LOUIS SAINT-SIMON

MEMOIRS OF LOUIS XIV AND HIS COURT AND OF THE REGENCY. VOLUME 05

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Saint-Simon L. d.

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Содержание

Duc de Saint-Simon
Memoirs of Louis XIV and His Court and of the Regency – Volume 05

CHAPTER XXXIII

Two very different persons died towards the latter part of this year. The first was Lamoignon, Chief President; the second, Ninon, known by the name of Mademoiselle de l'Enclos. Of Lamoignon I will relate a single anecdote, curious and instructive, which will show the corruption of which he was capable.

One day—I am speaking of a time many years previous to the date of the occurrences just related—one day there was a great hunting party at Saint Germain. The chase was pursued so long, that the King gave up, and returned to Saint Germain. A number of courtiers, among whom was M. de Lauzun, who related this story to me, continued their sport; and just as darkness was coming on, discovered that they had lost their way. After a time, they espied a light, by which they guided their steps, and at length reached the door of a kind of castle. They knocked, they called aloud, they named themselves, and asked for hospitality. It was then between ten and eleven at night, and towards the end of autumn. The door was opened to them. The master of the house came forth. He made them take their boots off, and warm themselves; he put their horses into his stables; and at the same time had a supper prepared for his guests, who stood much in need of it. They did not wait long for the meal; yet when served it proved excellent; the wines served with it, too, were of several kinds, and excellent likewise: as for the master of the house, he was so polite and respectful, yet without being ceremonious or eager, that it was evident he had frequented the best company. The courtiers soon learnt that his name vitas Fargues, that the place was called Courson, and that he had lived there in retirement several years. After having supped, Fargues showed each of them into a separate bedroom, where they were waited upon by his valets with every proper attention. In the morning, as soon as the courtiers had dressed themselves, they found an excellent breakfast awaiting them; and upon leaving the table they saw their horses ready for them, and as thoroughly attended to as they had been themselves. Charmed with the politeness and with the manners of Fargues, and touched by his hospitable reception of them, they made him many offers of service, and made their way back to Saint Germain. Their non-appearance on the previous night had been the common talk, their return and the adventure they had met with was no less so.

These gentlemen were then the very flower of the Court, and all of them very intimate with the King. They related to him, therefore, their story, the manner of their reception, and highly praised the master of the house and his good cheer. The King asked his name, and, as soon as he heard it, exclaimed, "What, Fargues! is he so near here, then?" The courtiers redoubled their praises, and the King said no more; but soon after, went to the Queen-mother, and told her what had happened.

Fargues, indeed, was no stranger, either to her or to the King. He had taken a prominent part in the movements of Paris against the Court and Cardinal Mazarin. If he had not been hanged, it was because he was well supported by his party, who had him included in the amnesty granted to those who had been engaged in these troubles. Fearing, however, that the hatred of his enemies might place his life in danger if he remained in Paris, he retired from the capital to this country-house which has just been mentioned, where he continued to live in strict privacy, even when the death of Cardinal Mazarin seemed to render such seclusion no longer necessary.

The King and the Queen-mother, who had pardoned Fargues in spite of themselves, were much annoyed at finding that he was living in opulence and tranquillity so near the Court; thought him

extremely bold to do so; and determined to punish him for this and for his former insolence. They directed Lamoignon, therefore, to find out something in the past life of Fargues for which punishment might be awarded; and Lamoignon, eager to please, and make a profit out of his eagerness, was not long in satisfying them. He made researches, and found means to implicate Fargues in a murder that had been committed in Paris at the height of the troubles. Officers were accordingly sent to Courson, and its owner was arrested.

Fargues was much astonished when he learnt of what he was accused. He exculpated himself, nevertheless, completely; alleging, moreover, that as the murder of which he was accused had been committed during the troubles, the amnesty in which he was included effaced all memory of the deed, according to law and usage, which had never been contested until this occasion. The courtiers who had been so well treated by the unhappy man, did everything they could with the judges and the King to obtain the release of the accused. It was all in vain. Fargues was decapitated at once, and all his wealth was given by way of recompense to the Chief- President Lamoignon, who had no scruple thus to enrich himself with the blood of the innocent.

