



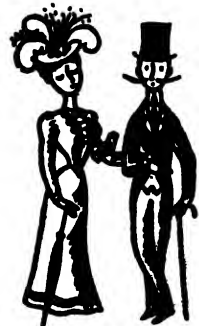
THE  
HISTORY  
OF  
FRANCE

*As told to Juliette*

*by*

JEAN DUCHÉ

Translated by R. H. Stevens



First Published in the English Language  
in Great Britain

Translated from *L'Histoire de France Racontée  
à Juliette* published in France

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*Burke Publishing Company Ltd.,  
55 Britton Street, London, E.C.1*

*Printed in Great Britain by  
C. Tinling & Co. Ltd., Liverpool, London and Prescott*

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## Preface

Of a good author, as of a cook-general, the first question that is asked is: "Have you any references?" To have or not to have,<sup>1</sup> that is the question.<sup>2</sup> I have.<sup>3</sup>

I don't really pose as an historian. Indeed, I must confess that history, as it is recorded in our text-books, bores me. And so I have tried my best to do something different. Here I am telling you a story, and I am telling it in the present tense. But the most vital part of the present, surely, is the future with all its uncertainty. "What happens next, I wonder? Is Napoleon going to die in Saint Helena, or. . . ?"

I should have preferred to write my story without dates and even, perhaps, without great names. "How did people live in such-and-such an age?" That, surely, is the crux of the whole question.<sup>4</sup> That, too, is why history is a resurrection<sup>5</sup> or a chaplet of facts, more or less substantiated, which each individual interprets in his own way, and the most plausible explanation may well be the nearest to the truth—a story full of noise and fury told by an idiot.<sup>6</sup>

In my own turn, therefore, I have portrayed France as a living person.<sup>7</sup> I saw her in her Gallic cradle being suckled on the milk of Rome and in her happy infancy being protected by the Roman Empire. Then came the time when this little girl fell rather brusquely into the ungrateful age—and the less said about her doings for the next five centuries the better. But when she enters upon her eleventh century she awakens, and the green years of her adolescence cause us to marvel. She reaches puberty in her sixteenth century to the accompaniment of the voluptuous explosion of the Renaissance. During her seventeenth and eighteenth centuries she is the loveliest maiden in the world, and, as you might well expect, she indulges in wayward and madcap adventures, which take the form of a revolution and an empire. After that, she settles down to staid, *bourgeois* marriage. And now she is in the springtime of her twentieth century and stands, I am convinced, on the threshold of a new life.

In watching this attractive young woman grow up, I have seen both

<sup>1</sup> Hemmingway.

<sup>4</sup> Valéry.

<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare.

<sup>6</sup> Michelet.

<sup>3</sup> As is obvious from these footnotes.

<sup>5</sup> Shakespeare.

<sup>7</sup> Michelet.

great and noble actions and all those various little things, which to me are the speaking images of life itself. As I do not wish to encumber myself much longer with footnotes, allow me, please, to issue to myself a certificate of historical good conduct.

When I say that Julius sent for his stenographer, when Fortunata declares she wishes to lead her own life—and tots up the tally of her husbands, when I give Cato's recipe for mulled wine, when I paint a picture of a Bordeaux street in A.D. 507 or of a Gallo-Roman villa on the banks of the Garonne, when the Bishop Sidonius Apollinaris gives away his family silver, when I describe the bracelets worn by Miroflède, Dagobert's concubine, when I speak of Miss Bavaria, winner of an international beauty competition organised by Louis the Affable, when the daughter of the Countess "makes much" of a knight in the eleventh century stronghold, when an amorous Saint Louis fixes a secret rendezvous with his wife on the staircase of the *château* of Pontoise, when Louis XIV . . . in short, there is not one single fact or description in this book, which is not based on an historical document or the authority of some eminent historian (except, of course, for a few, very obvious, wisecracks).

The truth is not always funny; but I see no reason to deny myself the use of that brand of humour which constitutes a very agreeable art and which is appropriate to all kinds of subjects—even truly serious subjects.

I have been at pains to avoid romanticising. . . . But I decided to tell this story of France like a film, in pictures, that is, in broad and generous outline, with peeps forward and flash-backs, with dialogue and running commentary. It has been my good fortune to have the help of a most devoted cameraman, Chronossus. Born twenty-nine centuries ago, Chronossus was at school with Vercingetorix and was a valiant Knight of the Crusades; though he seems to have had quite an affair with Marion Delorme, he was there with his rifle at the barricades of the *Commune*. No one was more skilful than he at being, with his camera, at the right spot at the right time during the Hundred Years War. It is my agreeable duty to pay homage to his serene sense of historical detachment, which allowed him to say to me one day:

"From the days of Clovis I feel as though I have been in sympathy with everything—except intolerance."

Finally, let me end this preface by expressing my thanks to all the numerous authors, whose works I have pillaged without reference or acknowledgement (conforming, in this respect, to the custom of all historians)—and also to those thousand million Frenchmen who have made France what she is and whom it is, alas, not possible to mention individually by name within the framework of this modest work.

## PROLOGUE

### Before the Dawn of Time

“ONCE upon a time there was the sun, and round it there revolved a little drop of water; and the little drop of water changed—first into vapour, then into a slimy mass and finally into something solid, from which emerged—a continent, only a very temporary continent, which was destined to return soon to the water.

“As a matter of fact, no one greeted this epoch-making event with a joyous cry of ‘Land!’—except, perhaps, a somewhat inquisitive little fish which, rather bored with a thousand million years of humidity and greatly daring, came out of the sea and decided that it would be rather jolly to walk on the solid earth and in the fresh air. Then it realised that to do so, it would have to have legs and lungs; and so, it proceeded to procure them, three hundred and fifty million years ago yesterday.

“Three hundred and forty-nine million years later it had developed into a man. For, such as we are, my dear love, you and I, we have only existed for a million years—and the earth is growing cold again!”

“Like your tournedos,” said Juliette.

“If one may not dream when lunching in a restaurant in Cro Magnon,” I retorted, “I don’t know. . . .”

“One may always dream,” replied Juliette.

“No—but seriously—those bison in the Lascaux cave! What lines! What form! What perfect curves and sense of motion! Even the potters of ancient Greece and Picasso have done nothing better. And it’s here, at this very spot where we are lunching, that the first known man of the world used to live.”

“And that only goes back twenty thousand years,” said Juliette. “When you think of the million years of man, the three hundred and fifty million years of the mammal and the thousand million years of the fish. . . .”

“And compare that with the three score and ten years that are our allotted span, you must admit that it’s pretty short measure!”

"Exactly!" said Juliette. "And that's why one must hurry and make the most of it."

"Twenty thousand years belong to that prehistoric man buried here, beneath our table, and less than three thousand to our own history! It does whittle things down a bit, Juliette, doesn't it? The history of this little Asiatic cape, which we call Europe, starts, for us, with the beginning of the Iron Age."

"Don't talk so loud," admonished Juliette. "Someone will hear you."

"So what?"

"All right—go on. So what?"

"Then it was that men, who were still using ivory spears with which to kill each other, invented the sword; a pretty considerable step forward, my dear. . . ."

"Which has since been pretty considerably eclipsed," said Juliette. "The Germans in Cro Magnon chivvied the *maquisards* with sub-machine guns, and the last war. . . ."

"Ended with the atom bomb!"

Juliette gave a little shiver. "Let's talk about something else," she said. "The atom bomb is hardly a topic for the last meal of our holidays."

(Now—if we had not come back from Spain via Eyzies, all this would never have happened—I mean this history of France.)

"But Juliette—those ruins on the gulf of Rosas. . . ."

"Still dreaming?"

"Those ruins near where we stayed last night, that place Ampurias, d'you realise that it was once a capital city of antiquity?"

"Carry on," said Juliette resignedly. "There's nothing like a good lunch to loosen the tongue."

"Phoenician boats used to cast anchor at the end of that gulf where, in ancient days, what now is silted over with sand or verdant with vine was once a flourishing little port. I was thinking about it yesterday. Yes—that Greek town on the gentle slopes, with its roseate laurel hedges, its pines along the waterfront—I saw it all peopled with white ghosts as I had my early morning dip."

Someone tapped me on the shoulder. It was a man, well dressed, apparently quite normal, but rather sad-looking, who had been seated at the table behind us.

"There you are! What did I tell you!" muttered Juliette.

"Please forgive me for intervening in your conversation," said the man. "But Ampurias is a memory that is particularly dear to me. I'm prepared to wager, it was in that little creek just above the cape that you had your bathe?"



I nodded.

"The beach goes down very sharply there. My goodness! What a hard time she had scrambling out! The sand crumbled beneath her little feet, and time and again she tottered and fell to her knees. What a pretty maid she was! A young maid, with eyes as blue as the sea and clad only in the meshes of her long, black hair. What a breath-taking sight she was! I shall never forget it!"

"Oh! have you, too, just come from Ampurias?"

"Well—not exactly. I spent a summer there about . . . let me see . . . yes it must be nearly two thousand five hundred years ago."

"Gracious! How time flies!"

"Indeed!" I exclaimed.

"We," continued Juliette sententiously, "drank Fleurac for luncheon; but only one bottle between us."

"I am well aware that I ought not to have spoken to you," the man went on. "But I trust you will not betray me if I let you into the secret of my somewhat peculiar circumstances? I am twenty-nine centuries old. Exactly, mark you, as old as that Iron Age of which you were just speaking. But everything changes and now we are entering upon the atomic age. I shall, alas, have to change my era."

"Cheer up!" said Juliette gaily, "A change of era, like a change of air, never did any one any harm! But tell me—if I understood you correctly, you were . . . wait a minute . . . let me work it out . . . when you were watching this young maiden emerge naked from the waters twenty-five centuries ago, you were only four centuries old, you disgusting little boy!"

"Too true! I was a mere child. But you must remember that in those days original sin had not yet been discovered."

"Discovered?" queried Juliette. "But surely, original sin dates from the days of Adam and Eve?"

"Of course. But Christianity, you see, had not yet told us about it. And that is why we all felt so completely innocent." He sighed deeply. "I had only just arrived in this country. I was still a little Celt."

"Really?" said Juliette. "And where had you come from?"

"I wish I knew. Scarcely was I weaned than my parents died, rather sordidly, somewhere in Siberia, I think. . . . What I do know is that my tender childhood was spent on the banks of the Danube, though I admit my recollections of the time are a little confused. I have the impression that life really began for me on the day that the Celts lifted me out of their chariot. We had traversed league upon league of forest land and then, quite suddenly, there we were—in Marseilles. The old town, of course. And, dear me, how it has all changed since! The sea has receded a lot, but

in those days the town was situated on a peninsula which was impregnable—at least the Marseillais said so. It was a fine town, with its thatch-roofed masonry houses going right down to the stone buildings of the *Vieux Port*—at that time quite new and the biggest in the world. From Antibes as far as Andalusia Marseilles was the Queen of the Mediterranean. The Celts had brought the iron sword and the iron plough with them. But adventurous mariners had already brought the olive tree, the fig tree and the vine—the forerunners of civilisation—from Phoenicia.”

“The civilisation of Homer and Praxiteles,” I observed somewhat aggressively. “Your Celts were, no doubt, fine fellows, but a little backward, don’t you think?”

“You know—I was still very young then,” replied the man. “For us at the time, the Greek civilisation of the Periclean century conjured up a vision, I think, of much ado about nothing—and a limitless supply of wine. But you must also remember that there was more than one Celt to go and see for himself. Some were in Asia Minor, some in Italy, while others had come to rest in Germany. But we were not really firmly settled anywhere. We were chased out of Asia Minor, brought under subjugation in Italy; then, one fine day the Germans flung us out and across the Rhine, and that’s how we came to make our sojourn in the lovely countryside of Gaul—urged forward by a dagger pricking us in the small of the back. As for the Germans, they wanted to remain where they were and on their own, so we left the poor fools there, cut off from the blessings of Mediterranean civilisation.”

“Ah well, everyone couldn’t be a Gaul, anyway,” remarked Juliette.

“Quite. And particularly so, as the Ligurians and the Iberians were already there, and we had to come to some sort of arrangement with them. Actually, there wasn’t very much trouble, until one day the Arverni suddenly got the idea of uniting all the tribes and forming one nation. But the rest of us didn’t want to be formed into a nation. We watched how these *Auvergnats*, as you call them today, came along in their big clogs, and we jolly well knew that their only reason for wanting to form a nation was in order to be able to wage war on a national scale. And the upshot of the whole business was, of course, Julius Caesar.

“This latter wrote a fine self-advertising treatise entitled *De Bello Gallico*, to show how he had conquered us. But if you want the truth, it was the sun that conquered us. No—really! Can’t you imagine what it was like for these great white-skinned loons, who had shot up like endives in the cold mists of the Baltic and the Danube, suddenly to stream into the Mediterranean sun? Julius Caesar? Stuff and nonsense! It was the sun—that and, later, for one might just as well be honest, Roman luxury and

comfort. That's why Vercingetorix was really such a dangerous madman, if you follow me. . . ."

I myself was a bit out of my depth, but Juliette seemed to have followed perfectly.

"So," she said, "You are now two thousand nine hundred years old?"

"Not more. And when I visit the grottoes of Eyzies, both the neolithic and the paleolithic, I feel quite a kid."

"Even so, two thousand nine hundred is quite a good age; 'Kid' is a bit of an exaggeration, isn't it?" remarked Juliette.

"Say—twenty-nine centuries, if you prefer. It certainly makes it sound a bit younger."

"And you certainly carry them well."

"You flatter me. To tell you the truth, my own case had astonished me for a very long while, until I read quite recently in *Izvestia*. . . ."

"In—what?" asked Juliette.

"*Izvestia*, in Moscow. I don't relish stopping in one place all the time, as you can well imagine. As I was saying, then, when I read in my Russian newspaper that biology was already envisaging the day when it would be possible to create a race of supermen, I immediately thought . . . I wonder how I can explain it to you?—anyway, it suddenly struck me that I myself was most probably the product of some sort of accident in nature, which occurred nearly thirty centuries ago, somewhere or other in Siberia. Be that as it may, the fact remains—what to you is a whole century is to me just one more year. And that, incidentally, need not astonish you. If you were to read *Izvestia* now and again, you'd know that everything that ever was, was invented over there. Then again, between ourselves, there are precedents you know. When I feel lonely, I think of Methuselah."

"Will you give us the pleasure of taking coffee with us?" I asked. "Perhaps," I went on insinuatingly, "perhaps you are destined never to die!"

"Well—it hasn't happened yet," he replied objectively.

"You're not by any chance immortal?" asked Juliette, and in her voice there was a hint of suspicion.

"Madame!" he cried, hastily touching wood. "Please! Don't mention so horrible a possibility! The only thing is—I do rather begin to wonder when I will die."

"Because you are quite sure that one day you will—is that it?" persisted Juliette.

"Yes. Aren't you—sure that you'll die, I mean?"

"Yes. But. . . ."

"Well—there you are! You see?"

"Yes—I see."

"Time," I ventured, "must have seemed very long to you."

"There you are wrong, sir. Time passes very quickly."

"Yes, I know."

"Then again—I've seen an awful lot of things—and not all of them nice things." He sighed.

"Come, come," I murmured consolingly. "It'll all turn out all right in the end. I'm sure you'll die, sooner or later."

"Yes, but—when? Life's very nice, of course, but in the long run, one begins to get a bit desperate."

"You're telling us!" exclaimed Juliette. "Didn't you say that you knew Vercingetorix?"

