the Regent's mistresses had one by one their turn. Fortunately they had little power, were not initiated into any state secrets, and received but little money.

The Regent amused himself with them, and treated them in other respects exactly as they deserved to be treated.

CHAPTER XC

It is time now that I should speak of matters of very great importance, which led to changes that filled my heart with excessive joy, such as it had never known before.

For a long time past the Parliament had made many encroachments upon the privileges belonging to the Dukes. Even under the late King it had begun these impudent enterprises, and no word was said against it; for nothing gave the King greater pleasure than to mix all ranks together in a caldron of confusion. He hated and feared the nobility, was jealous of their power, which in former reigns had often so successfully balanced that of the crown; he was glad therefore of any opportunity which presented itself that enabled him to see our order weakened and robbed of its dignity.

The Parliament grew bolder as its encroachments one by one succeeded. It began to fancy itself armed with powers of the highest kind. It began to imagine that it possessed all the authority of the English Parliament, forgetting that that assembly is charged with the legislative administration of the country, that it has the right to make laws and repeat laws, and that the monarch can do but little, comparatively speaking, without the support and sanction of this representative chamber; whereas, our own Parliament is but a tribunal of justice, with no control or influence over the royal authority or state affairs.

But, as I have said, success gave it new impudence. Now that the King was dead, at whose name alone it trembled, this assembly thought that a fine opportunity had come to give its power the rein. It had to do with a Regent, notorious for his easy-going disposition, his indifference to form and rule, his dislike to all vigorous measures. It fancied that victory over such an opponent would be easy; that it could successfully overcome all the opposition he could put in action, and in due time make his authority secondary to its own. The Chief-President of the Parliament, I should observe, was the principal promoter of these sentiments. He was the bosom friend of M. and Madame du Maine, and by them was encouraged in his views. Incited by his encouragement, he seized an opportunity which presented itself now, to throw down the glove to M. le Duc d'Orleans, in the name of the Parliament, and to prepare for something like a struggle. The Parliament of Brittany had recently manifested a very turbulent spirit, and this was an additional encouragement to that of Paris.

At first the Parliament men scarcely knew what to lay hold of and bring forward, as an excuse for the battle. They wished of course to gain the applause of the people as protectors of their interests—likewise those who for their private ends try to trouble and embroil the State—but could not at first see their way clear. They sent for Trudaine, Prevot des Marchand, Councillor of State, to give an account to them of the state of the Hotel de Ville funds. He declared that they had never been so well paid, and that there was no cause of complaint against the government. Baffled upon this point, they fastened upon a edict, recently rendered, respecting the money of the realm. They deliberated thereon, deputed a commission to examine the matter, made a great fuss, and came to the conclusion that the edict would, if acted upon, be very prejudicial to the country.

Thus much done, the Parliament assembled anew on Friday morning, the 17th of June, 1718, and again in the afternoon. At the end they decided upon sending a deputation to the Regent, asking him to suspend the operation of the edict, introduce into it the changes suggested by their body, and then send it to them to be registered. The deputation was sent, and said all it had to say.

On the morrow the Parliament again assembled, morning and afternoon, and sent a message to the Regent, saying, it would not separate until it had received his reply. That reply was very short and simple. The Regent sent word that he was tired of the meddling interference of the Parliament (this was not the first time, let me add, that he experienced it), that he had ordered all the troops in Paris, and round about, to hold themselves ready to march, and that the King must be obeyed. Such was in fact true. He had really ordered the soldiers to keep under arms and to be supplied with powder and shot.

The message did not intimidate the Parliament. The next day, Sunday, the Chief-President, accompanied by all the other presidents, and by several councillors, came to the Palais Royal. Although, as I have said, the leader of his company, and the right-hand man of M. and Madame du Maine, he wished for his own sake to keep on good terms with the Regent, and at the same time to preserve all authority over his brethren, so as to have them under his thumb. His discourse then to the Regent commenced with many praises and much flattery, in order to smooth the way for the three fine requests he wound up with. The first of these was that the edict should be sent to the Parliament to be examined, and to suffer such changes as the members should think fit to introduce, and then be registered; the second, that the King should pay attention to their remonstrances in an affair of this importance, which they believed prejudicial to the State; the third, that the works recently undertaken at the mint for recasting the specie should be suspended!

To these modest requests the Regent replied that the edict had been registered at the Cour des Monnaies, which is a superior court, and consequently sufficient for such registration; that there was only a single instance of an edict respecting the money of the realm having been sent before the Parliament, and then out of pure civility; that the matter had been well sifted, and all its inconveniences weighed; that it was to the advantage of the State to put in force this edict; that the works of the Mint could not be interfered with in any way; finally, that the King must be obeyed! It was quite true that the edict had been sent to the Parliament out of courtesy, but at the suggestion of the Regent's false and treacherous confidants, valets of the Parliament, such as the Marechals de Villeroy, and Huxelles, and Besons, Canillac, Effiat, and Noailles.

