

JEANNE LOUISE CAMPAN

MEMOIRS OF THE COURT
OF MARIE ANTOINETTE,
QUEEN OF FRANCE,
VOLUME 1

Jeanne Louise Henriette Campan

**Memoirs of the Court of
Marie Antoinette, Queen
of France, Volume 1**

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Содержание

PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR	5
MADAME CAMPAN	7
HISTORIC COURT MEMOIRS	8
MEMOIR OF MADAME CAMPAN	9
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	12

Mme. Campan
Memoirs of the Court of Marie Antoinette,
Queen of France, Volume 1 / Being the
Historic Memoirs of Madam Campan,
First Lady in Waiting to the Queen

PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR

Louis XVI. possessed an immense crowd of confidants, advisers, and guides; he selected them even from among the factions which attacked him. Never, perhaps, did he make a full disclosure to any one of them, and certainly he spoke with sincerity, to but very few. He invariably kept the reins of all secret intrigues in his own hand; and thence, doubtless, arose the want of cooperation and the weakness which were so conspicuous in his measures. From these causes considerable chasms will be found in the detailed history of the Revolution.

In order to become thoroughly acquainted with the latter years of the reign of Louis XV., memoirs written by the Duc de Choiseul, the Duc d'Aiguillon, the Marechal de Richelieu,

[I heard Le Marechal de Richelieu desire M. Campan, who was librarian to the Queen, not to buy the Memoirs which would certainly be attributed to him after his death, declaring them false by anticipation; and adding that he was ignorant of orthography, and had never amused himself with writing. Shortly after the death of the Marshal, one Soulavie put forth Memoirs of the Marechal de Richelieu.]

and the Duc de La Vauguyon, should be before us. To give us a faithful portrait of the unfortunate reign of Louis XVI., the Marechal du Muy, M. de Maurepas, M. de Vergennes, M. de Malesherbes, the Duc d'Orleans, M. de La Fayette, the Abby de Vermond, the Abbe Montesquiou, Mirabeau, the Duchesse de Polignac, and the Duchesse de Luynes should have noted faithfully in writing all the transactions in which they took decided parts. The secret political history of a later period has been disseminated among a much greater number of persons; there are Ministers who have published memoirs, but only when they had their own measures to justify, and then they confined themselves to the vindication of their own characters, without which powerful motive they probably would have written nothing. In general, those nearest to the Sovereign, either by birth or by office, have left no memoirs; and in absolute monarchies the mainsprings of great events will be found in particulars which the most exalted persons alone could know. Those who have had but little under their charge find no subject in it for a book; and those who have long borne the burden of public business conceive themselves to be forbidden by duty, or by respect for authority, to disclose all they know. Others, again, preserve notes, with the intention of reducing them to order when they shall have reached the period of a happy leisure; vain illusion of the ambitious, which they cherish, for the most part, but as a veil to conceal from their sight the hateful image of their inevitable downfall! and when it does at length take place, despair or chagrin deprives them of fortitude to dwell upon the dazzling period which they never cease to regret.

Louis XVI. meant to write his own memoirs; the manner in which his private papers were arranged indicated this design. The Queen also had the same intention; she long preserved a large correspondence, and a great number of minute reports, made in the spirit and upon the event of the moment. But after the 20th of June, 1792, she was obliged to burn the larger portion of what she had so collected, and the remainder were conveyed out of France.

Considering the rank and situations of the persons I have named as capable of elucidating by their writings the history of our political storms, it will not be imagined that I aim at placing myself on a level with them; but I have spent half my life either with the daughters of Louis XV. or with Marie Antoinette. I knew the characters of those Princesses; I became privy to some extraordinary facts, the publication of which may be interesting, and the truth of the details will form the merit of my work.

I was very young when I was placed about the Princesses, the daughters of Louis XV., in the capacity of reader. I was acquainted with the Court of Versailles before the time of the marriage of Louis XVI. with the Archduchess Marie Antoinette.

MADAME CAMPAN

My father, who was employed in the department of Foreign Affairs, enjoyed the reputation due to his talents and to his useful labours. He had travelled much. Frenchmen, on their return home from foreign countries, bring with them a love for their own, increased in warmth; and no man was more penetrated with this feeling, which ought to be the first virtue of every placeman, than my father. Men of high title, academicians, and learned men, both natives and foreigners, sought my father's acquaintance, and were gratified by being admitted into his house.