PART ONE

The Happy Age or *Pax Romana*



## How Gaul was Conquered by the Roman Baths

1,000,000,000 B.C.—*A world of vapour*; 350,000,000 B.C.—*The first mammal*; 1,000,000 B.C.—*The first man*; 20,000 B.C.—*Iron in Europe. Birth of Chronossus, the little Celt from Siberia*; 800–600 B.C.—*The Celts arrive in Gaul*; 600 B.C.—*The Greeks found Marseilles*; 500 B.C.—*Gallic hovels and Greek temples*; 52 B.C.—*Defeat of Vercingetorix at Alesia, the Gauls subjugated by the Roman baths.*

“VERCINGETORIX was at the Druids’ School with me. In those days all the best families, enlightened and patriotic, sent their children to the Druids.”

“Nowadays,” said Juliette, “they send them to the Jesuits.”

“I must say,” I remarked, “religion certainly does seem to produce good soldiers—Vercingetorix, Foche, de Lattre. . . .”

“And one must admit,” added Juliette, “that soldiers are often very fine patriots.”

There was a moment of silence. Our friend contemplated us with a slightly pained expression.

“If you persist in interrupting, you know,” he said, “we shan’t get to the twentieth century before the liqueurs.”

“Oh! Please forgive us!” cried Juliette. “I promise I won’t say another word if I can help it.”

“I’m sure you won’t,” replied our friend, soothingly, obviously still very naïve in spite of his age.

“And I promise that I won’t speak at all,” I asserted. “Just pretend I’m not here.”

“Thank you. Well—Vercingetorix was an orphan, but a fortunate orphan. His father, Celtill, was a mighty chief of the Auvergnat clan—we used to call them the Arverni—and so powerful that he aspired to have himself proclaimed king. The Arverni, however, didn’t agree, and so they burnt him at the stake, according to their custom; but they did

let the little Vercingetorix inherit his father's property—his women, his chariots and his thousands of customers."

"Customers? Are you trying to make me believe that he was in trade?" asked Juliette.

"But of course he was!" replied our friend. "The protégés of a Chief-tain were called his customers, his political clientele. Celtill, the father, dealt in ideas, current trends and policies. It is, I believe, a line of business that still prospers today."

"That's true," admitted Juliette. "But even so, M.P.s are not now burned at the stake—not very often, anyway."

"May I continue?" asked our friend.

"Oh! I'm sorry! Yes, please do go on."

"It has sometimes been said that Vercingetorix was not his real name, but that, unfortunately, is not the case. It was his name and it means 'The King of all the Warriors'. The title went to his head to such a degree that in the end he really believed he was—just that. I must admit, of course, that he had more than a little justification. I wish you had been there when he assumed the leadership of his clan, ten years later. Spruce and clean shaven. . . ."

"What!" exclaimed Juliette. "And what about the wonderful moustachios?"

"I am deeply sorry, Madame. There were no moustachios. Splendidly upright on his horse, clad in a multi-coloured Harlequin tunic, his breast glittering with a constellation of medallions, his long broadsword encrusted with coral slung at his side in a cross-belt of gold, his helmet crowned with an immense winged crest which enhanced his already magnificent stature, he rather gave the impression of inviting (and expecting) admiring glances, and there was more than a little of an 'A-warrior-bold-am-I' air about him; but he certainly frightened the men and thrilled the women.

"Officially, he was Caesar's friend. In practice, he had an old score to settle with him. It was not a personal feud, but one between the Arverni and the Romans, for, since the arrival of the latter, the Arverni had ceased to rule the roost among the tribes of Gaul. Now, with the advent of Vercingetorix, as handsome as he was stately, as gallant as he was astute and a brilliant orator to boot, they were hoping to be able to put some guts into the Gallic beast. One day, then, the signal flashed forth from the sacred forest of the Cernuti, the signal for the massacre of all the Roman merchants settled in Cenabum—the city we know today as Orleans. . . ."

"Orleans!" cried Juliette. "Orleans—where Joan of Arc. . . ."



"Exactly! The city where the English and the Huns of Attila both faltered and came to grief. There are some places which breathe a spirit of their own, you know. Cenabum was one. Gergovia was another. From Cenabum to Gergovia the signal was passed in twelve hours by sound of drum. One after the other, the tribes rose, as far afield as the Belgii and the Helvetii themselves, fired and roused to resistance by the propaganda of Vercingetorix—a great orator, as I have told you—on the subject: 'A Gaul speaks to the Gauls'. Under the leadership of the Arverni the guerilla warriors flocked to the hills and forests."

"Bravo!" cried Juliette. "Real patriots!"

"I think, perhaps, I ought to tell you that it would probably have required a bit more than a century of Arvernian dominion to give us a real national conscience."

"But surely," intervened Juliette, "Vercingetorix himself later said: 'I have taken up arms for the liberty of all.'"

"Exactly. And what he meant, of course, was the liberty of all free men. There were about a hundred thousand of us. . . ."

"In the whole country?"

"More or less—not counting the ten million customers and slaves."

"And how many legions did Caesar have?"

"Eleven, of which seven were Gallic legions containing a fair sprinkling of Germans. The latter, incidentally, have always seemed to like enlisting in the various Foreign Legions, haven't they? A legion consisted of five thousand men."

"In reality, then, four Roman legions—twenty thousand men," remarked Juliette. "Is it then correct to say that ten million Gauls allowed themselves to be conquered by twenty thousand Romans?"

"No, it is not. We were subjugated by the Roman baths. Just now you mentioned patriotism. Well, we had our own brand of patriotism—a devotion to our city. We wanted to see our cities big, beautiful, strong and spacious. To us, Rome represented comfort, urbanity, the blessings of technical and administrative skill. None but the incorrigibly stubborn would have hesitated for a moment between an Auvergnat hovel and a Roman mansion. Our brand of patriotism yearned for running water.

"To put it in a nutshell, the progressive Gauls were all on the side of Julius Caesar. Vercingetorix made ardent speeches and set fire to the cities in order to prevent Caesar from obtaining supplies. Avaricum alone, the city you call Bourges, was spared because it was so beautiful and that, in the long run, was bad luck, on the city. And all this time who, think you, were betraying him? Need I tell you? Why, the most intelligent among us, of course—the Druids. That fellow Divitiacus, Caesar's henchman,

guided his every step. The Roman took good care not to let it be known that the fellow was not only a Druid, but actually the chief of all the Druids. Poor Druids! they were ill-paid for their astuteness. Not very much later Tiberius persecuted them, because they had long memories and they knew too much!"

"Even so, Julius Caesar did deport a million Gauls, didn't he?" said Juliette.


"Only slaves—a publicity stunt."

"And didn't he cut off the right hands of ever so many men of the resistance movement?"

"That—yes. That, I admit, was a waste, for free men were scarce. But here again, publicity was the prime factor. He couldn't very well pose as a great Captain if he couldn't produce some savage enemies, could he? So, of course, he had to manufacture some. There was, however, one drawback. When the day of his Triumph came, and he had to lead his prisoners through the streets of Rome, Caesar found himself in a bit of a hole. He had told the Roman citizens that the Gauls were a rude and ruddy people—just a bit of local colour inserted into his advertising blurb. As far as Vercingetorix himself was concerned, there was no difficulty. He was of the true Gallic type and, after six years in prison he presented a superbly cadaverous and terrifying spectacle. But what about the rest—all those 'fierce and ruddy-complexioned warriors'? For the sake of historical veracity Caesar was obliged to touch them up with a lick of paint."

"How sad it is," sighed Juliette, "that Vercingetorix should have come to so lamentable an end!"

"He came to a sublime end! I was myself in the besieged city of Alesia. It was a lovely day in September 52 B.C. At the foot of the ramparts lay a tangled mass of rubble and broken palisades, and the hillsides were covered with the corpses of those who had fought to the last. Below, I could see Caesar in the middle of his camp, awaiting the surrender. He was seated on a dais, clad in his purple mantle and surrounded by the Eagles of his legions and the insignia of his cohorts. On the terraces and towers of the camp stood forty thousand legionaries, forming a crown of iron for Caesar. On the horizon, beyond the vast fringe of hills, the Gauls whom Vercingetorix had called to his aid were disappearing in headlong flight.

"Vercingetorix emerged from the town, mounted and alone. He rode down the hill paths and appeared, suddenly and unexpectedly, before Caesar. The horse he rode was a charger, caparisoned as for a fête. He carried the finest of his weapons, and on his breast  medallions

of gold. Drawing himself erect in the saddle, he approached with the proud air of a conqueror, riding to his Triumph. His whole figure shimmering with gold, silver and lustre, he was adorned like a sacrificial offering of atonement. He rode round the dais, rapidly tracing a circle round Caesar, for all the world like a sacrifice being led round the sacred circle. Then he halted in front of the Pro-Consul, leapt from his horse, tore off his weapons and adornments and cast them at the feet of the Victor. He had arrived in the full panoply of war—and he had stripped himself into the guise of the vanquished as a sign and a token that he regarded himself as a captive. Finally he advanced, knelt and, without a word, stretched out his hands to Caesar in the manner of a man offering prayer to a god. . . .”

Juliette drew a sharp breath.

“It was the end of independent Gaul!” she said.

“It was the first day of our civilisation!” retorted Cronossus.

## Julius, the Supreme Quisling

*O—France in her Gallic cradle feeds on Roman milk.*

"IMMEDIATELY after the battle of Alesia I was sent to Bibracte to continue my studies. You know Bibracte, of course?"

"Well—er—no, I don't think I do," replied Juliette. "I wasn't born then, was I?"

"Of course you know it! The town still exists—why it was excavated only the other day, in 1867. It is situated on the southern end of the Morvan massif, on a sort of promontory, which dominates all the surrounding country and commands the valleys of the Loire, the Saône and the Seine. On the summit of this promontory, about three thousand feet up, there used to be an enclosed space of about five square miles—and that was Bibracte, the capital city of the Eduens. In reality, it was rather a gloomy sort of place, with its hovels sunk deep into the earth to protect them against the wind. Its primary industry was metallurgy, because there were deposits of iron ore in the vicinity. But the town only really came to life for the annual Fair—and when there was a war on. Then the peasants used to come pouring back into the town, and the subterranean galleries were crammed full of provisions of every sort. In actual fact, however, everything was fairly quiet after Alesia. There were, of course, a few odd local revolts by the Belgians and the Aquitanians between 38 and 27, but in the land of the Eduens there was perfect peace. The Eduens, as you probably know, were the oldest allies of the Romans."

"But I thought they had joined forces with Vercingetorix?" intervened Juliette.

"Oh! that! Yes—but that was only a very passing bit of infidelity, which merely added the spice of anxiety to the friendship the Romans bore them; and, having already been rather let down once by them, the Romans were now all over the Eduens."

"I know," said Juliette. "Rather like those husbands who need a soupçon of infidelity to keep them nice and up to the mark!"

"We were in Bibracte," I interjected, not without a touch of asperity. "Forgive me—that is my last word. I will not interrupt you again."

"Yes, in Bibracte, where, to reply to Madam, the Gauls had the right to kill an unfaithful wife."

"And vice versa?" asked Juliette. "Equality. . . ."

". . . was primarily of a financial character. Both parties were expected to bring to the union an equal marriage portion. That of the husband reverted, on his death, to the widow for the education of the children and the maintenance of the concubines."

"You mean. . . ?"

"Oh! All within the privacy of the home, of course. So you see, a Gaul was never unfaithful to his wife, and everything was thoroughly well organised for the protection of the sanctity of hearth and home."

"I must say, the Gallic women seem to have been pretty long-suffering and complaisant," declared Juliette.

"And most devoted wives, too. Let me quote you the example of Eponine, whose husband was a guerilla and who hid with him for nine years in a cave, where she bore and brought up two children. Then there was the wife of Paetus, who had been ordered by the Emperor Claudius to commit suicide. She wanted to die with him, so she first stuck the sword into herself and then handed it to her husband, saying: 'Here you are, Paetus—it doesn't hurt a bit!' You must not forget that we Gauls, perhaps we had a touch of the reactionary in us, but we were noble and high-minded. And—and this is a rather unexpected trait to find in any nobility—we venerated the mind. Only the Druids, for example, were exempt from war service and taxation."

"Because they were priests?"

"Because they were *savants*. The ordinary rank and file priests, the *gutuatri*, as we called them, who were responsible for the everyday, routine management of divine affairs, enjoyed no privileges of any sort."

"Even so, I take it you don't mean that you had no respect for religion?"

"We respected religion more than science, but the priests less than the *savants*. We considered that it was easier to inculcate faith than to teach truth. The Druids understood astronomy, they could foretell the future, and they knew that mistletoe was a sovereign specific against sterility."

"I see," said Juliette. "But—with such a wealth of scientific knowledge at your disposal, did you or did you not have a god?"

"We had several gods. But the most venerated of them was the god

who dispensed life and death. He was always portrayed with a sickle as the emblem of all that he caused to spring from the earth (from which we, too, sprang), and a hammer, which was what he used to despatch his followers into the next world. Then, as we were always fond of a bit of gaiety, we often used to add a flute to the hammer and sickle.

"To be honest, I didn't stay very long at the Druids' School in Bibracte. New ideas were spreading pretty rapidly. The Druids, we found, were becoming a bit dated, and what we wanted was the modern, the Latin, school of education. Then again, I'd got a bit tired of living in one of these circular huts, made of logs and wattle, covered with reeds, devoid of windows, full of smoke and half embedded in the earth, while only fifteen miles away a splendid town was rising, which was soon to become the premier university city of Gaul. So, one evening a friend and I jumped over the walls of Bibracte and took the road for Autun."

"The road?" queried Juliette. "A figure of speech, I suppose? The Roman roads were not built in a day!"

"Ha! You, too! You don't know that we had roads of our own? That's just another of Master Julius Caesar's little yarns. How do you think he could have waged his Blitzkrieg without the roads of Gaul? The Roman roads were magnificent, it's true, and one could average nearly six miles an hour along them. But let me tell you this—at the time when I was born a thousand years before Christ, there was already in existence a road from Boulogne along which the tin from the Cornish mines was transported right down to the Côte d'Azur in five days! And that, you'll find if you work it out, means an average of six miles an hour along the whole length of the ALL TIN ROUTE."

"I really don't know what to think," said Juliette. "Were you civilised or weren't you?"

"Of course we were civilised, like the Moroccans—before Lyautey. Aristocrats and at the same time intellectuals, poor yet leisured. We were free, because we possessed the slaves who are essential to an intellectual way of life; and because our souls were high and noble, we believed in their immortality.

"Autun, or Augustodunum, so called because it was built by the Emperor Augustus, of whom you have certainly heard, was fortified, as its name implies (if, that is, you remember your Latin). It was extremely rare for a city in Roman Gaul to be fortified, but as I have already told you, the Romans were hand in glove with the Eduens. It was a completely new city—and all white! Once you'd crossed the ramparts, you might have thought you were in New York! As for me, emerging from the hovels of Bibracte, I stood and gaped open-mouthed like an oaf. The main street

was a mile long and thirty feet wide, with innumerable sidestreets crossing at right angles to it. The buildings, some of which were three-storeyed, were spread out on the gentle slopes leading down to the river Arroux. (The Romans had had enough of our eagles' eyries. Whenever possible, they always chose a hillside with an open vista and a gentle slope leading down to the river below.) In Autun, the riverside was the artisans' quarter—the fullers, the tanners, the weavers and the potters lived there—while the higher slopes were given over to the residences of the rich and to the temples—the *bourgeoisie* and the gods. In the central square was the Forum; quite close to it was the theatre, the biggest in all Gaul; and around this hub were concentrated all the busiest streets of the city. The ground floors of the buildings were occupied by shop-keepers; cloth merchants, seated behind their desks, their assistants busy measuring out lengths of cloth fingered and chosen by elegant women in snow-white togas, whose husbands meanwhile footed the bill; the scent shops, stocked with perfumes from Syria in lavish rows of graceful urns and long-necked flagons of glass; the florists, with the jolly little notice: 'I sell my garlands to lovers alone'.