Notwithstanding the decisive answer they had received, the Parliament met the very next day, and passed a decree against the edict. The council of the regency, at its sitting on the afternoon of the same day, abrogated this decree. Thus, since war was in a measure declared between the Regent's authority and that of the Parliament, the orders emanating from the one were disputed by the other, and vice versa. A nice game of shuttlecock this, which it was scarce likely could last long!

The Regent was determined to be obeyed. He prohibited, therefore, the printing and posting up of the decree of the Parliament. Soldiers of the guards, too, were placed in the markets to hinder the refusal of the new money which had been issued. The fact is, by the edict which had been passed, the Louis worth thirty livres was taken at thirty-six livres, and the crown piece, worth a hundred sous, at six livres instead of five. By this edict also government notes were made legal tender until the new money should be ready. The finances were thus relieved, and the King gained largely from the recasting of the coin. But private people lost by this increase, which much exceeded the intrinsic value of the metal used, and which caused everything to rise in price. Thus the Parliament had a fine opportunity for trumpeting forth its solicitude for the public interest, and did not fail to avail itself of it.

During the night a councillor of the Parliament was surprised on horseback in the streets tearing down and disfiguring the decree of the Regency Council, which abrogated that of the Parliament. He was taken to prison.

On Monday, the 27th of June, the Chief-President, at the head of all the other presidents, and of forty councillors, went to the Tuileries, and in the presence of the Regent read the wire-drawn remonstrance of the Parliament upon this famous edict. The Keeper of the Seals said that in a few days the King would reply. Accordingly on Saturday, the 2nd of July, the same deputation came again to the Tuileries to hear the reply. The Regent and all the Princes of the blood were there, the bastards also. Argenson, who from lieutenant of police had been made keeper of the seals, and who in his former capacity had often been ill-used—nay, even attacked by the Parliament—took good care to show his superiority over that assembly. He answered that deputation in the name of the King, and concluded by saying that the edict would in no way be altered, but would receive complete application. The parliamentary gentlemen did not expect so firm a reply, and withdrew, much mortified.

They were not, however, vanquished. They reassembled on the 11th and 12th of August, and spat forth all their venom in another decree specially aimed at the authority of the Regent. By this decree the administration of the finances was henceforth entirely to be at the mercy of the Parliament. Law, the Scotchman, who, under the favour of M. le Duc d'Orleans, had been allowed some influence over the State money matters, was to possess that influence no longer; in fact, all power on the part of the Regent over the finances was to be taken from him.

After this the Parliament had to take but one step in order to become the guardian of the King and the master of the realm (as in fact it madly claimed to be), the Regent more at its mercy than the King, and perhaps as exposed as King Charles I. of England. Our parliamentary gentlemen began as humbly as those of England, and though, as I have said, their assembly was but a simple court of justice, limited in its jurisdiction like the other courts of the realm, to judge disputes between private people, yet by dint of hammering upon the word parliament they believed themselves not less important than their English brethren, who form the legislative assembly, and represent all the nation.

M. and Madame du Maine had done not a little to bring about these fancies, and they continued in secret to do more. Madame du Maine, it may be recollected, had said that she would throw the whole country into combustion, in order not to lose her husband's prerogative. She was as good as her word. Encouraged doubtless by the support they received from this precious pair, the Parliament continued on its mad career of impudent presumption, pride, and arrogance. It assembled on the 22nd of August, and ordered inquiry to be made of the Regent as to what had become of all the state notes that had been passed at the Chamber of justice; those which had been given for the lotteries that were held every month; those which had been given for the Mississippi or Western Company; finally, those which had been taken to the Mint since the change in the specie.

These questions were communicated to the Regent by the King's officers. In reply he turned his back upon them, and went away into his cabinet, leaving these people slightly bewildered. Immediately after this occurrence it was rumoured that a Bed of justice would soon be held. The Regent had not then thought of summoning such an important assembly, and his weakness and vacillation were such that no one thought he would dare to do so.

The memoirs of Cardinal de Retz, of Joly, of Madame Motteville, had turned all heads. These books had become so fashionable, that in no class was the man or woman who did not have them continually in hand. Ambition, the desire for novelty, the skill of those who circulated these books, made the majority of people hope to cut a figure or make a fortune, and persuaded them there was as little lack of personages as in the last minority. People looked upon Law as the Mazarin of the day— (they were both foreign)—upon M. and Madame du Maine, as the chiefs of the Fronde; the weakness of M. le Duc d'Orleans was compared to that of the Queen-mother, and so on.