The other person who died at the same time was, as I have said, Ninon, the famous courtesan, known, since age had compelled her to quit that trade, as Mademoiselle de l'Enclos. She was a new example of the triumph of vice carried on cleverly and repaired by some virtue. The stir that she made, and still more the disorder that she caused among the highest and most brilliant youth, overcame the extreme indulgence that, not without cause, the Queen-mother entertained for persons whose conduct was gallant, and more than gallant, and made her send her an order to retire into a convent. But Ninon, observing that no especial convent was named, said, with a great courtesy, to the officer who brought the order, that, as the option was left to her, she would choose "the convent of the Cordeliers at Paris;" which impudent joke so diverted the Queen that she left her alone for the future. Ninon never had but one lover at a time— but her admirers were numberless—so that when wearied of one incumbent she told him so frankly, and took another: The abandoned one might groan and complain; her decree was without appeal; and this creature had acquired such an influence, that the deserted lovers never dared to take revenge on the favoured one, and were too happy to remain on the footing of friend of the house. She sometimes kept faithful to one, when he pleased her very much, during an entire campaign.

Ninon had illustrious friends of all sorts, and had so much wit that she preserved them all and kept them on good terms with each other; or, at least, no quarrels ever came to light. There was an external respect and decency about everything that passed in her house, such as princesses of the highest rank have rarely been able to preserve in their intrigues.

In this way she had among her friends a selection of the best members of the Court; so that it became the fashion to be received by her, and it was useful to be so, on account of the connections that were thus formed.

There was never any gambling there, nor loud laughing, nor disputes, nor talk about religion or politics; but much and elegant wit, ancient and modern stories, news of gallantries, yet without scandal. All was delicate, light, measured; and she herself maintained the conversation by her wit and her great knowledge of facts. The respect which, strange to say, she had acquired, and the number and distinction of her friends and acquaintances, continued when her charms ceased to attract; and when propriety and fashion compelled her to use only intellectual baits. She knew all the intrigues of the old and the new Court, serious and otherwise; her conversation was charming; she was disinterested, faithful, secret, safe to the last degree; and, setting aside her frailty, virtuous and full of probity. She frequently succoured her friends with money and influence; constantly did them the most important services, and very faithfully kept the secrets or the money deposits that were confided to her.

She had been intimate with Madame de Maintenon during the whole of her residence at Paris; but Madame de Maintenon, although not daring to disavow this friendship, did not like to hear her spoken about.

She wrote to Ninon with amity from time to time, even until her death; and Ninon in like manner, when she wanted to serve any friend in whom she took great interest, wrote to Madame de Maintenon, who did her what service she required efficaciously and with promptness.

But since Madame de Maintenon came to power, they had only seen each other two or three times, and then in secret.

Ninon was remarkable for her repartees. One that she made to the last Marechal de Choiseul is worth repeating. The Marechal was virtue itself, but not fond of company or blessed with much wit. One day, after a long visit he had paid her, Ninon gaped, looked at the Marechal, and cried:

"Oh, my lord! how many virtues you make me detest!"

A line from I know not what play. The laughter at this may be imagined. L'Enclos lived, long beyond her eightieth year, always healthy, visited, respected. She gave her last years to God, and her death was the news of the day. The singularity of this personage has made me extend my observations upon her.