"The bazaar in the Forum was filled with a variety of every conceivable kind of commodity and the housewife pressed for time could buy all she wanted in the way of food and provisions in one single shop. At the entrance were the wines and the *cervoise*, our Gallic barley beer; the salesman poured the liquid into a funnel clamped above the counter, under which the customer placed her urn to receive it. At the back was the *charcuterie*, with the pay-desk railed off at an angle to the counter; and on the other side of the shop, on the way out as it were, stood a succession of counters, on which were displayed cheeses from Cantal, Gallic butter, oil from Italy, cakes, pastries, sweetmeats, fruits—all with salesmen in close attendance.

"For sanitary reasons, since beasts and gladiators were slaughtered in it, the amphitheatre was outside the city walls. Incidentally, there was also a Gladiators' School at Autun University. Like our theatre, our amphitheatre was the biggest in all Gaul. That in Nîmes measured only about 440 feet, while ours seated twenty thousand spectators—double the whole population of Autun. But then on holidays everybody used to flock in from all the neighbouring districts, dressed in brightly coloured tunics falling loosely over their breeches, which were tucked, *à la Russe*, into their top-boots. In the stands peasants, artisans and students rubbed shoulders happily, and the medley of the variegated colours of their Gallic costumes contrasted sharply with the white togas of the upper-class citizens, dressed in the latest fashion from Rome."

*Gaul in the Year Nought*

"At school I made friends with one, Romulus. His father had originally been called Eporedorix, but had exchanged his Gallic name for that of Caesar and, being an ardent quisling, now called himself Caius Julius. Young Romulus often invited me to his house during the vacations."

"Aha!" exclaimed Juliette. "And what was the house like?"

"It was complete with every modern comfort, and they lacked nothing. There is an old saying: 'A flourishing building programme is a sure sign of prosperity', which is perfectly true—and doubly so, if one happens oneself to be in the building trade. And Caius Julius was—very much so. He had branches all over the place and a finger in every pie in the making. In Autun, of course, and in Lyons, which the Romans had built from beginning to end and which was going splendidly, while in both Vichy and Mont-Dore he had interests in the construction of the Roman baths.

"He owned a whole flotilla of vessels as large as modern barges which plied the Rhône in his service, while on the roads, among the elegant chariots and the carts crammed with peasants, there were streams of heavy waggons, laden with stone blocks, planking, uncut marble, bricks, rubble, lime, sand, pig-iron and lead for plumbing and bronze for statuary—and all in the name of Caius Julius Caesar. Nevertheless, he found plenty to grumble about. He had never ceased to regret, for instance, that he had been only a child when the great aqueduct of Nîmes was constructed; and when he was in depressed mood he was wont to declare that he had 'arrived too late in a world grown too old'. And that, mark you, in the year O of our history!"

"Very interesting," said Juliette. "But what about the house?"

"I will come to that in a moment," said our friend. "Has it ever struck you that the history of France dates from the birth of Christianity? France is the only country in the whole world which is the same age as Christ. But in the year of which I am talking, while in Bethlehem an infant was being born who was destined to change the face of the world, Julius took me with him to Lyons, to attend the festival of Augustus. It was held each year from 20th to 30th of July."

"Like our 14th of July," interrupted Juliette, "during the school holidays."

"Yes, except that we had no school holidays, no holidays with pay and no Sundays either, for neither had the Lord's Day yet been given to us by Christianity nor the Sabbath by the Jews. On the other hand we had a whole heap of holidays—about one hundred and eighty, or very nearly the



half of the whole year—and the Festival of Augustus, held just before the beginning of the month that bears his name, was the loveliest of them all.”

### *The Festival of Augustus*

“Julius, who was the aedile of Autun, the official, that is, in charge of the Police and the Public Works Department, represented the city at all the various festivals. Between ourselves, I was more than a little amused, because I knew—Romulus had told me—that not very long before Julius had tinkered about with his own plumbing system in such a way as to be able to ‘gate-crash’ on the municipal water supply. Running water was very expensive indeed, and in all Autun there were only about thirty wells. Once he had horned his way into high municipal office, however, he of course straightway rectified the irregularities in his plumbing!

“He was, then, the Autun delegate to the Lyons festival. Lyons was a fine city, quite new, like Autun but very much bigger; less of a seat of learning than Autun, it was much more important as a business centre, and while Autun was perhaps the primary university city of Gaul, it was Augustus’ wish that Lyons should be its political capital. And I must say, I very much admired the map of Gaul, placed under the portico of the University, with the four triangles of the four Provinces, Gallia Narbonensis (which had already become a quasi-Roman province some time before), Aquitania, Lugdunensis and Belgica, which converged together on Lyons like the fingers of an open hand.

“The small Celtic village still had its being on the hillock of Fourvière, as though it were a yard-stick for the measurement of the progress achieved in half a century. And what a hive of activity there was below it, along the quays, on the docks and in the warehouses and taverns, where sailors sat cheek by jowl with the carters and commercial travellers from the four Provinces, from Italy, from Spain and from Syria. And what a display of opulence on the *Ile du Rhône*, where the wine merchants had their houses! The colossal temple of Augustus, completed some eleven years previously—a great quadrangular mass—dominated the whole town. It was nearly two hundred feet long and was decorated with shields, sculptures, laurel wreaths and oak leaves, and bore the inscription:

### TO ROME AND AUGUSTUS

glittering in letters of gold on the marble plinth. To left and right of it rose tall columns in Egyptian granite, upon each of which stood a Winged Victory, with a crown in one hand and a palm frond in the other. All around the Temple were clustered squares and gardens with fountains and gigantic statues representing the sixty-one cities of Gaul, the Temple

of the Dead Emperors, the Circus, the Amphitheatre, the Municipal Buildings for the reception of deputations from other cities, and yet more statues—of the Priests of the Altar, of Governors, of Princes of the Imperial Family. . . .”

“Superb!” ejaculated Juliette. “But wasn’t it a bit like a casino in the middle of a cemetery?”

“Blasphemy, Madame! They blended death and fun and games together, like everybody else—and that’s all there is to it. The Festival opened with the formal ritual of the Sacrifice. The Supreme Delegate of hirsute Gaul, dressed in the garb of a High Priest, his brilliant pontifical robes covered with a cloak of purple embroidered with gold, a golden crown on his head, advanced into the midst of the vast and reverently silent concourse and performed the solemn act of sacrifice for the well-being of the Emperor and the country. The animals sacrificed were then eaten at a religious banquet. Then came the Games and the spectacles, which were by no means entertainment pure and simple, but essential parts of the ritual. They lasted for four days, during which eight pairs of gladiators fought to the death each day. The whole thing cost the Supreme Delegate about 330,000 sesterces—a bit over thirteen million francs in our money. But there you are—those who aspire to high honour must pay the piper!

“Julius explained it all to me in great detail. ‘Watch carefully, my child,’ he said to me, and there were tears in his eyes as he spoke. ‘My whole career as a successful businessman will be wasted if, one of these days, I do not succeed in becoming the Pontif who officiates in the name of Gaul at the Festival of our Emperor and God.’”

“Did he really believe that the Emperor was a god?” asked Juliette.

“How could he do otherwise, since he was just longing for the chance to become his High Priest? Julius, you know, possessed all the shrewd common sense and logic of the successful businessman.”

“And what about the masses—what did they think?”

“They showed much less logic. The honest burgher, who had no particular aspirations of any kind and certainly none to become a High Priest, believed that the Emperor was the living God; and it was only those in well-informed circles who knew that he would not become a deity until after his death. Vespasian—you know, that upstart who respected nothing, not even his own divinity—said mockingly as he lay dying: ‘I feel myself turning slowly into a god!’ And as a result of that wisecrack men worshipped him in the most inappropriate buildings, and his memory was kept fresh in anything but an odour of sanctity.”

“And now,” said Juliette, “can’t we go back, please, and have a look at Julius’ house?”

## Dining with Tatinia

A.D. 33—*Nothing, except perhaps the death of Christ which did not in the least disturb the Roman world.*

"JULIUS, I need hardly say, had built himself a fine, four-square Roman mansion. Round the inner courtyard, in the centre of which was an ornamental pond to catch the rain-water, ran a covered peristyle, on to which the entrance hall and the living rooms opened."

"In fact, exactly like the *patios* we've just seen in Spain," said Juliette.

"Yes—more or less. The roof was covered with wooden tiles, but the show-piece of the mansion was its windows. While we ordinary folk covered our windows with curtains or animal skins, Julius had adorned his with thick glass. As a result no one could enter the house through the windows, and so they could be made to reach right down to the ground. These windows, of course, could not be opened.

"The central heating was furnished by a system of hot water running through pipes between the double floor-boards; I rather think your up-to-date architects have recently re-discovered this system of heating, which is much more sensible and much nicer than radiators. In fact, the only things lacking in Julius' house were gas and electricity. For everyday lighting oil lamps were used. But when there was a dinner party or a reception, the lamps were replaced by wax candles in bronze candelabra, fashioned like statuettes. In the living-room—at that time, the separate drawing-room and dining-room which was all the rage in the nineteenth century was unknown—in the living-room the mosaic floor was decorated with scenes from the wine harvest. Tatinia was also very proud of her cut-glass chandeliers, moulded in the shape of griffins, dolphins and clusters of foliage."

"Tatinia?"

"Julius' wife. She was still quite young—barely thirty, and was a true daughter of Gaul, sweet and adorable. In her large, blue eyes there was a

permanent look of astonishment, but her mutinous little mouth was always ready with a quick and witty retort. Her mass of tawny-gold hair, parted in the middle, left bare her tiny ears and beautiful forehead. When I saw her for the first time, she was playing with Carilla, her youngest child, still a toddler, and the sister of my friend, Romulus. She kissed me on the forehead and exclaimed that I, too, was a little darling. This made me blush, for I was only two centuries old at the time. She then called the nurse and told her to take Carilla, who at once started to scream and cry in the international language of babyhood, but who was immediately mollified when the nurse put an ivory doll into her little arms.

"Tatinia waved me to a wicker armchair and in a grown-up tone started to question me about my studies. Romulus immediately gave a loud yawn and said he thought he'd take a stroll as far as the baths. Tatinia spoke in Latin, as did all the best Gallic families, while I, who had only just started at the grammar school—you know, the one near the temples of Minerva and Apollo. . . ."

Juliette did not know, she said.

". . . Anyway, I got along somehow with a mixture of Latin and Celtic, with sometimes even a bit of Greek thrown in—for my teacher was a Greek. She asked me what I was going to do when I had completed my studies and had become a fully educated Gaul. I replied that I hoped to go on to the Gladiators' School. At that she burst out laughing, tweaked my ear and suggested that I play a game of knuckle-bones with Romulus while she got dressed for dinner.

"I was alone in the living-room. Urged on by the demon Curiosity—or that's what I called this particular demon at the time—I went and lifted the curtain of the room into which Tatinia had retired. The room appeared to be empty, except for three puppies, which wagged their tails when they saw me. I sat down on a sort of combined seat and trunk affair. On the vast Gallic bed—the fame of our mattresses had spread even to Rome—Tatinia had thrown her white tunic and her girdle with its silver buckle. Her leather sandals were on the mosaic floor, on which were lying, too, like some long, living serpents, the fillets of her brassiere.

"From the bathroom came the splashing of water. Full of respect for our Gallic modesty, I did not dare to approach any nearer, but my eye was caught by a dressing table, decorated with mosaic fishes, on which stood a round hand mirror with a thick handle, numerous jars of cosmetics and a beautiful cake of that soap made from goat's fat and the ashes of the beech tree, which enhances the glint of golden hair. . . a lovely, naked arm appeared, groping for the cake of soap, and I drew back in dismay.

To recover my composure I went over to a small cylindrical casket that contained Tatinia's jewels. In a confused heap lay a number of those plated bracelets which women wore high up on the arm, near the shoulder, but no Celtic anklets; there were ear-rings, crystal rings mounted in gold or silver, which were worn on the second joint of the index and third fingers of the left hand, a pearl necklace of alternate round and drop pearls and, to my surprise, a fibula, a brooch, bearing the inscription: *If thou lovest me, I love thee more.*

"Thirty-three years later I saw Tatinia emerge from that same bath-room, adorned with these same jewels for a banquet she was giving in honour of some illustrious Roman who was passing through Autun. I must confess that I was less moved than on the previous occasion. I myself was still only ten centuries—and a little bit—old, but Tatinia had already passed her sixtieth year. Julius had become one of the richest notables in all Gaul; he had always felt that his wealth should have gained for him the Pontificate of Lyons, but he had lavished games and bread on his fellow citizens in vain, and he had remained merely an Augur, a fat and soured Augur.

"On the evening of which I am telling you, he had been freshly shaven—and with the razors of the period being shaven, let me tell you, was a somewhat risky business; but the Emperor had not yet made beards fashionable, and the Gallic moustache was looked upon rather askance. His barber had singed his hair, turned grey by the passing years, and the constant disappointments. One of these disappointments had been his son, Romulus. Julius had hoped that Romulus would become a barrister and that the path of the law would lead him to Rome. Romulus, however, had joined the Army and was stationed on the Rhine frontier. For at that time the Romans had constructed a line of fortifications on the Rhine, which separated Gaul from Germany, rather like the Maginot Line. Thus Gaul had become definitely integrated into the Mediterranean domain and in return deservedly enjoyed the benevolence of an occidental slant in Roman interests.

"To be a Centurion on 40,000 sesterces a year (something like a million and a half francs today) was nothing to boast about for the son of an Augur—even though he did get free rations and quarters in addition. Romulus, however, regained his father's esteem to a certain extent when he explained that, under the *Pax Romana*, they did not have much fighting to do and that that, in a way, was rather an advantage, if you happened to be a professional soldier. And Julius, showing that rare power of assimilation and adaptation characteristic of the Gaul, had restored the light of his parental countenance; then, from the moment that the astute Centurion

had married Aventina, a girl from Nîmes and an intimate friend of a Roman maiden named Fortunata, whose father was the Prefect of the Praetorian Guard, Romulus positively basked in the sunshine of paternal approval. With political backing like that, the Augur could certainly augur the inauguration of a splendid official career for his soldier son; and that explains why Fortunata had been invited to dinner.

"Tatinia possessed but few knives and no forks at all; but this minor drawback was more than counter-balanced by the varied excellence of the fare she offered to her guests, spread before them on the most lovely ceramic dishes. First of all, there were oysters—not those miserable little things from the Berre lake, but oysters from Bordeaux, white and succulent, which Julius had ordered to be whirled from the sea to Autun in three days in honour of Fortunata. The Romans, you know, were tremendously partial to shell fish. The other fish was not gudgeon from the Arroux or vulgar perch, but delicate blue trout; and for dessert the guests were offered—not the commonplace apple, but choice pears from Julius' own orchards. The cheese came from Cantal; and the main dish was the great Gallic speciality, cold meats of every kind—pâtés, moulds, roasts, hams; and in the centre of the rectangular table adorned with a superb cloth of fringed linen, sat enthroned the boar's head. As side dishes Tatinia had added a haunch of venison and fricassés of hare, hedgehog and woodcock.