To say the truth, all tended towards whatever was extreme—moderation seemed forgotten—and it was high time the Regent aroused himself from a supineness which rendered him contemptible, and which emboldened his enemies and those of the State to brave all and undertake all. This lethargy, too, disheartened his servants, and made all healthy activity on their part impossible. It had at last led him to the very verge of the precipice, and the realm he governed to within an inch of the greatest confusion. He had need, indeed, to be up and doing!

The Regent, without having the horrible vice or the favourites of Henry III., had even more than that monarch become notorious for his daily debauches, his indecency, and his impiety. Like Henry III., too, he was betrayed by his most intimate councillors and domestics. This treachery pleased him (as it had pleased that King) because it induced him to keep idle, now from fear, now from interest, now from disdain, and now from policy. This torpor was agreeable to him because it was in conformity with his humour and his tastes, and because he regarded those who counselled it as good, wise, and enlightened people, not blinded by their private interests, but seeing clearly things as they were; while he was importuned with opinions and explanations which would have disclosed the true state of affairs and suggested remedies.

He looked upon such people as offered these opinions and explanations as impetuous counsellors, who hurried everything and suggested everything, who wished to discount the future in order to satisfy their ambition, their aversion, their different passions. He kept on his guard against them; he applauded himself for not being their dupe. Now, he laughed at them; often he allowed them to believe he appreciated their reasoning, that he was going to act and rouse from his lethargy. He amused them thus, gained time, and diverted himself afterwards with the others. Sometimes he replied coldly to them, and when they pressed him too much he allowed his suspicions to peep out.

Long since I had perceived M. le Duc d'Orleans' mode of action. At the first movements of the Parliament, of the bastards, and of those who had usurped the name of nobility, I had warned him. I had done so again as soon as I saw the cadence and the harmony of the designs in progress. I had pointed out to him their inevitable sequel; how easy it was to hinder them at the commencement; how difficult after, especially for a person of his character and disposition. But I was not the man for such work as this. I was the oldest, the most attached, the freest spoken of all his servitors; I had given him the best proofs of this in the most critical times of his life, and in the midst of his universal abandonment; the counsels I had offered him in these sad days he had always found for his good; he was accustomed to repose in me the most complete confidence; but, whatever opinion he might have of me, and of my truth and probity, he was on his guard against what he called my warmth, and against the love I had for my dignity, so attacked by the usurpations of the bastards, the designs of the Parliament, and the modern fancies of a sham nobility. As soon as I perceived his suspicions I told him so, and I added that, content with having done my duty as citizen and as his servitor, I would say no more on the subject. I kept my word. For more than a year I had not of myself opened my mouth thereon. If he was sometimes spoken to before me, and I could not keep quite silent without being suspected of sulking or pique, I carelessly said something indefinite, with as little meaning in it as possible, and calculated to make us drop the subject.

Judge of my surprise, therefore, when as I was working as usual one afternoon with the Regent, he interrupted me to speak with bitterness of the Parliament. I replied with my accustomed coldness and pretended negligence, and continued my business. He stopped me, and said that he saw very well that I would not reply to him concerning the Parliament. I admitted it was true, and added that he must long since have perceived this. Pressed and pressed beyond measure, I coldly remarked that he could not but remember what I had said to him of the Parliament both before and after his accession to the regency, that other counsels had prevailed over mine, and that finding my opinions were misinterpreted by him, I had resolved to hold my tongue, and had done so. As the subject was now reopened I reminded him of a prophecy I had uttered long before, that he had missed the opportunity of governing the Parliament when he might have done so with a frown, and that step by step he would allow himself to be conducted by his easy-going disposition, until he found himself on the very verge of the abyss; that if he wished to recover his position he must begin at once to retrace his steps, or lose his footing for ever!

Such strong words (from my mouth they had been rare of late), pronounced with a slow, firm coldness, as though I were indifferent to the course he might adopt, made him feel how little capable I believed him of vigorous and sustained action, and what trifling trouble I took to make him adopt my views. Dubois, Argenson, and Law had also spoken to him, urging him to take strong measures against the Parliament; the effect of my speech was therefore marvellous.

It was indeed high time to do something, as I have before remarked. The Parliament, we found, after passing its last decree, had named a commission to inquire into the financial edict; this commission was working in the utmost secrecy; a number of witnesses had already been examined, and preparations were quietly making to arrest Law some fine morning, and hang him three hours after within the enclosure of the Palais de justice.