A short time after the death of Mademoiselle de l'Enclos, a terrible adventure happened to Courtenvaux, eldest son of M. de Louvois. Courtenvaux was commander of the Cent-Suisses, fond of obscure debauches; with a ridiculous voice, miserly, quarrelsome, though modest and respectful; and in fine a very stupid fellow. The King, more eager to know all that was passing than most people believed, although they gave him credit for not a little curiosity in this respect, had authorised Bontems to engage a number of Swiss in addition to those posted at the doors, and in the parks and gardens. These attendants had orders to stroll morning, noon, and night, along the corridors, the passages, the staircases, even into the private places, and, when it was fine, in the court-yards and gardens; and in secret to watch people, to follow them, to notice where they went, to notice who was there, to listen to all the conversation they could hear, and to make reports of their discoveries. This was assiduously done at Versailles, at Marly, at Trianon, at Fontainebleau, and in all the places where the King was. These new attendants vexed Courtenvaux considerably, for over such new-comers he had no sort of authority. This season, at Fontainebleau, a room, which had formerly been occupied by a party of the Cent-Suisses and of the body-guard, was given up entirely to the new corps. The room was in a public passage of communication indispensable to all in the chateau, and in consequence, excellently well adapted for watching those who passed through it. Courtenvaux, more than ever vexed by this new arrangement, regarded it as a fresh encroachment upon his authority, and flew into a violent rage with the new-comers, and railed at them in good set terms. They allowed him to fume as he would; they had their orders, and were too wise to be disturbed by his rage. The King, who heard of all this, sent at once for Courtenvaux. As soon as he appeared in the cabinet, the King called to him from the other end of the room, without giving him time to approach, and in a rage so terrible, and for him so novel, that not only Courtenvaux, but Princes, Princesses, and everybody in the chamber, trembled. Menaces that his post should be taken away from him, terms the most severe and the most unusual, rained upon Courtenvaux, who, fainting with fright, and ready to sink under the ground, had neither the time nor the means to prefer a word. The reprimand finished by the King saying, "Get out." He had scarcely the strength to obey.

The cause of this strange scene was that Courtenvaux, by the fuss he had made, had drawn the attention of the whole Court to the change effected by the King, and that, when once seen, its object was clear to all eyes. The King, who hid his spy system with the greatest care, had counted upon this change passing unperceived, and was beside himself with anger when he found it made apparent to everybody by Courtenvaux's noise. He never regained the King's favour during the rest of his life; and but for his family he would certainly have been driven away, and his office taken from him.

Let me speak now of something of more moment.

The war, as I have said, still continued, but without bringing us any advantages. On the contrary, our losses in Germany and Italy by sickness, rather than by the sword, were so great that it was resolved to augment each company by five men; and, at the same time, twenty-five thousand militia were

raised, thus causing great ruin and great desolation in the provinces. The King was rocked into the belief that the people were all anxious to enter this militia, and, from time to time, at Marly, specimens of those enlisted were shown to him, and their joy and eagerness to serve made much of. I have heard this often; while, at the same time, I knew from my own tenantry, and from everything that was said, that the raising of this militia carried despair everywhere, and that many people mutilated themselves in order to exempt themselves from serving. Nobody at the Court was ignorant of this. People lowered their eyes when they saw the deceit practised upon the King, and the credulity he displayed, and afterwards whispered one to another what they thought of flattery so ruinous. Fresh regiments, too, were raised at this time, and a crowd of new colonels and staffs created, instead of giving a new battalion or a squadron additional to regiments already in existence. I saw quite plainly towards what rock we were drifting. We had met losses at Hochstedt, Gibraltar, and Barcelona; Catalonia and the neighbouring countries were in revolt; Italy yielding us nothing but miserable successes; Spain exhausted; France, failing in men and money, and with incapable generals, protected by the Court against their faults. I saw all these things so plainly that I could not avoid making reflections, or reporting them to my friends in office. I thought that it was time to finish the war before we sank still lower, and that it might be finished by giving to the Archduke what we could not defend, and making a division of the rest. My plan was to leave Philip V. possession of all Italy, except those parts which belonged to the Grand Duke, the republics of Venice and Genoa, and the ecclesiastical states of Naples and Sicily; our King to have Lorraine and some other slight additions of territory; and to place elsewhere the Dukes of Savoy, of Lorraine, of Parma, and of Modem. I related this plan to the Chancellor and to Chamillart, amongst others. The contrast between their replies was striking. The Chancellor, after having listened to me very attentively, said, if my plan were adopted, he would most willingly kiss my toe for joy. Chamillart, with gravity replied, that the King would not give up a single mill of all the Spanish succession. Then I felt the blindness which had fallen upon us, and how much the results of it were to be dreaded.