"The king of wines in those days came from Cahors; other sound wines came from the vineyards of the Rhône and the Allobroges; but Julius would have blushed to offer his guests wine from his own newly planted vineyards in Burgundy, except in the form of a mulled posset and with the dessert of hot tarts and grilled snails. Tatinia prepared this brew with her own hands from the recipe of Cato: when the wine was boiling she added iris roots and sweet clover. Then she poured the mixture into a keg lined with pitch and perfumed with incense, which was placed on the table and from which the guests helped themselves. When it had settled properly, this Burgundy made quite a passable mulled posset, though not nearly so good as the mulled wine of Vienne (at 1,500 francs a litre). I nearly forgot to mention our sparkling white wine; believe me, we had no need to await the advent of Dom Pérignon and the seventeenth century to discover that wine effervesces when honey is added and it is then hermetically sealed.

"I am bound to say that Fortunata astonished us. We Gauls always regarded ourselves as mighty wine bibbers; but Fortunata, by Jove, matched us all, drink for drink. I noticed it first when Julius was plying us, before dinner, with absinthe from Saintes, offering with each fresh goblet

yet another toast to our divine Emperor, Tiberius. Among those present were Romulus, on leave, who teased me for having forgotten to grow up, and his young wife, Aventina from Nîmes. The latter looked very brunette beside her mother-in-law, Tatinia, whose tawny-gold hair, now pepper and salt, was dressed *en côtes de melon*, because that was the fashion in Rome; at least, the poor woman thought it was, but as the elegant Fortunata wore her hair closely drawn into a large chignon on the top of her head, Tatinia must have been sadly behind the times. Little Carilla, now married, was taking the waters at Vichy with her husband; but their small son, Filiolus, spent his time scrambling after his ball between our legs.

“‘I hope you won’t mind taking us as you find us,’ said Tatinia, with an apologetic gesture towards her grandson.

“‘And—I’ve a real surprise for you,’ added Julius, a little apprehensively, I thought. ‘You are going to dine with an outlaw, a fellow who has been a guerilla for these last twelve years.’

“‘No!’ exclaimed Fortunata. ‘What a thrill!’

“‘She reminded me, I’m afraid, very forcibly of those ladies of the town whom one sees in the *Rue de Lappe* or round the *Halles*, all dressed up in mink and gobbling onion soup.

“‘Apart from that sensational attraction,’ continued Julius, ‘I thought it would amuse a woman of the world—indeed, a woman of the capital of the world—to share for a few hours the modest existence of a humble Gallic family. May I re-fill your goblet?’

“‘To tell you the truth,’ blurted out Fortunata, ‘as a woman who is now with her tenth husband, I find it most moving and touching. And here’s to the health of the gentleman destined to succeed number ten! Seriously, my dear,’ she continued, turning to Tatinia, ‘but for the fact that you have been blessed with this perfect husband, I should never have been able to understand why you have not taken advantage of the Julian law, which allows you to divorce at will. You Gallic women are terribly old-fashioned, I fear.’

“‘Perhaps,’ said Julius jokingly, ‘it is because my wife knows that I have over her the powers of life and death.’

“‘That was all right in the time of Cato the Censor, three hundred years ago,’ retorted Fortunata. ‘But not now, my dear man. No—in Rome we have found the right answer. We say: one must live one’s own life. As I explained to my last husband—I know, I said, that convention allows you to do exactly as you please and expects me to renounce all the whims and fancies that may attract me. But it’s no use your shouting and crying to high heaven—I, too, am a human being.’

"Everybody laughed politely. Fortunata had used a term, the full implication of which it is difficult to translate into one terse phrase; for 'I, too, am a human being' she had used the expression '*homo sum*'—I am a man.

" 'A really clever Gallic woman,' said Aventina with a smile, 'prefers to lead her man by more gentle paths to the place where she wants him.'

"Tatinia remained silent. To my mind came the recollection of the brooch I had seen thirty-three years before. She was still wearing it, pinned at the shoulder of her tunic. *If thou lovest me, I love thee more!* I should have loved to know whether the brooch was telling the truth and, at my still tender age, I hoped so much that Tatinia was not so 'old-fashioned' as Fortunata had hinted.

"After she had regaled us with the latest titbits of gossip from the Eternal City, Fortunata, who had a finger in every pie, started a political discussion with our Augur, Julius. While she was describing the problems of municipal administration in an over-crowded Rome of seven hundred thousand inhabitants, Atectorix was announced. I had not seen this obstinate revolutionary since the Sacrovir insurrection in 21, which had caused such consternation among the quislings of Autun and in the course of which the guerillas had carried off as hostages all the boys attending the university. In the current view, however, Atectorix's resistance now consisted of nothing more than sporting his voluminous Gallic pantaloons and his provocative, challenging Gallic moustachios.

" 'Allow me,' declaimed Julius, 'to present to you my cousin from Auvergne, who has insisted on taking advantage of the honour of your presence here to declare his fidelity to Rome—Atectorix!'

"Atectorix clicked his heels, his hands rigid along the seams of his pantaloons.

" 'ATSHUM!'

" 'Bless you!' said Tatinia.

"As a matter of fact, he hadn't sneezed at all. The rugged old warrior was giving the warrior's salute—'Present!' or *Adsum* in Latin as she spoke in Auvergne.

" 'Now here is an event which will certainly be reported in the highest quarter,' said Julius hopefully.

"Fortunata acquiesced with a gracious smile.

"Eighty-five years after this, Vercingetorix, the last of the Gallic guerillas, surrendered."

### *Julius Knew a Thing or Two*

"At dessert, after the gentlemen had retired to vomit and had returned,



the conversation rose to the dizziest intellectual heights, embracing a review of geophysical knowledge and even of the mysteries of religion. The Gauls, you know, dearly loved that feeling of warm excitement engendered, with the assistance of mulled wine, by discussion and debate, and voices grew louder and louder and more and more animated.

"Fortunata, reclining on a semi-circular Roman couch, made her points with a smile. On the other side of the table, Julius and Atectorix, sitting on their stools, were abusing each other violently. Romulus, the Centurion, whose mental processes had been greatly slowed down by garrison duty, could not get a word in edgeways. Behind each guest stood a slave, alert to fulfil his every wish.

"'Oh! I'm quite prepared to admit that one must move with the times,' roared Atectorix. 'Your engineers and aediles, your senators and judges, Roman Law, the conception of State and the gods know what else—I'm sure they're all very fine. They don't mean a thing to me, however, so don't let's talk about them. But the race, our race, is going to hell; and there I do know what I'm talking about. I've seen war, don't forget.'

"'In Mayence . . .' began Romulus.

"'Mayence!' snorted Atectorix. 'On the Rhine the Officers amuse themselves with aquatic tilting matches—aquatic jousts on the Rhine—I ask you! In my day. . .'

"'Well—that's the *Pax Romana*,' said Julius. 'The Germans are frightened of us and we enjoy the confidence of Rome.'

"'We've been occupied by a lot of bloody Italian imperialists!'

"'Gaul—occupied by a symbolic garrison of twelve hundred men in Lyons? You're mad, Atectorix. On the contrary, Caesar has opened the gates of Rome to us. Am I not right?' He turned to the Prefect's daughter. 'Take no notice, I beg of you, noble Fortunata—he doesn't know what he's talking about! Never, since she was tamed by the divine Julius, has Gaul's fidelity been shaken, never, even in the most crucial moments, has her devotion ever wavered.'

"'Ha! So I don't know what I'm talking about, eh?' shouted Atectorix. 'And I suppose you do, when you assert that these slaves serving us have souls—when they don't even do military service any longer! Listen! When I was on my way here I passed one of those flocks of geese which waddle all the way from Flanders to Italy on their flat feet for the pleasure of being devoured when they get there. And at once I thought to myself, *The Gauls!*'

"'Pay no heed, please, most noble lady,' cried Julius once again. 'The fellow asserts that you are ruining us, whereas we all know that you are

the source and fount of all our riches. It's true, I know, that Rome has declared her intention of liberating all slaves, but. . . .'

"'But he can't surely, be so naïve as to believe it,' interjected Fortunata. 'After all,' she added, with more than a touch of cynicism, 'you may not put a slave to death without just cause; but you can always torture him. Justice must be served, of course. But if you can show cause why he should be put to death, he very quickly ends up on the cross of infamy.'

"'Speaking of the cross,' said Romulus, 'I heard a good story last spring when I was stationed in Jerusalem. . . .'

"'Don't interrupt when your father's speaking,' said Julius sharply. 'If I have a criticism—oh! only a very tiny criticism—to level at the Government it would be that instead of adding the Roman religions to the Gallic ones—for one can't have too many religions—they have elected to add the Feast Days, and that has meant a big drain on the budget. And while we are on the subject of finance, may I recommend to your benevolent notice, most noble Fortunata, the tender I have submitted for the honour of constructing the great statue to Mercury, the god of Art and Industry, on the summit of the Puy de Dôme?'

"'Mercury!' grumbled Atectorix. 'Give me Cernunnos every time, a god in human shape with the antlers of a stag on his head. He's the god I revere most.'

"I had the feeling that Julius was staring at me with suspicious insistence. 'Kronnos,' he murmured dreamily, 'the sempeternal isle . . . and here we have this young lad who refuses to grow up. Tell me, my dear boy, do you think you might perhaps be in a state of perpetual reincarnation?'

"I confess I was most embarrassed. They all started to discuss my soul. Julius proposed that I should be baptised *Metempsychose*. But Fortunata quite rightly pointed out that to justify the name I should have to change my skin. 'And that,' she sighed, caressing the chubby part of my arm, 'would be such a pity. No—for one of such lovely and unassailable youth there can be but one name—Chronossus!'

"And that reminds me," said our friend, interrupting his narrative, "that I seem to have forgotten my good manners entirely. Allow me to introduce myself—Chronossus, at your service!"

"How do you do?" said Juliette. "And now—what happened next? What happened with your seductive Fortunata? Come on—own up!"

"Like everybody else, she died," replied Chronossus. "Now, let me see—where was I? What was I saying? Oh! Yes—Well, Julius could hardly contain himself for joy and was simply bubbling with ideas.

"'Send for my secretary!' he cried.

"A slave entered and sat down on a stool, alert and ready to record on his tablets in dexterous shorthand the words of his master.

"Let us give thanks to our divine Emperor,' declaimed Julius, 'thanks to whom we live surrounded by benign gods in a world well ordered and precisely defined. Take a note, slave. . . . We know that the world is a round ball suspended in the middle of another sphere, substantial but hollow and infinitely vaster, which we call the heavens. We know that the sun which revolves round us is not extinguished at night and re-lit at dawn. D'you hear, you foolish slaves, who believe that the other half of the world is plunged in perpetual darkness and serves as a refuge of the dead! It is inhabited, that other half of the world, but inhabited by unfortunates doomed to live their lives upside down! For these are the definite conclusions reached by our *savants*, who have reduced the universe to human dimensions—indeed, I would almost say to the dimensions of the individual man. And for that reason I raise my glass to our divine Tiberius, who has outlawed those erstwhile muddle-headed Druids and has deported to Sardinia four thousand of those Jews, who profess to worship one sole god the Almighty. A single god, if you please! That's too much of a good thing!

"I don't think it is,' said a gentle voice.

"Tatinia had dared to raise her voice against Julius! 'I do not believe there is anything abnormal in the worship of one single god. I do not believe that the world reduced to the dimensions of the individual is a wholly satisfying conception. For myself, I worship Mithras, the god whom our armies brought back with them from the East.'

"I agree,' said Romulus. 'In Mayence. . . .'

"And what has this god of yours to say?' interrupted Fortunata.

"He was born in the winter solstice on 25th December, and the shepherds came bringing fruit and their flocks to him. In his teaching he tells us that there is Good and Evil, that the Good will be our salvation in a world to come and that evil can be expiated by good deeds and sacrifice.'

"Exactly!' said Romulus. 'Do you know that in Jerusalem. . . .'

"It stinks of Jews a hundred miles off!' roared Atectorix.

"What a frightful bore these oriental religions are,' sighed Fortunata.

"And what, pray, is the point of meditating about salvation, as you call it,' said Julius, 'when we are already lords of the earth under a clement sky which we now know cannot come toppling down on our heads.'

"Father,' said Romulus, 'I have something I must tell you.'

"I don't doubt it, my boy,' retorted Julius wearily. 'Very well—carry on, Centurion! We are all ears.'

“‘Last spring, when we were stationed in Jerusalem, we killed a Jew.’

“‘Oh! What a shocking thing to do!’ mocked Fortunata.

“‘He claimed to be the son of their God. He spoke better than Mithras. He said he had come to the world to atone for all the sins of mankind. So we crucified him on a slave’s cross.’

“‘You might just as well have allowed the fellow to live,’ said Julius. ‘Scatter-brained visionaries of that sort won’t pull down the Roman world about our ears.’”

## CHAPTER IV

# Under the Eye of the Barbarians

A.D. 257—*The Franks invaded France*; A.D. 275—*The Franks invaded France. It had become an idée fixe with them. After that, we would not play. Our cities retired into their rampart shells—and stayed there for fifteen centuries.*

“ON a beautiful sunny day in the era of the *Pax Romana* I was jogging contentedly on my horse along the road to Saintes, the great Roman city in the west. It was spring. The verdant crops were shimmering on the hillsides, the apple trees were in blossom, and I, my head still spinning after the flutes and cymbals and dancing at the Feast of Cybele—for a whole week in Bordeaux we had been dancing, drinking and celebrating the consecration of spring—I was just nodding sleepily in the saddle as we jogged onwards. Nothing disturbed the peace of the countryside and its silence was unbroken save for the song of birds and the soft, muffled noise of my horse’s hooves on the cobbles—yes, indeed, they sounded muffled, as if padded, for in those days we had no iron horse-shoes; sometimes we used to put on a light metal covering or some sort of bundle of grasses, but generally speaking our horses went bare-footed.

“It started with a distant rumbling to which I paid no attention, and I first roused myself from my torpor when I saw a long convoy swaying towards me on the uneven surface. ‘That crowd has got up a bit too late to go to the Fair,’ I thought to myself. But very soon I saw that among the chariots there were cows, goats, sheep, pigs and waggons piled high and in confusion with peasants and townsfolk, with women, children, hens, wine jars, chairs, frying-pans, bundles of clothes and mattresses. . . . You remember the exodus of 1940? The Germans had leapt over the barrier of the Rhine. Well, this was the exodus of 257. For my own part, all I saw at the time was a terrified concourse, fleeing before the wave of Barbarians who had already ravaged Tours, Poitiers, Angoulême and Saintes and who the next day would reach the Pyrenees. I did not know

that the Alamans had burst out eastwards in a foaming cascade as far as Italy, but would it not have been very reassuring to have known that our Barbarians in the west were the Franks, invading France?"

"Reassuring—for whom?" asked Juliette.

"Reassuring historically. For, humanly speaking, it was of vital importance. For three centuries we had been happy. We had enjoyed three hundred years of peace and contentment, and our country had never known anything so scandalous."

### *One Last Moment of Happiness*

"At the beginning of 257, I was still at Autun University, but from the year O onwards I had begun to feel that this unbroken contentment was becoming a little monotonous."

"You can't blame a state of contentment for that," observed Juliette. "It simply means that you had too much time on your hands to amuse yourself."

"True," replied Chronossus. "Anyway, I decided to play truant. My idea was to push on to Bordeaux and witness the merry-making which followed, in April, on the Feast of Cybele, the Goddess of Vernal Abundance."

"I crossed the mountains of Auvergne, anxious to have a look at that colossal Arvernian temple of Mercury, an edifice said to be unique in antique architecture. It had taken ten years to build and had cost forty million sesterces—fifteen hundred million of today's francs. This temple, incidentally, had been yet another of the disappointments of our friend Julius, who died without having received the contract to build it. At the foot of the great statue, erected on the Puy de Dôme at a dizzy height. . . ."