Twenty years before the Revolution I often heard it remarked that the imposing character of the power of Louis XIV. was no longer to be found in the Palace of Versailles; that the institutions of the ancient monarchy were rapidly sinking; and that the people, crushed beneath the weight of taxes, were miserable, though silent; but that they began to give ear to the bold speeches of the philosophers, who loudly proclaimed their sufferings and their rights; and, in short, that the age would not pass away without the occurrence of some great outburst, which would unsettle France, and change the course of its progress.

Those who thus spoke were almost all partisans of M. Turgot's system of administration: they were Mirabeau the father, Doctor Quesnay, Abbe Bandeau, and Abbe Nicoli, charge d'affaires to Leopold, Grand Duke of Tuscany, and as enthusiastic an admirer of the maxims of the innovators as his Sovereign.

My father sincerely respected the purity of intention of these politicians. With them he acknowledged many abuses in the Government; but he did not give these political sectarians credit for the talent necessary for conducting a judicious reform. He told them frankly that in the art of moving the great machine of Government, the wisest of them was inferior to a good magistrate; and that if ever the helm of affairs should be put into their hands, they would be speedily checked in the execution of their schemes by the immeasurable difference existing between the most brilliant theories and the simplest practice of administration.

Destiny having formerly placed me near crowned heads, I now amuse my solitude when in retirement with collecting a variety of facts which may prove interesting to my family when I shall be no more. The idea of collecting all the interesting materials which my memory affords occurred to me from reading the work entitled "Paris, Versailles, and the Provinces in the Eighteenth Century." That work, composed by a man accustomed to the best society, is full of piquant anecdotes, nearly all of which have been recognised as true by the contemporaries of the author. I have put together all that concerned the domestic life of an unfortunate Princess, whose reputation is not yet cleared of the stains it received from the attacks of calumny, and who justly merited a different lot in life, a different place in the opinion of mankind after her fall. These memoirs, which were finished ten years ago, have met with the approbation of some persons; and my son may, perhaps, think proper to print them after my decease.

J. L. H. C.

—When Madame Campan wrote these lines, she did not anticipate that the death of her son would precede her own.

HISTORIC COURT MEMOIRS

MARIE ANTOINETTE

MEMOIR OF MADAME CAMPAN

JEANNE LOUISE HENRIETTE GENET was born in Paris on the 6th of October, 1752. M. Genet, her father, had obtained, through his own merit and the influence of the Duc de Choiseul, the place of first clerk in the Foreign Office.

Literature, which he had cultivated in his youth, was often the solace of his leisure hours. Surrounded by a numerous family, he made the instruction of his children his chief recreation, and omitted nothing which was necessary to render them highly accomplished. His clever and precocious daughter Henriette was very early accustomed to enter society, and to take an intelligent interest in current topics and public events. Accordingly, many of her relations being connected with the Court or holding official positions, she amassed a fund of interesting recollections and characteristic anecdotes, some gathered from personal experience, others handed down by old friends of the family.

"The first event which made any impression on me in my childhood," she says in her reminiscences, "was the attempt of Damiens to assassinate Louis XV. This occurrence struck me so forcibly that the most minute details relating to the confusion and grief which prevailed at Versailles on that day seem as present to my imagination as the most recent events. I had dined with my father and mother, in company with one of their friends. The drawing-room was lighted up with a number of candles, and four card-tables were already occupied, when a friend of the gentleman of the house came in, with a pale and terrified countenance, and said, in a voice scarcely audible, 'I bring you terrible news. The King has been assassinated!' Two ladies in the company fainted; a brigadier of the Body Guards threw down his cards and cried out, 'I do not wonder at it; it is those rascally Jesuits.'—'What are you saying, brother?' cried a lady, flying to him; 'would you get yourself arrested?'—'Arrested! For what? For unmasking those wretches who want a bigot for a King?' My father came in; he recommended circumspection, saying that the blow was not mortal, and that all meetings ought to be suspended at so critical a moment. He had brought the chaise for my mother, who placed me on her knees. We lived in the Avenue de Paris, and throughout our drive I heard incessant cries and sobs from the footpaths.