Nevertheless, the King, as if to mock at misfortune and to show his enemies the little uneasiness he felt, determined, at the commencement of the new year, 1706, that the Court should be gayer than ever. He announced that there would be balls at Marly every time he was there this winter, and he named those who were to dance there; and said he should be very glad to see balls given to Madame de Bourgogne at Versailles. Accordingly, many took place there, and also at Marly, and from time to time there were masquerades. One day, the King wished that everybody, even the most aged, who were at Marly, should go to the ball masked; and, to avoid all distinction, he went there himself with a gauze robe above his habit; but such a slight disguise was for himself alone; everybody else was completely disguised. M. and Madame de Beauvilliers were there perfectly disguised. When I say they were there, those who knew the Court will admit that I have said more than enough. I had the pleasure of seeing them, and of quietly laughing with them. At all these balls the King made people dance who had long since passed the age for doing so. As for the Comte de Brionne and the Chevalier de Sully, their dancing was so perfect that there was no age for them.

CHAPTER XXXIV

In the midst of all this gaiety, that is to say on the 12th of February, 1706, one of our generals, of whom I have often spoken, I mean M. de Vendome, arrived at Marly. He had not quitted Italy since succeeding to Marechal de Villeroy, after the affair of Cremona. His battles, such as they were, the places he had taken, the authority he had assumed, the reputation he had usurped, his incomprehensible successes with the King, the certainty of the support he leaned on,—all this inspired him with the desire to come and enjoy at Court a situation so brilliant, and which so far surpassed what he had a right to expect. But before speaking of the reception which was given him, and of the incredible ascendancy he took, let me paint him from the life a little more completely than I have yet done.

Vendome was of ordinary height, rather stout, but vigorous and active: with a very noble countenance and lofty mien. There was much natural grace in his carriage and words; he had a good deal of innate wit, which he had not cultivated, and spoke easily, supported by a natural boldness, which afterwards turned to the wildest audacity; he knew the world and the Court; was above all things an admirable courtier; was polite when necessary, but insolent when he dared—familiar with common people—in reality, full of the most ravenous pride. As his rank rose and his favour increased, his obstinacy, and pig-headedness increased too, so that at last he would listen to no advice whatever, and was inaccessible to all, except a small number of familiars and valets. No one better than he knew the subserviency of the French character, or took more advantage of it. Little by little he accustomed his subalterns, and then from one to the other all his army, to call him nothing but "Monseigneur," and "Your Highness." In time the gangrene spread, and even lieutenant-generals and the most distinguished people did not dare to address him in any other manner.

The most wonderful thing to whoever knew the King—so gallant to the ladies during a long part of his life, so devout the other, and often importunate to make others do as he did—was that the said King had always a singular horror of the inhabitants of the Cities of the Plain; and yet M. de Vendome, though most odiously stained with that vice—so publicly that he treated it as an ordinary gallantry—never found his favour diminished on that account. The Court, Anet, the army, knew of these abominations. Valets and subaltern officers soon found the way to promotion. I have already mentioned how publicly he placed himself in the doctor's hands, and how basely the Court acted, imitating the King, who would never have pardoned a legitimate prince what he indulged so strangely in Vendome.

The idleness of M. de Vendome was equally matter of notoriety. More than once he ran the risk of being taken prisoner from mere indolence. He rarely himself saw anything at the army, trusting to his familiars when ready to trust anybody. The way he employed his day prevented any real attention to business. He was filthy in the extreme, and proud of it. Fools called it simplicity. His bed was always full of dogs and bitches, who littered at his side, the pops rolling in the clothes. He himself was under constraint in nothing. One of his theses was, that everybody resembled him, but was not honest enough to confess it as he was. He mentioned this once to the Princesse de Conti—the cleanest person in the world, and the most delicate in her cleanliness.

He rose rather late when at the army. In this situation he wrote his letters, and gave his morning orders. Whoever had business with him, general officers and distinguished persons, could speak to him then. He had accustomed the army to this infamy. At the same time he gobbled his breakfast; and whilst he ate, listened, or gave orders, many spectators always standing round…. (I must be excused these disgraceful details, in order better to make him known)…. On shaving days he used the same vessel to lather his chin in. This, according to him, was a simplicity of manner worthy of the ancient Romans, and which condemned the splendour and superfluity of the others. When all was over, he dressed; then played high at piquet or hombre; or rode out, if it was absolutely necessary. All was now

over for the day. He supped copiously with his familiars: was a great eater, of wonderful gluttony; a connoisseur in no dish, liked fish much, but the stale and stinking better than the good. The meal prolonged itself in theses and disputes, and above all in praise and flattery.