"Well—we've got the Eiffel Tower," said Juliette, "situated, too, on a Champ de Mars, so, you see, we still maintain the old religions."

"With us," continued Chronossus, "it was Mercury, a peaceful and industrious god. At his feet was spread the triple girdle of the temple; a succession of staircases and terraces descended towards the grandiose vista of extinct volcanoes. Here, as at the temple of Apollo in Delphi, pilgrims from various parts made their offerings—booty almost beyond the dreams of the Barbarians who were destined, within a few short weeks, to leave not one stone of the place on another."

"After three days of gentle ambling through the Limousin forest, the smiling valley of the Charente opened up before me. In the forest itself, I had seen practically nothing but innumerable pigs, sometimes fleeing in wild terror before some pack of German hounds that was chasing them. The Gauls took great delight in galloping behind these packs of hairy

hounds, barking and roaring like a crowd of beggars on the heels of a herd of deer. Others, less sporting, perhaps, preferred to squat hidden in a thicket, their bows ready to shoot at the deer enticed to the scene by the cries of a captive doe."

"I congratulate them!" observed Juliette tartly. "Delightful sportsmen!"

"Next, I rode through those fertile fields which the large, two-wheeled Gallic plough had won from the Celtic forest. Every now and then I halted at some villa. There were no villages in those days—in fact, until Charlemagne's time I don't think I ever saw a village—but only the villas of the masters, built Roman fashion and surrounded by the hovels of such labourers as were required for the upkeep of the estate and outhouses for the storage of farm implements—the harvester, an enormous box-like affair, pushed by an ox and fitted with teeth, which tore out the ears of corn and flung them into the container as it went along; the reaping-hook; the big Celtic scythe and the shovels, forks and sickles you still see in use today. Then there was the *birota*, which was so called because it had two wheels and which continued to be called a *brouette* (wheelbarrow) even after it had lost one of its wheels in the thirteenth century."

"Steady!" protested Juliette. "You can't skip a thousand years like that in a wheel-barrow! We were on our way to Bordeaux."

"As I approached nearer to the town the road began to acquire a festive air. Long processions of waggons, laden with barrels, amphorae, sacks of corn, bales of cloth, baskets of fruit and vegetables, groaned their way along the metallated Roman highway. Twisting and turning between these cumbersome vehicles were the lighter carriages of travellers—cabriolets with two wheels, light country carts with their cloth hoods, and the swift, four-wheeled post-chaise; mules, their backs piled high with sacks, trotted in single file with the donkeys, carrying their loads in panniers in equipoise on each flank. The Gauls accompanying them, conscious of the Roman fortifications which kept the Germans on the other side of the Rhine, were as easy in their minds as were their own donkeys. Walls, you know, were very much *à la mode* in those days; the Chinese had just spent five hundred years—from 214 B.C. to A.D. 250—in building theirs. One might well have said therefore that the inspiration had come from very far afield, if only one had known that there was such a thing as a Chinaman in the world."

### *Druid versus Charlatan*

"After passing those gravestones which lined the road at the approaches to every city, I pulled up at a tavern on the outskirts of Bordeaux, to quench my thirst and taste the wine of Médoc, which was bringing such fame to

the country. The bar was full of peasants and merchants, all arguing vociferously. A small, bearded hobgoblin of a man came and sat on the bench beside me. He wore a pointed hat, a short tunic gathered at the waist by a girdle, and a *caracalla*, a voluminous cape with a huge Gallic hood, which reached down to the feet and which had become all the rage among the Romans. They called it a *cuculus*. We called it a *coule* and, later, a *cagoule*, and it was a very practical garment when one was travelling.

"My name is Aprilis," said the bearded little man. And with a wicked, impish wink he added: 'I am a charlatan.'

"These," he continued, smilingly placing a long box on the table before us, 'are my vipers! It's all right—no need to be frightened! You may be quite sure I wouldn't let them escape—I need them far too much for the distilling of my anti-toxin! There is no finer cure on earth for the plague. And I shall despair of the whole human race if in all this crowd I don't find a few plague-stricken customers! Take a peep inside. Look at their gleaming eyes and their quivering tip-tilted little noses! Ah! what a splendid anti-toxin my little vipers will make, when they have been pounded into pulp and mixed with opium, squill, knapp-weed, dry Judean bitumen and resin from the birthwort!'

"Roman remedies—quite useless!" interrupted a cavernous voice. I turned swiftly. A tall, raw-boned, ginger-haired fellow, with a long, straggling, yellowish beard had come up to have a look at the vipers. 'You people,' he continued, 'vaunt your anti-toxin as a sovereign cure for any and every illness. We Druids have a far wider range of medicinal therapeutics.' His voice suddenly assumed a whining, importunate note. 'I'll tell you about them, if you like,' he said.

"He turned out to be one of those solitary Druids, who had defied the edicts of Tiberius and who was scratching out a living by secretly peddling his scientific knowledge.

"'Er—ten sesterces—do you agree?' said the Druid.

"'Certainly—agreed!' replied Aprilis. 'I, too, am a charlatan. Now listen—epilepsy! We treat epilepsy with the brain of the camel, the heart of a hare, the blood of a tortoise and the testicles of a wild boar.'

"'In what proportions?' asked the Druid.

"'Er—ten sesterces—do you agree?' replied the charlatan.

"'You go and . . .' said the Druid.

"'You old rascal, you dirty, crapulous, hairy old scarecrow!' cried Aprilis. 'Down with the Druids! In actual fact, we have two remedies for epilepsy. Pliny recommends the tail of a dragon laced with the sinews of a deer and sewn up in the skin of a kid.'

"'That's not a remedy,' observed the Druid. "'It's a cat o' nine tails!'



“The modern method—shock treatment.’

“You torturer!’

“Druid!’

“Charlatan! Peddler of obscene medicines!’

“Sorcerer!’

“There was a moment of pained silence. The Druid broke it. ‘Of what use is it,’ he said, sadly, ‘to hurl insults at one another? We are not doctors.’

“‘Too true,’ retorted Aprilis. ‘If we were, we’d be much better off than we are. We should have set up shop in one of those resorts that boast of hot springs. We should be in charge of one of those sumptuous baths for wealthy sufferers at Luxeuil or Saint-Armand-les-Eaux, at Dax or Mont Dore, at Vichy or Aix-les-Bains, solicitously treating hypochondriacs with medicine—and games of skill and chance.’

“‘Alas!’ repeated the Druid. ‘We are not doctors. We cure everything—and for nothing—for less than nothing.’

“‘Everything, that is, except cancer,’ said Aprilis. ‘In the face of that all-devouring malady we must admit that we are defenceless.’

“‘Alas!’ sighed the Druid. ‘Even the sacred mistletoe, that universal anti-toxin, is impotent. Perhaps, one day, though, the cowslip . . . You know, of course, that it’s a sovereign cure for headaches? At least, very nearly so; and on the rare occasions that it fails, we trepan.’

“‘Trepanning is nothing new,’ retorted the charlatan. ‘Even our old Celtic grandfathers knew all about it. Now, I know how to operate on a cataract. You take a needle and you plunge it fearlessly into the middle of the space between the pupil of the eye and the temporal angle. . . . Then—but dear me, how my tongue runs away with me! What about going on to the fête? There, perhaps, we may find someone with a cataract, which would give me the chance to demonstrate my skill in actual practice.’

“‘I hope we do,’ said the Druid courteously. I am congratulating myself on having made the acquaintance of so skilful a charlatan.’

“‘Don’t mention it,’ replied Aprilis. ‘The friendship of a Druid is a gift from the gods.’

“‘Don’t talk to me about them!’ cried the Druid, taking a hitch at his belt. ‘I see nothing in common between all these painted, pomarded Roman gods and my gods. This bucolic Cybele revolts me, and all their spring dances put together don’t hold a candle to our beautiful summer solstice ceremonies, when we used to cast men alive as sacrifices into the holocaust of fire. Tradition is dying.’”

“On the contrary,” said Juliette. “In my opinion traditions persist, and your Druid didn’t know what he was talking about. We still have the New Year Mistletoe and bonfires for the Feast of Saint John, don’t we?”

"Indeed we do," replied Chronossus; "and up to the time of Louis XIV we used to fling live cats and dogs into the flames with great ceremony."

"What!" exclaimed Juliette. "In the middle of the great century of French civilisation?"

"I saw it with my own eyes," said Chronossus. "Please remember that, when next at the Feast of Saint John you see the young village folk leaping through the fire."

### *The Bull and the Lamb*

"What a milling crowd teemed through the streets and squares," continued Chronossus. "I left the Druid and the Charlatan to go and look for their patients. A juggler was making his dog walk up and down a ladder. Other dogs were barking their appreciation, a waggon drawn by oxen had caused a traffic jam, and the peasant driving it was bawling himself hoarse and wildly cracking his whip about him. Another, in a country cart, was answering him back and giving as good as he got. A pig, covered in mud, fled between the legs of the onlookers, upsetting two or three of them, to the vast and ribald amusement of the rest. Crowds of shoppers clustered round the open-air booths, laden with corn, dried vegetables, onions, fruit, olives, pastries and, of course, cooked meats of every kind. An itinerant pedlar, who had taken up his stand in the shelter of a porch was busy shouting the praises of his wares, while his partner poured out *cervoise* and wine. Nearby a brisk trade was being done in thick soup, each customer plunging his mug into the cauldron and draining it where he stood, leaning on his staff. It really did seem as though the whole province had flocked into Bordeaux, on business or for fun, out of devotion to Cybele or in flattery of the Emperor, to see and to be seen, to rid themselves for a while of their personal worries and mingle with the crowd, intent only on the intoxicating excitement of the Sacrifice of the Bull; and some, quite simply, for no reason at all.

"To be allowed to provide the sacrificial bull was a great privilege, for the donor offered it for the well-being of his family, the country and the Emperor—apart, of course, from his own well-being, for in a trice he found himself purified and a man greatly to be respected. In the front rank of the crowd the City Magistrates, the Decurions, the emasculated priests powdered and rouged like the priestesses, the flute and cymbal players and the Dancers of Cybele took their places. The bull was led on to a platform made of planks pierced with holes and placed over a trench. In the trench beneath sat the donor, and the blood of his victim poured through the holes and all over his body. Thence he emerged, hideous to see but washed clean of all his faults by this shower-bath of blood. At once

there were wild shouts of 'Long live the Emperor!' drowning the music of flute and cymbal, while the priests and priestesses cavorted in a frenzied trance, slashing off and grabbing gobbets of flesh from the bull and wildly shaking their long hair, soaked in its blood. The festivities continued for several days, intermingled with initiations, rites, processions invoking fair weather and rain, singing, dancing and drinking and the abandonment of all restraint."

"That reminds me of Seville," said Juliette. "There, after Holy Week, they have a week of *Feria*, with singing, dancing, drinking and bullfighting."

"Instead of the latter," continued Chronossus, "we had the gladiators. When I looked at these men facing each other, shield to shield, but stripped to the waist, so that the multitude could once more gorge itself upon the blood of others, my mind went back to another amphitheatre, where a young maiden went to her death for the sake of a much purer religion.

"Nothing, of course, affords the stump orator a better opportunity than a Fair. At Lyons in 177 the Christians took advantage of the pagan rites to do a little propaganda. Quite a number of them were arrested. All they were asked to do was to declare that they were not Christians. If they consented, they were immediately released. But among them were some really stubborn, pig-headed people! The Bishop Pothin, for example, ninety years of age, would have none of it; he was thrashed mercilessly till he died, two days later, in prison. And little Blondina! Tormentor after tormentor did his worst, but to them all she replied placidly: 'I am a Christian. We do no harm.'

"Those Christians who were Roman citizens had the right to claim execution by beheading. The others were reserved for the amphitheatre. The populace took great delight in watching the victims, naked and under the lashing whips of the attendants, being led round the amphitheatre; but the martyrs-to-be smiled serenely, and that, to the plebs, was infuriating. Then the wild beasts were unleashed. None of them, however, showed any inclination to approach Blondina, who was being kept as a *bonne bouche* with Pontius a young lad of fifteen. And so, these two youthful martyrs were compelled to witness the agony of all their companions, one after another, and some fifty in all; and after each gruesome episode had ended they were offered the chance of saving themselves if they would swear homage to the gods. Blondina had no other thought than to encourage Pontius and help him to remain steadfast. He died, staunch and resolute, and Blondina was left alone.

"First she was cast to the lions, which contented themselves merely with snapping at her and dragging her along the ground. Then she was tied in

a net and flung at the feet of a ferocious bull, which tossed her again and again into the air; and even after all that they were compelled in the end to despatch her with the sword.

"The fury of the torturers was expended on the poor remnants that the wild beasts had disdained. For six whole days an increasing mass of crushed bones, severed heads and bits and pieces of flesh piled up in the amphitheatre, until on the seventh day authority stepped in and ordered that these horrible remains be burnt and the ashes cast into the Rhône. But the divine and sweet humility of Blondina was blazoned in letters of gold across the sky of Gaul.

"I thought of all this as I watched the gladiators slaughter each other to the glory of Cybele and the Emperor. And when I left the amphitheatre I could hear all around me in the crowd the whispered propagation of the Christian faith.

"I left the great city, spread spaciouly along the banks of the Garonne and susceptible, all too susceptible, to the pleasures of the flesh. I took ship to Blaye. To left and right, on the slopes of the hills, planted with vines were row upon row of villas with their vast wine stores, their tiers of terraces, their porticos and their ornate statuary. There was one villa, I remember, that was built on a triple arcade and dominated the whole river. From its ornamental basin water was pouring down in a cascade, and at the foot of it lay a young peasant taking his ease and quenching his thirst.

"And on the road from Blaye to Saintes I met the Barbarians."

#### *Our Towns Shrink back into their Shells*

"D'you mean to say that Roman Gaul disintegrated just like that, like chaff before a puff of wind?" asked Juliette.

"Who said anything about disintegration?" retorted Chronossus. "All I was trying to do was to bring home to you the futility of its attitude, concerned so very much more with fêtes than with feats of arms, and the mystic and blood-thirsty sentimentality with which it was permeated. Postumus, who was in command on the German frontier and had let the Barbarians through, was proclaimed Emperor; such things happen to Generals who have been defeated and sometimes even to Generals who have been victorious. He took the Barbarians in the rear, hurled them over the Alps and the Pyrenees and behold, the *Pax Romana* was restored by a Gallic Emperor. We took advantage of the fact to have a rare old private fight between ourselves, until finally Rome intervened and re-established order, just twenty years after we had saved ourselves."

"But ruined? And, I hope, wiser for our experiences."

"Neither, but simply gay, carefree and prosperous."

"I always knew," said Juliette proudly, "that our country was full of resource."

"Of resources—yes," said Chronossus. "And so much so, that the Barbarians thought that the time had come to take another cut from the joint, and this time a much larger one. There were about sixty cities in Gaul; and the Barbarians pillaged and burned the whole lot and then returned whence they had come.

"Once again the Rhine fortifications were re-built. Once again the Gallic peasant tilled his devastated land and the townsman laboriously collected his bits of calcinated masonry—not, indeed, to build temples or smiling villas, but to construct black and frowning ramparts, behind which the shrunken cities took refuge.

"After three centuries of urban civilisation we returned to the molehills of Vercingetorix. And there we remained until the seventeenth century. It is a sad thing to have to say, but for three-quarters of our whole two thousand years of history our cities have been bolted and barred behind ramparts.

"This second invasion occurred in 275, if you want precise dates. The Roman Empire in the west still had two centuries to live. In 475. . ."