"At last I saw a man arrested; he was an usher of the King's chamber, who had gone mad, and was crying out, 'Yes, I know them; the wretches! the villains!' Our chaise was stopped by this bustle. My mother recognised the unfortunate man who had been seized; she gave his name to the trooper who had stopped him. The poor usher was therefore merely conducted to the gens d'armes' guardroom, which was then in the avenue.

"I have often heard M. de Landsmath, equerry and master of the hounds, who used to come frequently to my father's, say that on the news of the attempt on the King's life he instantly repaired to his Majesty. I cannot repeat the coarse expressions he made use of to encourage his Majesty; but his account of the affair, long afterwards, amused the parties in which he was prevailed on to relate it, when all apprehensions respecting the consequences of the event had subsided. This M. de Landsmath was an old soldier, who had given proofs of extraordinary valour; nothing had been able to soften his manners or subdue his excessive bluntness to the respectful customs of the Court. The King was very fond of him. He possessed prodigious strength, and had often contended with Marechal Saxe, renowned for his great bodily power, in trying the strength of their respective wrists.

[One day when the King was hunting in the forest of St. Germain, Landemath, riding before him, wanted a cart, filled with the slime of a pond that had just been cleansed, to draw up out of the way. The carter resisted, and even answered with impertinence. Landsmath, without dismounting, seized him by the breast of his coat, lifted him up, and threw him into his cart.—MADAME CAMPAN.]

"M. de Landsmath had a thundering voice. When he came into the King's apartment he found the Dauphin and Mesdames, his Majesty's daughters, there; the Princesses, in tears, surrounded the

King's bed. Send out all these weeping women, Sire,' said the old equerry; 'I want to speak to you alone: The King made a sign to the Princesses to withdraw. 'Come,' said Landsmath, 'your wound is nothing; you had plenty of waistcoats and flannels on.' Then uncovering his breast, 'Look here,' said he, showing four or five great scars, 'these are something like wounds; I received them thirty years ago; now cough as loud as you can.' The King did so. 'Tis nothing at all,' said Landsmath; 'you must laugh at it; we shall hunt a stag together in four days.'—'But suppose the blade was poisoned,' said the King. 'Old grandams' tales,' replied Landsmath; 'if it had been so, the waistcoats and flannels would have rubbed the poison off.' The King was pacified, and passed a very good night.

"His Majesty one day asked M. de Landsmath how old he was. He was aged, and by no means fond of thinking of his age; he evaded the question. A fortnight later, Louis XV. took a paper out of his pocket and read aloud: 'On such a day in the month of one thousand six hundred and eighty, was baptised by me, rector of —, the son of the high and mighty lord,' etc. 'What's that?' said Landsmath, angrily; 'has your Majesty been procuring the certificate of my baptism?'—'There it is, you see, Landsmath,' said the King. 'Well, Sire, hide it as fast as you can; a prince entrusted with the happiness of twenty-five millions of people ought not wilfully to hurt the feelings of a single individual.'

"The King learned that Landsmath had lost his confessor, a missionary priest of the parish of Notre-Dame. It was the custom of the Lazarists to expose their dead with the face uncovered. Louis XV. wished to try his equerry's firmness. 'You have lost your confessor, I hear,' said the King. 'Yes, Sire.'—'He will be exposed with his face bare?'—'Such is the custom.'—'I command you to go and see him.'—'Sire, my confessor was my friend; it would be very painful to me.'—'No matter; I command you.'—'Are you really in earnest, Sire?'—'Quite so.'—'It would be the first time in my life that I had disobeyed my sovereign's order. I will go.' The next day the King at his levee, as soon as he perceived Landsmath, said, 'Have you done as I desired you, Landsmath?'—'Undoubtedly, Sire.'—'Well, what did you see?'—'Faith, I saw that your Majesty and I are no great shakes!'

"At the death of Queen Maria Leczinska, M. Campan,—[Her father-in-law, afterwards secretary to Marie Antoinette.]—then an officer of the chamber, having performed several confidential duties, the King asked Madame Adelaide how he should reward him. She requested him to create an office in his household of master of the wardrobe, with a salary of a thousand crowns. 'I will do so,' said the King; 'it will be an honourable title; but tell Campan not to add a single crown to his expenses, for you will see they will never pay him.'