He would never have forgiven the slightest blame from any one. He wanted to pass for the first captain of his age, and spoke with indecent contempt of Prince Eugene and all the others. The faintest contradiction would have been a crime. The soldier and the subaltern adored him for his familiarity with them, and the licence he allowed in order to gain their hearts; for all which he made up by excessive haughtiness towards whoever was elevated by rank or birth.

On one occasion the Duke of Parma sent the bishop of that place to negotiate some affair with him; but M. de Vendome took such disgusting liberties in his presence, that the ecclesiastic, though without saying a word, returned to Parma, and declared to his master that never would he undertake such an embassy again. In his place another envoy was sent, the famous Alberoni. He was the son of a gardener, who became an Abbe in order to get on. He was full of buffoonery; and pleased M. de Parma as might a valet who amused him, but he soon showed talent and capacity for affairs. The Duke thought that the night-chair of M. de Vendome required no other ambassador than Alberoni, who was accordingly sent to conclude what the bishop had left undone. The Abbe determined to please, and was not proud. M. de Vendome exhibited himself as before; and Alberoni, by an infamous act of personal adoration, gained his heart. He was thenceforth much with him, made cheese-soup and other odd messes for him; and finally worked his way. It is true he was cudgelled by some one he had offended, for a thousand paces, in sight of the whole army, but this did not prevent his advancement. Vendome liked such an unscrupulous flatterer; and yet as we have seen, he was not in want of praise. The extraordinary favour shown him by the King—the credulity with which his accounts of victories were received—showed to every one in what direction their laudation was to be sent.

Such was the man whom the King and the whole Court hastened to caress and flatter from the first moment of his arrival amongst us. There was a terrible hubbub: boys, porters, and valets rallied round his postchaise when he reached Marly. Scarcely had he ascended into his chamber, than everybody, princes, bastards and all the rest, ran after him. The ministers followed: so that in a short time nobody was left in the salon but the ladies. M. de Beauvilliers was at Vaucresson. As for me, I remained spectator, and did not go and adore this idol.

In a few minutes Vendome was sent for by the King and Monseigneur. As soon as he could dress himself, surrounded as he was by such a crowd, he went to the salon, carried by it rather than environed. Monseigneur stopped the music that was playing, in order to embrace him. The King left the cabinet where he was at work, and came out to meet him, embracing him several times. Chamillart on the morrow gave a fete in his honour at L'Etang, which lasted two days. Following his example, Pontchartrain, Torcy, and the most distinguished lords of the Court, did the same. People begged and entreated to give him fetes; people begged and entreated to be invited to them. Never was triumph equal to his; each step he took procured him a new one. It is not too much to say, that everybody disappeared before him; Princes of the blood, ministers, the grandest seigneurs, all appeared only to show how high he was above them; even the King seemed only to remain King to elevate him more.

The people joined in this enthusiasm, both in Versailles and at Paris, where he went under pretence of going to the opera. As he passed along the streets crowds collected to cheer him; they billed him at the doors, and every seat was taken in advance; people pushed and squeezed everywhere, and the price of admission was doubled, as on the nights of first performances. Vendome, who received all these homages with extreme ease, was yet internally surprised by a folly so universal. He feared that all this heat would not last out even the short stay he intended to make. To keep himself more in reserve, he asked and obtained permission to go to Anet, in the intervals between the journeys to Marly. All the Court, however, followed him there, and the King was pleased rather than otherwise, at seeing Versailles half deserted for Anet, actually asking some if they had been, others, when they intended to go.

It was evident that every one had resolved to raise M. de Vendome to the rank of a hero. He determined to profit by the resolution. If they made him Mars, why should he not act as such? He claimed to be appointed commander of the Marechals of France, and although the King refused him this favour, he accorded him one which was but the stepping-stone to it. M. de Vendome went away towards the middle of March to command the army in Italy, with a letter signed by the King himself, promising him that if a Marechal of France were sent to Italy, that Marechal was to take commands from him. M. de Vendome was content, and determined to obtain all he asked on a future day. The disposition of the armies had been arranged just before. Tesse, for Catalonia and Spain; Berwick, for the frontier of Portugal; Marechal Villars, for Alsace; Marsin, for the Moselle; Marechal de Villeroy, for Flanders; and M. de Vendome, as I have said, for Italy.