## Who Conquered Whom?

A.D. 313—*Constantine legalises Christianity; Fourth Century A.D. —Gracious urban life dies. Labour and capital at a standstill. The Gauls revert to agriculture. Rome ceases to govern, but exploits the peoples for the benefit of the privileged classes. Unjust and crushing taxation. Christian propaganda spreads subversive ideas about liberty, equality and fraternity. The people show no further desire to fight for a rotten régime. The advent of the Barbarians! A.D. 406—The Franks invade France and at last decide to stay there; A.D. 451–53 —Attila conquered by women; A.D. 476—The Roman Empire falls (to the female line).*

"IN 475 there remained in Auvergne but one single bastion of Roman Gaul—Clermont; and it was its Bishop who was carrying on the fight."

"Splendid!" cried Juliette. "Bishops at last—and militant Bishops at that!"

"Christianity," said Chronossus, "had progressed with giant strides. Shall I go on? First of all, let us take a good look at this land of Auvergne. Gergovia, Alesia, the Mercury on the Puy de Dôme and finally Clermont, like some ancient Gergovia come down to the edge of the Limagne plains—all these were clustered in this one province, a land unique in its pride. It was here that Roman Gaul was born, it was here that it shone resplendent with its colossal temple, and it was here, four centuries later, that it perished. Here in mortal combat were locked the last of the rebels against Rome and the last of those who had remained faithful to her.

"The Franks reigned in north Gaul (Belgium), the Alamani in the north-east (Alsace), the Burgundians in Burgundy, while the Visigoths had spread themselves over the loveliest part of all, Aquitania, and had set up their Court at Toulouse. In 475 Clermont alone was still holding out, and the Visigoths were very busy doing their utmost to destroy it. Every

night their *ballistae* and catapults, mounted on high siege towers, hurled enormous spears, incendiary missiles and great lumps of solid rock, over the ramparts and into the town. The wooden houses crumbled and collapsed in flames. The starving Arverni fought over the weeds which grew between the paving stones. Plague worked faster than the spades of the grave diggers. And what with the Visigoths without, and his wife within, the good Bishop Sidonius Apollinaris, simply did not know which way to turn.

"For, as a last straw, the poor fellow was not only married, but married to Papianilla, a spouse every bit as redoubtable as were the hairy hordes outside.

"Is it not enough,' she was wont to cry, 'to distribute the patrimony of the Church? Must you also every day give away our own corn and our own oil and beans? Does not the Lord's Prayer say: *Give us this day our daily bread?* OUR daily bread, Sidonius! Splendid fare, no doubt for these wretches, the bread of the daughter of the Emperor Aviticus!'

"That his father-in-law had once, for a brief while, been a Gallic Emperor was a fact of which Sidonius was beginning to become only too well aware. He contented himself, however, with a cultured quotation from Tacitus, who, speaking of husbands, said: 'Those who hold their peace claim that they have established peace'; or from the Scriptures in which it is written: 'Rage contorted the woman's face . . . her husband groaned and with a sigh sued for a little peace.' Having delivered himself thus, the Bishop would go off and give away such bits and pieces of silver as he possessed, on the pretext that the poor, after all, were poor. But the latter, far more provident, used to return the gifts to the Bishop's wife, who bought them back at reduced prices. Sidonius would then give them away again, and again Papianilla would re-purchase them—a vicious circle of—to her—simply infuriating charity.

"How is it,' she cried, 'that we have fallen so low that I, a patrician and the daughter of an Emperor, find myself reduced to saving the family silver in this mean way?'

"And how is it,' the Bishop would retort gently, 'that we have come to be besieged by the Visigoths?'

### *The Return of the Barbarians*

"The Barbarians returned because they were civilised. We had received them with open arms because we were a little too civilised.

"The two great invasions of the third century had struck Roman Gaul a terrible blow. Even so, and in spite of the havoc they wrought, they would have passed away without leaving very much trace, if only the

Romans had not lost their zest for the common cause and the Gauls their personal energy.

"The Gallo-Romans had developed a great industrial kingdom. First and foremost there were the mines, like those round Lyons, which were owned by a most beautiful businesswoman, Memmia Sosandres by name. Then there were the metal foundries, the cloth mills, the textile industry and the potteries. I knew one craftsman, a fellow called Masuetos, who in the course of his life fashioned no less than 134,410 pieces of pottery! He must have led a pretty busy life!"

"Well—with slavery, of course," said Juliette, "forced labour was too easy."

"Before the invasions a slave cost 500 *deniers* (80,000 francs), the same price as a bull, but he was expected to work much harder, of course, than any bull. After the invasions, however, there crept in an aversion to honest toil, new ideas. . . ."

"Exactly!" exclaimed Juliette. "I know—Trade Unions, strikes!"

"Anyway, the workers quite simply deserted; and once they had gone, there was not a hope of finding them again. There was no such thing then as a passport or an identity card. For its own employees, however, the State did invent one of its own—it branded them with a hot iron; and that, in practice, meant, of course, that nearly all the industrial workers were branded, for such industry as had survived the invasion had forthwith been nationalised. As for the big industrialists themselves, when they found that the cities had retired once more behind their ramparts, that communications were most uncertain, that the currency was being constantly devalued, that export trade was quite impossible and that labour was restless with new-fangled ideas of personal liberty, they threw in their hands and retired to the country. And Gaul fell back on its artisans and peasants."

"The ordinary, little man—the backbone of Gaul!" cried Juliette.

"And a pretty good asset for the Roman Treasury, too. The big wigs not only saw to it that they themselves were exempted from the payment of taxes, but went one better and also defended all those who sought their protection against the onslaughts of the Treasury. Not, of course, free, gratis and for nothing, as you can well imagine; but they had a long arm, which reached all the way to Rome, and its hand weighed heavily on the people."

"They had, in fact, established a sort of feudalism which began where feudalism should end—a fiscal feudalism. Like the cities, the villas of these feudal lords were surrounded by walls unscalable by any tax collector. It is true that the ordinary tax-payer stood a grave risk of being tortured,



for the tax collectors—the Curiales—had been given a raw deal; if they failed to collect the full amount due, they were forced to make good the deficit from their own pockets. Many of them tried to escape by seeking refuge in some religious Order, but the State bound them to their official desk, compelled them to marry and their children to succeed them in their high office. In those days, there was no more wretched man on earth than a tax collector.”

“Except a tax-payer!” interjected Juliette.

“Then the Gallic peasants revolted, took up arms, pillaged the countryside and were then exterminated at the Château de Saint Maur, near a small market town called Lutetia. These insurgents were given the name of Bagaudes. But misery and poverty are hard task-masters . . . and how many new editions of Bagaudes I was destined to see in the centuries to come!

“It was said that their leaders were Christians, and this may well have been true; Christianity was spreading more and more, and particularly in those places where Latin was still spoken—the towns. The preachers, too, had many arresting slogans—liberty, equality, fraternity and goodness knows what else. And you can imagine for yourself the effect such ideas produced in the suburbs!

“As far as liberty was concerned, however, there was a certain diversity of interpretation, for when Pelage, a Breton priest—or rather, an Armorican priest, for the Bretons were still on their island—declared that every Christian was free to acquire virtue by his own efforts, he got into trouble with Saint Augustine, an aristocrat, who went so far as to assert that God had already defined the elect and the damned—precisely and for all time.

“By becoming a convert in 313, the Emperor Constantine had legalised Christianity. What, perhaps, he did not realise was, that by so doing he had also legalised a sort of desertion from within. For those who were either Christians or depressed wretches—when they were not both—made common cause in their distaste for an unjust and dissolute régime. And it was not very long before they were awaiting with eagerness the advent of the Barbarians and welcoming them as liberators.

“During this period, when the Roman administrators were foundering in corruption, others were gradually taking their place, people who alone still enjoyed the prestige of culture and moral authority—the Bishops. Within a century of the Constantinian era the Catholic hierarchy had taken over from the Roman hierarchy—admittedly with the object of safeguarding it for all time, provided, of course, that no more powerful authority came forward and offered its services, for the Church was

already strong enough to make use of any master and conscious enough of its divine mission to be able to change masters as easily as changing horses. Faithful, without doubt, to Rome, but faithful above all to herself, the Kingdom of the Church was not yet of this world.

"Then came the Barbarians! The timorous capitalists despaired of preserving their privileges by their own exertions, but saw possible salvation in the weakness of the State; the oppressed populace dedicated itself to any and every saint and to the invader; the Church remained superbly detached in its attitude; and so, self-indulgence, misery and faith all combined to conspire against Rome. And the whole thing is epitomised in the story of Saint Martin.

"His parents were pagans. His father, a soldier of the Empire, had risen to the rank of Tribune and had insisted that his son should join the army. Martin made a strange sort of soldier; he was sober, he was chaste and he was sweet-natured and charitable. At Amiens, in mid-winter, he cut his cloak in two with his sword in order to give half of it to a beggar.

"On one occasion, when there was a small skirmish on the frontier, he refused to fight. Accused of cowardice, he declared that he would take his place in the front line, but without arms. 'Protected by the Sign of the Cross and not by helmet and shield, I will advance fearlessly into the midst of the enemy.' "

"Goodness me! That was pretty risky, wasn't it?" exclaimed Juliette. "Was he as sure as all that of God's personal interest in his welfare?"

"As a matter of fact, God spared him from putting it to the test. The enemy sued for peace the next day.

"He died in 397. His mausoleum in Tours, which took the place of the Temple of Mercury, became the premier sanctuary in Gaul. And while the people of Vercingetorix set up a conscientious objector as their national patron saint<sup>1</sup> the Barbarians, sword in hand, suggested to us in 406 that we should share Saint Martin's cloak with them."

### *Punctilious Vandals*

"We had not the heart to refuse them. Behind their Rhine, in their black forests, they had become a little peeved with us. As a matter of fact, we quite understood. We looked upon them as all but civilised. We could put ourselves in their place. And they certainly put themselves in ours.

"And pretty brutally, too, at the beginning. They slaughtered and pillaged in a light-hearted and haphazard way, taking money wherever they could lay their hands on it and carrying off our goods, our flocks and

<sup>1</sup> We dedicated 3,675 churches to him!

our women; and more than one Bishop, chastised, dragged in chains from his burning city, complained of having had to undergo the same ordeals as his faithful followers. 'All Gaul,' wrote Orientus, the Bishop of Auch, about 430, 'was burnt at the same stake.' "

"That, surely, was merely traditional?"

"It was not even accurate. As soon as they became the masters, the Barbarians showed that they really were civilised. They pillaged legally and strictly in accordance with the Roman laws of hospitality and in every way behaved as most punctilious vandals."

"Well-behaved occupation troops!" said Juliette. "That must have been rather pleasant!"

"Well, yes—it was. At last we breathed freely again! At last they were being nice, like real Barbarians! For we had always been very fond of them, ever since the days when we used to bring back slaves from each expedition into their land. We used to treat them most tenderly; there was, for example, the case of Germaine, the beautiful, blue-eyed blonde, who lived with Ausonius, the Bordeaux poet, as a free woman, dearly loved. Others enlisted in our legions, where they were so well treated that not a few of them rose to be Generals. In fact, the Empire, for the Barbarians, was less an enemy than a career. And a sort of agricultural land of milk and honey. For these nomadic adventurers had turned farmers. They needed *Lebensraum*. Their sedentary predilections made it essential that they should move on."

"Well—that's logic, if you like!" remarked Juliette.

"But they dared not do so, poor wretches! They were still hesitating when the Huns rolled forward from the steppes of lower Asia, hit them exactly as they themselves had hit the Celts a thousand years before and compelled them to flee onward and into our land. As you yourself observed, one could hardly bear them any ill-will if, in the circumstances, they looked upon themselves as invaders and followed the ordinary route of an invasion. The moment they had finished putting Gaul to the fire and the sword, the Barbarians sheathed their arms and turned their hands to the plough in unison with the Gauls. Imagine, if you can, two peasants working peacefully side by side—and unable to exchange a single intelligible word! As for the nobles. . . . Paulin de Pella, who had taken refuge in the unoccupied zone in Marseilles, was most agreeably surprised when a Visigoth, who had taken a fancy to one of his properties near Bordeaux, did not simply grab it, but actually sent him some money for it. The price the purchaser had fixed was, admittedly, a bit on the low side, but at least the legalities had been respected. In large numbers the Gauls followed the example of Paulin's sons, who abandoned their father and

returned to the occupied zone, waiving their claim to the protection of the Roman officials (and their crippling fiscal system) to live in freedom, as they said, with the Barbarians. They had, in fact, now been well and truly conquered; and fifty years had sufficed to complete their submission.

"When in their turn the Huns invaded Gaul in 451, they found drawn up against them Barbarian and Roman, shoulder to shoulder, under the command of a Roman General, Aetius."

*Saved from Attila by a Beautiful Young Pagan*

"I'm not going to waste much time talking about Attila and his Huns. Thanks to Marcellus Ammienus, the Roman historian, everybody knows that they used to slash the cheeks of their male children so that the scars would prevent their beards from growing; that they slept on horseback; and that, as the only saddles they possessed were beef steaks, which they ate raw (if somewhat tepid), they always rode bareback after the main meal of the day. As for Saint Genevieve, she would certainly have saved Lutetia,<sup>1</sup> had the Huns ever thought of besieging that charming city. I. . . ."

"Sir," interrupted Juliette, "I think I should warn you. I am bound to say that I don't like the way in which you denigrate splendid characters, and. . . ."

"Please—do not misunderstand me," replied Chronossus. "Saint Genevieve was sublime, but surely it's better, isn't it, to admire her as she really was, rather than as she has been depicted by hagiography? Is it not wholly admirable that this young maid should have shown more courage than all the Parisians put together? The hordes of Attila had passed Troyes and were heading direct for the very heart of Gaul—Orleans. But even in those days the Parisians were already quite convinced that the real heart of Gaul was—Paris; and so, they hastily prepared for incontinent flight!

"We must, I think, forgive them both their vanity and their lack of courage, for in the future they were destined to redeem themselves a hundred times over. Today Lutetia has a place in history thanks to a legend, but Paris was shortly to become a centre of history in her own right. At that time, however, it was still only a spot in which to spend a brief, enchanted hour, but an hour so enchanting, that it became the Emperor Julius' favourite haven of leisure. The Gallic city rested on the *Ile de la Cité* and was joined by a wooden bridge to the Roman city, which was spread over what is now the Latin Quarter. Wonderful vines flourished

<sup>1</sup> Lutetia—the ancient name for Paris.

there, and even fig trees, which were wrapped in straw to protect them in winter. The water of the Seine flowed clear and limpid and was sweet to drink.

"Genevieve, a wise and saintly maiden of twenty-eight, told the Parisians that their city would not be attacked. As they refused to believe her, she mobilised all the wives and persuaded them to revolt against their husbands, whom they promptly attacked with a shower of stones. Quite unconvinced by these lapidary arguments, the husbands left their wives and fled southwards—and straight into the arms of the Huns! A couple of days later, the sheepish men of Paris were once more re-integrated into the bosoms of their families.

"While Attila was besieging his city, Aignan, the Bishop of Orleans, slipped out and implored the assistance of Aetius, a fine and gallant Roman General. The latter hastened over from Italy and, mobilising the Franks, the Armoricans, the Visigoths and a few Burgundians to supplement his legions, forced Attila to abandon the siege, pursued him and brought him to battle at Mauriac, near Troyes.