Immediately this fact became known, the Duc de la Force and Fagon (Councillor of State) went to the Regent—'twas on the 19th of August, 1718—and spoke to him with such effect, that

he ordered them to assemble with Law that very day at my house in order to see what was to be done. They came, in fact, and this was the first intimation I had that the Regent had begun to feel the gravity of his position, and that he was ready to do something. In this conference at my house the firmness of Law, hitherto so great, was shaken so that tears escaped him. Arguments did not satisfy us at first, because the question could only be decided by force, and we could not rely upon that of the Regent. The safe-conduct with which Law was supplied would not have stopped the Parliament an instant. On every side we were embarrassed. Law, more dead than alive, knew not what to say; much less what to do. His safety appeared to us the most pressing matter to ensure. If he had been taken it would have been all over with him before the ordinary machinery of negotiation (delayed as it was likely to be by the weakness of the Regent) could have been set in motion; certainly, before there would have been leisure to think of better, or to send a regiment of guards to force open the Palais de justice; a critical remedy at all times, and grievous to the last degree, even when it succeeds; frightful, if instead of Law, only his suspended corpse had been found!

I advised Law, therefore, to retire to the Palais Royal, and occupy the chamber of Nancre, his friend, then away in Spain. Law breathed again at this suggestion (approved by de la Force and Fagon), and put it in execution the moment he left my house. He might have been kept in safety at the Bank, but I thought the Palais Royal would be better: that his retirement there would create more effect, and induce the Regent to hold firm to his purpose, besides allowing his Royal Highness to see the financier whenever he pleased.

CHAPTER XCI

This done I proposed, and the others approved my proposition, that a Bed of Justice should be held as the only means left by which the abrogation of the parliamentary decrees could be registered. But while our arguments were moving, I stopped them all short by a reflection which came into my mind. I represented to my guests that the Duc du Maine was in secret the principal leader of the Parliament, and was closely allied with Marechal de Villeroy; that both would oppose might and main the assembling of a Bed of justice, so contrary to their views, to their schemes, to their projects; that to hinder it they, as guardians of the young King, would plead on his behalf, the heat, which was in fact extreme, the fear of the crowd, of the fatigue, of the bad air; that they would assume a pathetic tone in speaking of the King's health, calculated to embarrass the Regent; that if he persisted they would protest against everything which might happen to His Majesty; declare, perhaps, that in order not to share the blame, they would not accompany him; that the King, prepared by them, would grow frightened, perhaps, and would not go to the Parliament without them; that then all would be lost, and the powerlessness of the Regent, so clearly manifested, might rapidly lead to the most disastrous results.

These remarks stopped short our arguments, but I had not started objections without being prepared with a remedy for them. I said, "Let the Bed of justice be held at the Tuileries; let it be kept a profound secret until the very morning it is to take place; and let those who are to attend it be told so only a few hours before they are to assemble. By these means no time will be allowed for anybody to object to the proceeding, to plead the health of the King, the heat of the weather, or to interfere with the arrangement of the troops which it will be necessary to make."

We stopped at this: Law went away, and I dictated to Fagon the full details of my scheme, by which secrecy was to be ensured and all obstacles provided against. We finished about nine o'clock in the evening, and I counselled Fagon to carry what he had written to the Abbe Dubois, who had just returned from England with new credit over the mind of his master.

The next day I repaired to the Palais Royal about four o'clock. A moment after La Vrilliere came and relieved me of the company of Grancey and Broglio, two rouses, whom I had found in the grand cabinet, in the cool, familiarly, without wigs. When M. le Duc d'Orleans was free he led me into the cabinet, behind the grand salon, by the Rue de Richelieu, and on entering said he was at the crisis of his regency, and that everything was needed in order to sustain him on this occasion. He added that he was resolved to strike a heavy blow at the Parliament; that he much approved my proposition respecting the Bed of justice at the Tuileries, and that it would be held exactly as I had suggested.

I was delighted at his animation, and at the firmness he appeared to possess, and after having well discussed with him all the inconveniences of my plan, and their remedy, we came at last to a very important matter, the mechanical means, so to speak, by which that plan was to be put in force. There was one thing to be provided for, which may appear an exceedingly insignificant matter, but which in truth was of no light importance. When a Bed of justice is held, seats one above another must be provided for those who take part in it. No room in the Tuileries possessed such seats and how erect them without noise, without exciting remarks, without causing inquiries and suspicions, which must inevitably lead to the discovery and perhaps thereby to the failure of our project? I had not forgotten this difficulty, however, and I said to the Regent I would go in secret to Fontanieu, who controlled the crown furniture, explain all to him, and arrange matters with him so that these seats should be erected at the very last moment, in time for our purpose, but too late to supply information that could be made use of by our enemies. I hurried off accordingly, as soon as I could get away, in search of Fontanieu.

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