Now that I am speaking of the armies, let me give here an account of all our military operations this year, so as to complete that subject at once.

M. de Vendome commenced his Italian campaign by a victory. He attacked the troops of Prince Eugene upon the heights of Calcinato, drove them before him, killed three thousand men, took twenty standards, ten pieces of cannon, and eight thousand prisoners. It was a rout rather than a combat. The enemy was much inferior in force to us, and was without its general, Prince Eugene, he not having returned to open the campaign. He came back, however, the day after this engagement, soon re-established order among his troops, and M. de Vendome from that time, far from being able to recommence the attack, was obliged to keep strictly on the defensive while he remained in Italy. He did not fail to make the most of his victory, which, however, to say the truth, led to nothing.

Our armies just now were, it must be admitted, in by no means a good condition. The generals owed their promotion to favour and fantasy. The King thought he gave them capacity when he gave them their patents. Under M. de Turenne the army had afforded, as in a school, opportunities for young officers to learn the art of warfare, and to qualify themselves step by step to take command. They were promoted as they showed signs of their capacity, and gave proof of their talent. Now, however, it was very different. Promotion was granted according to length of service, thus rendering all application and diligence unnecessary, except when M. de Louvois suggested to the King such officers as he had private reasons for being favourable to, and whose actions he could control. He persuaded the King that it was he himself who ought to direct the armies from his cabinet. The King, flattered by this, swallowed the bait, and Louvois himself was thus enabled to govern in the name of the King, to keep the generals in leading-strings, and to fetter their every movement. In consequence of the way in which promotions were made, the greatest ignorance prevailed amongst all grades of officers. None knew scarcely anything more than mere routine duties, and sometimes not even so much as that. The luxury which had inundated the army, too, where everybody wished to live as delicately as at Paris, hindered the general officers from associating with the other officers, and in consequence from knowing and appreciating them. As a matter of course, there were no longer any deliberations upon the state of affairs, in which the young might profit by the counsels of the old, and the army profit by the discussions of all. The young officers talked only of pay and women; the old, of forage and equipages; the generals spent half their time in writing costly despatches, often useless, and sending them away by couriers. The luxury of the Court and city had spread into the army, so that delicacies were carried there unknown formerly. Nothing was spoken of but hot dishes in the marches and in the detachments; and the repasts that were carried to the trenches, during sieges, were not only well served, but ices and fruits were partaken of as at a fete, and a profusion of all sorts of liqueurs. Expense ruined the officers, who vied with one another in their endeavours to appear magnificent; and the things to be carried, the work to be done, quadrupled the number of domestics and grooms, who often starved. For a long time, people had complained of all this; even those who were put to the expenses, which ruined them; but none dared to spend less. At last, that is to say, in the spring of the following year, the King made severe rules, with the object of bringing about a reform in this particular. There is no country in Europe where there are so many fine laws, or where

the observance of them is of shorter duration. It often happens, that in the first year all are infringed, and in the second, forgotten. Such was the army at this time, and we soon had abundant opportunities to note its incapacity to overcome the enemies with whom we had to contend.

The King wished to open this campaign with two battles; one in Italy, the other in Flanders. His desire was to some extent gratified in the former case; but in the other he met with a sad and cruel disappointment. Since the departure of Marechal de Villeroy for Flanders, the King had more than once pressed him to engage the enemy. The Marechal, piqued with these reiterated orders, which he considered as reflections upon his courage, determined to risk anything in order to satisfy the desire of the King. But the King did not wish this. At the same time that he wished for a battle in Flanders, he wished to place Villeroy in a state to fight it. He sent orders, therefore, to Marsin to take eighteen battalions and twenty squadrons of his army, to proceed to the Moselle, where he would find twenty others, and then to march with the whole into Flanders, and join Marechal de Villeroy. At the same time he prohibited the latter from doing anything until this reinforcement reached him. Four couriers, one after the other, carried this prohibition to the Marechal; but he had determined to give battle without assistance, and he did so, with what result will be seen.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.