"For three days the Huns, well protected behind their chariots, which they had drawn up to form a fortified camp, poured a hail of darts onto their assailants. At the end of the third day, there were no more men left to kill. But Attila, equally had no more darts to hurl; so he departed, marching in good order past the army of Aetius, which was now no longer in a position to pursue him any farther. The story goes that the little stream which flows through the plain was swollen into a torrent of blood. Torrent or stream, the fact remains that the Barbarians had shed their blood in the defence of Gaul. That, indeed, was a miracle. Other miracles, too, were celebrated. The Christian bards sang hymns of praise to the glory of the Bishops—Auctor of Metz, Aignan of Orleans, Loup of Troyes—all saviours of their respective cities; they sang, too, the praises of saints like Saint Genevieve. But the last of the great Romans, General Aetius, was relegated to oblivion.

"Enough, however, of the Bishops and the General. Gaul, to put it in a nutshell, was well and truly saved by a woman."

"Aha!" exclaimed Juliette. "So even you have to admit it in the end."

"Yes; but certainly not by the woman you think. This fellow, Attila, to tell you the truth was born under the sign of the feeble sex, and I mention specifically three women (among others) in his life. The first unleashed him against us. That was Honoria, the sister of the young Emperor, Valentinus III. Their mother was fulfilling the functions of Regent, but the presence of a father's strong hand was sadly missed in the family.

Honorio behaved so imprudently, that she had to be exiled from the Roman Court, which was blasé and broadminded enough, in all conscience. Thereupon, this madcap of a girl sent her ring to Attila who, understandably perhaps, interpreted the act as an offer of marriage. It was a case of one pest calling to another. The Hunnish scourge claimed his 'Wife'—and half the Empire with her. His claim was rejected, and hence the invasion—via Gaul.

"The second woman, Genevieve, was waiting for him round the corner from Troyes, but never met him.

"The third, whose action was decisive, is less well known. She was a young German woman, serene and golden haired, named Ildico. Attila met her in 453 while he was making his preparations for the renewal of the invasion on a much bigger scale, and in a flash he realised that she was the one, the ultimate, woman in his life. In this he wasn't very far wrong. He was then sixty years of age and he had, so they said, sixty sons. He married Ildico just as quickly as he could. On the night of their wedding they retired together to his private apartments and. . . ."

"You surprise me!" said Juliette pertly.

". . . and twenty-four hours later," continued Chronossus, "they were still there."

"Crikey!" exclaimed Juliette, shocked, but this time by genuine surprise, into an ejaculation of somewhat plebeian flavour. "Ah well," she continued with a wistful sigh, "every man can't be an Attila, I suppose!"

"That, of course, is perfectly true," replied Chronossus. "But it didn't prevent his servants from becoming anxious. Eventually, they broke open the door.

"Attila was lying stretched out, flat on his face, his arms spread-eagled, stark naked on a white rug spattered with blood. In a corner of the room, wrapped in her veils and her golden tresses, the lovely Ildico sat and trembled; her glance, like that of an animal at bay, never rose from the ground. Attila had died in a transport of love. Gaul breathed again. But did she, I wonder, ever give due credit to this young pagan, who had been so demonstrably efficient?"

*Ladies! Never marry a Bishop!*

"And now the catapults of the Visigoths were bombarding Clermont, the stubborn Auvergnats, the saintly Bishop, Sidonius Apollinarius, and his wife, Papianilla—all were attacked with cheerful impartiality.

"Clermont, in those days, was the second city of Aquitaine. It was built with the basalt rocks brought down from Gergovia on the fringe of the Auvergne hills. And high up on the ramparts Sidonius, in the

interval between two bursts of catapult fire, was poetically apostrophising the countryside.

“‘Oh, sea of crops,’ he cried, ‘whose murmuring waves sway far and wide, gently, peacefully, with no hint of storm or wreck; Oh, lovely countryside, so dear to every traveller, as bountiful to the peasant as to the hunter! Oh, girdle of mountains, with verdant pastures on your brow, fruitful vines upon your flanks, little villas nestling at your feet and the castles rising skywards from your crags! Oh, deep secluded woods, ye reeds in the folds of the earth, ye rivers in the narrow confines of your beds. . . .’ For the Bishop was a poet, as well as being a landowner in a big way. ‘Never,’ he declaimed, ‘never will we negotiate under the threat of Barbarian catapults! Never shall these hairy hordes, whose locks glisten with the sheen of rancid butter, whose words are perfumed with the scent of garlic and onion, never, I say, shall they hold Roman Arverni beneath their yoke!’

“‘And where, pray, should we all be, if my brother, Ecdicius, so dreaded by the Goths, were not here to inspire men to courageous deeds?’ retorted Papianilla. ‘All your exhortations won’t make a warrior out of an orator . . . or a husband out of a Bishop,’ she added as a sour afterthought.

“She still bore him a grudge because, from the time he donned the mitre of his episcopal office, he had banished the spindle, the shuttle and all female fripperies from his apartments. In other words, for the last five years since he had become a Bishop, he had occupied a separate room, in accordance with the letter from Pope Leon to Rusticus of Narbonne. ‘It is not seemly that priests should discard their wives,’ His Holiness had written. ‘But they should have them without, as it were, having them. In this way, both conjugal affection will be preserved and nuptial activity eliminated.’ ‘You’re only too glad of the excuse, you poor specimen!’ Papianilla used to say, respectfully appreciative, but by no means satisfied. ‘There’s precious little chance of your ever being condemned to a fare of bread and water!’ ”

“Bread and water? I don’t quite follow,” said Juliette.

“Sidonius was both a dutiful husband and a conscientious Bishop,” explained Chronossus.

“I’m sure he was! But I still don’t understand.”

“You will, when I tell you a little story about Sidonius’ predecessor, the Bishop Urbicus. One night, he was awakened by loud knocks on his door. It was his wife.

“‘How much longer, Bishop, are you going to sleep behind locked doors?’ she cried, ‘Why do you disdain your wife? Why do you close

your ears to Saint Paul, who said: "Come unto one another, lest the devil tempt ye!" And here I am, come unto you—not to some outsider, mark you, but to you, my husband.'

"And Urbicus, having opened his ears to Saint Paul and his door to his wife, the flesh and the devil, placed upon himself a penance of one month on bread and water. It was for this reason that the inquisitive ladies of Auvergne were wont, so assiduously, though, of course, not pointedly, to enquire after the appetite and diet of the dear Bishop. But to their sorrow their own appetite for a bit of tittle tattle remained unsatisfied. Sidonius Apollinarius remained always a handsome wielder of knife and fork!"

"Fork!" said Juliette. "So they had invented something, after all."

"I said fork, but I was wrong, for the Gallo-Romans still ate with their fingers, and they hadn't invented anything. Why should they have bothered their heads about technical progress when they had all the slaves they wanted? No—Roman Gaul did not produce even one single modest new implement during the whole five centuries of its existence, which ended in the year 475."

"Ha!" exclaimed Juliette. "Let us pause and watch the crumbling of the Roman Empire."

"It fell to the female line," replied Chronossus.

"But—hold hard!" insisted Juliette. "A whole world is coming to an end, and a new one is about to take its place. How did it all happen?"

"Unnoticed," replied Chronossus, "and as the result of three or four misunderstandings."

"To Clermont came the Quaestor, Licinianus, sent there from Rome on a special mission by the Emperor Nepos.

"Let us rejoice," said Papianilla. "The envoy has said that he brings the Patriciate to my brother Ecdicius, in recognition of our resistance to the Goths!"

"Let us indeed rejoice," echoed Sidonius. "And after this favour from on high which elevates us to patrician rank, let us hope that our children will live to enjoy the consular honours of ancient Rome," he added, showing that even an intelligent man can sometimes be a man of method."

"And?" queried Juliette.

"The Quaestor had been instructed to cede Auvergne to the Barbarians."

### *The Unexpected Always Happens*

"Like all his upstart colleagues, Euric, most puissant King of the Visigoths at Toulouse, admired Rome and adopted, or rather adapted, her



laws. He felt that for Rome to come and implore the Garonne to protect the enfeebled Tiber was a great honour for him, and so he asked nothing more of the Emperor than that he should continue to reign as Emperor. But that, alas, with the best will in the world and much as they loved the dear Barbarians, neither Olybrius, Glyceris nor Nepos<sup>1</sup> were able to do. One after the other they mounted the throne, cut a few capers and departed. A conspiracy got rid of the first and a revolt deposed the second; and when Nepos fled, it became the turn of Romulus, nicknamed derisively Augustulus. At the end of about a year an Officer of the Guard, a mercenary named Odaire, having come to the conclusion that this game of marionettes had gone on long enough, sent the Emperor down to the seaside at Baiae and with his connivance pinched the imperial insignia, which he despatched respectfully to the Emperor of the Eastern Empire in Constantinople."

"And?" asked Juliette.

"The Roman Emperor of the Eastern Empire popped them into his museum."

"In fact," said Juliette, "the Western Empire was never conquered at all; it was pilfered!"

"It was, indeed. The Barbarian Kings were left to settle things as best they could, and then the trouble started. Now, as one with a shrewd mind, who, think you, would come out on top—the Franks, settled in Belgium, the Alamani on the Rhine, the Burgundians on the Saône and the Rhône, or the Visigoths, who reigned from the Loire to the Pyrenees and over the whole of Spain?"

"The Visigoths, obviously," replied Juliette. "Well?"

"Well—thirty years later an ambitious little Frank named Clovis was destined to create France.

"As for the Church, deprived of the Roman hierarchy which she had so skillfully made her own, left to face the pagans alone, she seemed to be on the threshold of difficult times. She had not succeeded in converting the peasants, because they knew no Latin. Pagan and peasant were called at the time by the generic name of *paganus*. How, then, was the Church to cope with this massive afflux of Barbarians and this mixture of multitudinous strange tongues and dialects? Gaul had become a veritable Tower of Babel, and that, as it turned out, was the Church's opportunity. The bewildered, heterogenous population had no option but to adopt the Esperanto of the day—Latin."

<sup>1</sup> The last emperors of the Roman Western Empire. Olybrius must not be confused with the notorious Governor of Gaul of the same name, who has gone down to history as the personification of boastful braggadocio.

“So Christianity was once more about to progress with giant strides, this time thanks to the Barbarians—is that it?” asked Juliette.

“Yes—and all the more speedily because these tribes were not very good at administration. The Barbarians often used to devour each other; the Bishops did so but very rarely.

“The Christians of Saint Martin had welcomed the Barbarians because the Kingdom of God was not of this world, and in this world, thanks to the Barbarians, the Kingdom of the Church was about to be founded.”

PART TWO

The Ungracious Age or Barbarian Darkness



## Civilised Gaul Transformed into Barbarian France

A.D. 481-511—*Clovis, first King of the Franks. The urn and the phial*; A.D. 496—*Baptism of Clovis. The Alliance between Throne and Altar.*

"WE can, I think, with justice say that it was the Romans who brought us into the world. From the year O of the Christian era and our own history we had enjoyed, by and large, five centuries of light. We were next destined to live for five centuries in the shadows. Even so, with Clovis we got off to a flying start."

"Stop!" said Juliette. "I think I ought to warn you that there's nothing much more that you can tell me. From Clovis onwards, my history is pretty good."

"Would you like me to go straight to the Carolingians?" said Chronossus.

"Well—you might anyway tell us about the baptism of Clovis, if you were there."

*The Story of a Phial and an Urn*

"I went to Rheims in the company of three thousand Franks. Those who could not get into the richly adorned church crowded into the square and the streets, which were also most bravely bedecked with sumptuous brocades. This solid mass, bristling with spiked javelins and iron lances, in reality made a rather sinister spectacle; and on that bleak Christmas day in 496 only the battle-axes of the Frankish halbardiers gave forth a sparkle of light. The ruddy locks of the soldiers, brushed up and over the tops of their heads towards their foreheads, left their powerful necks bare. They were all clean-shaven, save for a wisp of a moustache, and our Gallic women found the greenish glint in their eyes very disturbing. They were also quick to appreciate the close-fitting garments of the soldiery, which exposed their well-turned legs, were pressed flat on their stomachs and showed off to advantage their stalwart shoulders; when

these three thousand roisterers were being baptised, more than one girl would dearly have loved to have been holding one at the baptismal font.

"The ceremony was conducted in the scintillating shimmer of a forest of candles; bounteous clouds of incense gripped one by the throat. Under the contented eye of Clotilde, who had brought him there, Clovis knelt before the Bishop Remi. '*Sicambre*' said Remi. . . ."

"By the way," broke in Juliette. "I always wondered why he called him *Sicambre*?"

"Oh! Just a little confusion of thought!" replied Chronossus. "Like the Franks, the Sicambrians were an ancient Germanic people, the dear old Bishop's Latin was a bit rusty and he got somewhat muddled with his Latin derivatives. Incidentally, did you know that France very nearly came to be called Sicambria? Anyway, Clovis was at last baptised and had prostrated himself; his long hair, the royal insignia of the Merovingians, was brushing the ground, the. . . ."

"Cut!" said Juliette. "Let's get on to the urn."

"Let me first tell you about a certain phial," said Chronossus. "It contained the sacred oil with which Clovis was anointed. After the ceremony it was placed in a vaulted dungeon. It was found there two hundred years later, when there arose the question of having a consecrated King, and from thence onwards all the Kings of France, right up to Louis XVI, were consecrated with this oil."<sup>1</sup>

"It must have been a pretty good sized phial," remarked Juliette.

"You may be quite sure that they used it with the most rigid economy. How could it have been large when it was brought by a dove?"

"Oh! I see," said Juliette.

"Doves, you know, were also used in connection with the elections," continued Chronossus. "The Bishops, for example, were elected by their peers, by the clergy and by the people. And you know how supremely ignorant electors sometimes are! When, for example, Honorat, the Bishop of Arles, chose Saint Hilary, celestial approbation of his choice was attested by the release of pigeons over the head of the candidate. You will observe that it was a good choice. On other occasions, the practice enabled Gallic aristocrats to succeed each other, father and son, as Bishops."

"I'm not sure that I like your sense of humour," said Juliette, and repeated her request to get on to the urn.

"Oh! That!" said Chronossus. "That was at the very beginning of Clovis' reign, in 486, after the battle of Soissons, one of his earliest victories, won while he was still a petty Frankish princeling. He was nineteen at the

<sup>1</sup> Louis XVIII and Charles X were consecrated without oil from the phial, which had been publicly shattered with a hammet by the Deputy Rühl at Rheims in 1793.

time. His soldiers had pillaged the churches, and, since the richest booty was to be found in them, in spite of his desire to placate the clergy, there was nothing Clovis could do to stop them. Among the sacred vessels was a large urn of remarkable beauty which was dearly cherished by the Bishop of the diocese. He sent a messenger to beg Clovis to return it to him. This request rather embarrassed Clovis, for the custom was that all the booty should be placed in a heap—or rather in five heaps. The King's heap was then drawn by lottery, after which the rest was broken up and divided into small lots among the soldiers. Clovis asked that the urn be treated separately and given to him. All his men agreed readily enough, except one, who smashed the urn with his axe and declared that the King could have the fragments provided that they came to him by the luck of the draw. The insolent fellow was within his rights, of course, and Clovis stifled his anger and sent his profound apologies to the Bishop.

"The next spring he got the chance of having his revenge. Reviewing his troops at the beginning of the campaign, he stopped in front of the man in question and reprimanded him sharply about the state of his arms and equipment. 'You're the worst turned-out man on parade,' he cried. 'Your battle-axe, your sword and your javelin are a positive disgrace.' And he seized the man's axe and hurled it to the ground. As the soldier bent down to pick it up, Clovis brought his own battle-axe down on his head. 'That,' he cried, 'is what you did to the Soissons urn!'

"The whole personality of the man is reflected in this story of the urn—his respect for popularity, but also for his own authority, his self-control, his skill in trickery, his cruelty and that supreme virtue in leaders of men—his sense of theatre.