"Louis XV., by his dignified carriage, and the amiable yet majestic expression of his features, was worthy to succeed to Louis the Great. But he too frequently indulged in secret pleasures, which at last were sure to become known. During several winters, he was passionately fond of 'candles' end balls', as he called those parties amongst the very lowest classes of society. He got intelligence of the picnics given by the tradesmen, milliners, and sempstresses of Versailles, whither he repaired in a black domino, and masked, accompanied by the captain of his Guards, masked like himself. His great delight was to go 'en brouette'—[In a kind of sedan-chair, running on two wheels, and drawn by a chairman.]—Care was always taken to give notice to five or six officers of the King's or Queen's chamber to be there, in order that his Majesty might be surrounded by people on whom he could depend, without finding it troublesome. Probably the captain of the Guards also took other precautions of this description on his part. My father-in-law, when the King and he were both young, has often made one amongst the servants desired to attend masked at these parties, assembled in some garret, or parlour of a public-house. In those times, during the carnival, masked companies had a right to join the citizens' balls; it was sufficient that one of the party should unmask and name himself.

"These secret excursions, and his too habitual intercourse with ladies more distinguished for their personal charms than for the advantages of education, were no doubt the means by which the King acquired many vulgar expressions which otherwise would never have reached his ears.

"Yet amidst the most shameful excesses the King sometimes suddenly resumed the dignity of his rank in a very noble manner. The familiar courtiers of Louis XV. had one day abandoned

themselves to the unrestrained gaiety, of a supper, after returning from the chase. Each boasted of and described the beauty of his mistress. Some of them amused themselves with giving a particular account of their wives' personal defects. An imprudent word, addressed to Louis XV., and applicable only to the Queen, instantly dispelled all the mirth of the entertainment. The King assumed his regal air, and knocking with his knife on the table twice or thrice, 'Gentlemen; said he, 'here is the King!'

"Those men who are most completely abandoned to dissolute manners are not, on that account, insensible to virtue in women. The Comtesse de Perigord was as beautiful as virtuous. During some excursions she made to Choisy, whither she had been invited, she perceived that the King took great notice of her. Her demeanour of chilling respect, her cautious perseverance in shunning all serious conversation with the monarch, were insufficient to extinguish this rising flame, and he at length addressed a letter to her, worded in the most passionate terms. This excellent woman instantly formed her resolution: honour forbade her returning the King's passion, whilst her profound respect for the sovereign made her unwilling to disturb his tranquillity. She therefore voluntarily banished herself to an estate she possessed called Chalais, near Barbezieux, the mansion of which had been uninhabited nearly a century; the porter's lodge was the only place in a condition to receive her. From this seat she wrote to his Majesty, explaining her motives for leaving Court; and she remained there several years without visiting Paris. Louis XV. was speedily attracted by other objects, and regained the composure to which Madame de Perigord had thought it her duty to sacrifice so much. Some years after, Mesdames' lady of honour died. Many great families solicited the place. The King, without answering any of their applications, wrote to the Comtesse de Perigord: 'My daughters have just lost their lady of honour; this place, madame, is your due, as much on account of your personal qualities as of the illustrious name of your family.'

"Three young men of the college of St. Germain, who had just completed their course of studies, knowing no person about the Court, and having heard that strangers were always well treated there, resolved to dress themselves completely in the Armenian costume, and, thus clad, to present themselves to see the grand ceremony of the reception of several knights of the Order of the Holy Ghost. Their stratagem met with all the success with which they had flattered themselves. While the procession was passing through the long mirror gallery, the Swiss of the apartments placed them in the first row of spectators, recommending every one to pay all possible attention to the strangers. The latter, however, were imprudent enough to enter the 'oeil-de-boeuf' chamber, where, were Messieurs Cardonne and Ruffin, interpreters of Oriental languages, and the first clerk of the consul's department, whose business it was to attend to everything which related to the natives of the East who were in France. The three scholars were immediately surrounded and questioned by these gentlemen, at first in modern Greek. Without being disconcerted, they made signs that they did not understand it. They were then addressed in Turkish and Arabic; at length one of the interpreters, losing all patience, exclaimed, 'Gentlemen, you certainly must understand some of the languages in which you have been addressed. What country can you possibly come from then?'—'From St. Germain-en-Laye, sir,' replied the boldest among them; 'this is the first time you have put the question to us in French.' They then confessed the motive of their disguise; the eldest of them was not more than eighteen years of age. Louis XV. was informed of the affair. He laughed heartily, ordered them a few hours' confinement and a good admonition, after which they were to be set at liberty.

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