"And the whole of his history, from the episode of the urn to his baptism, ran true to form. For, if Clovis made France, the Church certainly made Clovis."

#### *A Little Pagan with a Future*

"To tell the truth, you would have thoroughly astonished Clovis if you had told him on his death-bed that he had just created France.

"Clovis had but one clear idea in his head, and even that was not original. It was an idea common to the Germans, the Huns, the Celts, all those pallid giants from the Danube to the Rhine and from the Rhine to the west—the ancient nostalgia for the sun. Clovis was longing for his Mediterranean, and, as a petty Princeling in Tournai, he was a long, long way from it. The Burgundians and the Visigoths had arrived before the Franks, and they, of course, had taken their place in the sun.

"If any of our Germanic occupiers seemed destined to dominate the

rest, it was, as we have already agreed, the Visigoths, who held sway south of the Loire. We have seen how they were already on the Seine, filching bits of the Rhône valley from the Burgundians. . . . Alas! Alaric had but one fault, but he had it in good measure—he was an Arian. A convert to Christianity, he asserted that God the Father was the sole God and that Christ was the first of His creatures. As a religious conception this appeared to be much the most logical to the Barbarian mind. As they made their case worse by refusing the clergy any place in the hierarchy of State, the Visigoths naturally got no support at all from the ecclesiastical side. The Burgundians were also Arians, but their King, Gondebaud, was much more tolerant than Alaric. He was all in favour of a fusion with the Gallo-Romans, and he had drawn up a constitution, the *Loi Gombette*, under which the Burgundians and the Gallo-Romans would be granted equality of status and rights. For the women, whose emancipation was progressing in step with the progress of Christianity, this law was much more lenient than the other Barbarian codes.

“Let’s have a peep at this Barbarian leniency of yours,” said Juliette.

“Well—if a man seduced a girl, he had to pay heavy compensation to her father, and if he failed to pay up, the parents assumed full rights over his goods and his person. A husband obtained his wife by purchase, and then, when the marriage had been consummated, he was still required to give her the *Morgengabe*, the ‘gift of the morning’.”

“Quite gallant—for a Barbarian!” commented Juliette.

“I feel bound in any case also to draw your attention to the fact that any woman who forsook her husband was suffocated in the mud.”

“What a filthy idea,” cried Juliette. “I don’t want to hear any more about these people!”

“ . . . But if a man forsook his wife. . . .”

“ . . . I bet he wasn’t suffocated!”

“Certainly not. He had to repay the purchase price of his wife, or he left her his house, his women and all his worldly goods. He could also obtain a divorce if he could prove adultery, sorcery or desecration of the sepulchre.”

“Desecration of the sepulchre,” murmured Juliette dreamily. “I rather like that as grounds for divorce. It’s certainly less dishonest than mental cruelty.”

“Such, then, were the leniencies shown by the Burgundians. You will appreciate, I hope, that between Alaric, the Visigoth, who kept the clergy at arm’s length, and Gondebaud the conciliatory, the Church had no difficulty in making its choice.”



"But what about Clovis? Hadn't the Church yet realised that here was a young man with a future?"

"Well, no, I don't think so. It's true, of course, that a pagan was regarded as being worth two heretics, but then Clovis was still only a very provincial pagan from Tournai. So, in due course, Avitius, the great Bishop of Vienne openly proclaimed himself to be a friend of the Burgundian King. Ten years later the Bishop, having turned his mitre, wrote to Clovis: 'Your adhesion to the Faith is our victory.'"

*Neither God nor Devil, but a Woman*

"The petty King of Tournai had mapped out his path. A moment or so ago, I mentioned the battle of Soissons; it was there that, as a start, he liquidated Syagrius, the last representative of the Romans in Gaul. Then, by means of a few judicious assassinations among his Frankish colleagues between the Meuse and the Seine and, later, between the Seine and the Loire, he transformed himself from a Frankish Princeling into the King of the Franks. And now, since you, Madame, are a Parisienne, I must tell you that your city was beginning to become conscious of her individuality, and she gave her first indication of the fact by exchanging her name of Lutetia for that of the Gallic tribe who formed her population;<sup>1</sup> and, almost as though her new name meant her to be unruly, she decided to oppose Clovis. Genevieve, although she was in her seventies, mobilised the most powerful community of the city, the watermen, and sent them to Arcis-sur-Aube to collect supplies; and Paris, for the first time in her history, girded herself to resist.

"Therein she made a great mistake, for Clovis had already decided to make her his capital.

"There remained, on the Rhine, those rather too enterprising neighbours, the Alamani; when they attacked the Ripuarian Franks, Clovis hastened to the latter's assistance and there he delivered his famous speech on the battlefield. . . ."

"Battle of Tolbiac," interjected Juliette.

"Forgive me! I had forgotten the name of the place, but it was somewhere in the Rhine valley. They had to give it some name, and that's probably why they called it Tolbiac. But in that battle it was Sigebert who fought the Alamani alone, before ever Clovis arrived. However, let that pass. You know the famous speech? 'Jesus Christ! Thou whom Clotilde declares to be the Son of the Living God, if Thou wilt give me this day victory over mine enemies. . . .'"

"I'm not prepared to swear that Clovis actually made that speech;

<sup>1</sup> The Parisii.

I wasn't there. But he may well have, for he was certainly sufficient of a showman to have done so. What is quite certain, however, is that policy and love were combining and leading him straight to his baptism. For three years Remi, that very wise old Bishop of Rheims, had made sure that Clotilde was kept hard at it, working on him. If one pagan was worth more than two heretics, what was so enterprising a pagan not worth! Clovis himself realised full well that he could find no more powerful ally than the Church, but he was a little worried at what his pagans would think about it all; but once the Alamani had been exterminated by a stroke from Heaven, no further delay was permissible. Clotilde took him firmly by the hand and led him to Rheims."

### *The Cross and the Sword*

"From that moment the thing was, in any case, in the bag. Clovis was the sole Catholic monarch in the west, and in his person the clergy welcomed a new Constantine. With the blessing of his new-found friend, the Bishop of Vienne, he defeated Condebaud, who, incidentally, was Clotilde's uncle, and proceeded down the Rhône. As it happened Operation Côte d'Azur was halted before Avignon. Clovis, finding himself hard pressed, did not persist, decided that he would make a detour to the west and at Poitiers settled the fate of the Visigoths with the (post-dated) blessing of Gregory, Bishop of Tours.

"Meanwhile Alaric, however, had taken certain precautions. He had dismissed all those Bishops whom he suspected of being members of Clovis' fifth column. But Clovis had taken God into his camp. 'It displeases me greatly,' he cried, 'to see these Arians still holding parts of Gaul. With the help of God, let us go forward! And when we have defeated them, let us spread our rule over their territories.' And forward he went, halting piously at the sanctuary of Tours, where the Dean of the Chapter of Saint Martin predicted that he would be victorious. Always quick to seize any chance of making a striking gesture, he killed with his own hand one of his soldiers who had stolen some hay from a peasant. 'How can we hope to conquer,' he cried, 'if we offend Saint Martin?' Then, when he arrived on the banks of the Vienne, which had been greatly swollen by the rains, a doe sent by Heaven led him to a ford, while above the basilica of Saint Hilary in Poitiers shone a golden globe of fire to guide him on his way.

"The battle was joined at Vouille, four leagues from Poitiers. Fighting on the side of the Visigoths, the Arvernian contingent, commanded by young Apollinaris, that son of Sidonius whom his father hoped soon to see raised to the rank of Consul, suffered severe losses. Alaric II was slain by

Clovis, who himself had the narrowest of escapes from two Gothic horse-men.

“Clovis had completed his work. We were now in the year 507, and he himself was forty. The Visigoths had been flung across the Pyrenees, the Burgundians had been pushed back as far as Avignon. The Alamani had at last been chased to the other side of the Rhine, where the Franks, settled in what later was to become known as Franconia, thus reversing in an eastern direction the old ancestral migration westwards.”

*With the Political Assistance of the Holy Trinity*

“Gregory of Tours pointed the moral. ‘Clovis,’ he wrote, ‘adhered to the dogma of the Holy Trinity and was thus enabled to destroy the heretics and extend his dominion over the whole of Gaul. Alaric, who denied the Holy Trinity, was stripped of his kingdom and his people, and—and this is far more serious—was deprived of his chance of eternal life. The Lord protects those who believe in Him, and though their enemies may on occasion cause them some losses, He repays them a hundredfold. Not only did the heretics gain nothing, but they also lost all that they had possessed.’”

“Even if he had tried,” said Juliette, “your good Bishop could not have admitted more ingenuously that, as far as Clovis was concerned, the Holy Trinity was a political instrument.”

“And it really was ingenuousness and not cynicism, you know,” replied Chronossus. “Even the Bishops still had a touch of the pagan in them and regarded God as something or someone to be made use of.”

“I don’t think we ourselves are very different,” murmured Juliette. “After all, Saint Antony of Padua is still Head of the Lost Property Office.”

“Quite! Anyway, these simple-minded people believed that victory naturally went to him who possessed the best deity, but their faith was certainly sincere, if somewhat rough and ready. When Remi read to Clovis on the day of his baptism the story of the Crucifixion, the latter cried: ‘Ah! If only I had been there with my Franks! I would have avenged Christ!’ This god of his, who gave him his victories, he’d have got him out of the hole all right—by force—on the Mount of Olives!<sup>1</sup>

“Clovis returned in triumph to Tours, the holy city of Gaul and there in the basilica he received the consular diploma, sent to him by Anastacius, the Emperor of the Eastern Empire. He donned the *chlamys*—the purple tunic—placed a diadem upon his head and might have been Napoleon himself. From that day onwards he was addressed as Consul and Augustus

<sup>1</sup> And here, for those blessed with VERY clear foresight, was the genesis of the Crusades.

and took up his stand as the champion of the ancient order of things. Rome was defunct, but her prestige endured and had placed the seal of legality on his conquests.

"The Gallo-Romans were neither massacred nor reduced to slavery. The Frankish peasants continued like their forefathers to till the soil of Brabant and Flanders. It has been said that the Germanic aristocracy stripped us of all we possessed; it is not true. Everything went off so well, that one might perhaps with more justice have said that it was the Gallo-Romans who had annexed the Franks. For we have a delightful power of assimilation, haven't we, and an astonishingly persuasive way with us! Oh! I know you'll probably object and say that, according to the Salic law, the murder of a Frank was assessed at two hundred sous, while if you killed a Gallo-Roman you got off with a hundred. . . ."

"I promise you, I hadn't even thought of such a thing!" protested Juliette.

"Pity," replied Chronossus. "For that objection just confirms what I have been saying. The Frank was valued more highly because he was in short supply. Did you know that Clovis' whole following did not exceed six thousand men? How could they possibly have stripped us bare? Their numbers only just sufficed to conquer us. And having done so, their first care was to conserve their manpower. So you find that no one was more highly rated than a pregnant woman; she was valued at four men. A fecund woman was valued at three men. An elopement with a married woman cost you as much as the murder of a man. To make the punishment fit the crime—that was what Clovis was after. Would you care to have details of the fines and retributions extracted? You would? Right! An abortion—one hundred sous. Loss of foot, hand, eye, nose of a Frank—also a hundred sous. If the hand survived, but hung useless—sixty-three sous. For a big toe or a thumb—fifty sous. Thirty-five sous for the finger that guides the arrow. A gash on the head or in the stomach—thirty sous. A bloody punch on the nose—fifteen sous. An ordinary, everyday punch—nine sous. As for flirtations . . . this is how gay France started off putting a price on carryings on and such like. If you were discovered holding a woman's hand or arm, you paid a minimum fine of fifteen sous, which could, however, be raised to a maximum of thirty-five sous, according to subsequent developments. You will say that with women there is always an element of uncertainty. . . ."

"I shall say nothing at all," retorted Juliette, suddenly very anti-Clovis.

Chronossus lapsed into silence, angry and even a little sulky, which was very annoying, for I'm sure he had lots more very interesting things to tell us.

"All right—you win," said Juliette in a conciliatory tone. "Carry on, you're surely not going to halt the history of France at Clovis?"

"I rather think, Madame, that, to a certain degree, you are lacking in historical detachment. But it is hardly fair to expect a young woman to be a Descartes and move among men as though they were trees." He shook his head.

"I should be terribly sorry if you went away with a bad impression of the Franks. There was any amount of good in them, you know. They made France, they discovered that with cheese you must drink red wine . . . in short, they were jolly good Frenchmen, those fellows."

"I don't say they weren't," retorted Juliette. "The Gauls, too, had their points; they were better at making pastry, for instance."

"Ah well, I won't press the point. I wonder what I can find to amuse you? Would you like to hear how land purchases were transacted?"

"Are you quite sure that your lawyers' stories are screamingly funny?"

"That's the whole point—there weren't any lawyers, and any written agreement was very rare. This is how the law stood: 'The purchaser, with three, six or twelve witnesses, shall take with him an equal number of young children, shall ensure that they see him pay over the purchase money and shall then box or pull their ears, so that the occasion may be well impressed upon them and they will thus be enabled to bear witness in the future.' Nowadays, of course, with the progress made in the art of writing, there's precious little chance of having a pull at a lawyer's ears. . . . H'm . . . well—I will not persist. I see that you have not taken Clovis to your heart. But he really was a great statesman, you know."

"I don't like great statesmen," retorted Juliette obstinately. "They climb to greatness on the backs of other people."

"Well said! Bravo!" cried Chronossus, in a relieved tone of voice. "But they also climb on the backs of foreign potentates, you know. Perhaps I may hope to persuade you to make your peace with Clovis by telling you a few anecdotes about family assassinations?"

### *The Assassin at Work*

"No sooner had Clovis completed his triumph over the Visigoths than he set to work, like the good Head of the State that he was, to settle the hash of those petty Frankish Princes, his cousins, who had helped to put him in power. Sigebert, the King of the Riparian Franks, resided in Cologne. Clovis secretly sent messengers to his son, Chloderic: 'Your father is an old man. He limps,' (he had been wounded at Tolbiac) 'if he were to die; his kingdom would revert to you with our friendship.' Chloderic took the tip. He had his father murdered while he was asleep in

his tent in the forest of Buconia. He then sent word to Clovis: 'My father is dead. I have his kingdom and his treasure. Send your envoys, that they may select gifts for you.' When the envoys arrived, he showed them the treasure chest in which Sigebert had kept his gold; then, when at their request he bent and plunged his hand deep down into the treasure, one of them killed him with a blow from his axe. Then, quite unexpectedly, Clovis arrived. He caused the people to be assembled. 'Of all this,' he told them, 'I am innocent. I could not shed the blood of my kith and kin, for that is forbidden. But, since this has happened, I advise you to turn to me, so that I can take you under my protection.' With loud clashings of their swords the people signified their approbation. They proclaimed Clovis King and carried him shoulder-high on their bucklers."

"You mean—on their shields," corrected Juliette punctiliously.

"All right—on their shields, if you like."

"Well—it is more correct, isn't it?" persisted Juliette objectively. Chronossus apologised. "I am only telling you the story as our good Bishop Gregory told it to me," he said. "Shall I pass on to the next episode?"

"I have a feeling," said Juliette, "that it's going to be Clovis who passes on to the next episode!"

"At Cambrai, Ragnachar was on the throne. By his debauchery he had alienated the Franks over whom he ruled. Those who remained faithful to him Clovis corrupted with gifts of bracelets and cross-belts of gold, and then he marched against him. Taken prisoner with his brother, Richar, Ragnachar was led in chains into Clovis' presence.

"'By allowing yourself thus to be manacled,' said Clovis, 'you have brought disgrace on our family. It were far better that you were dead. So saying, he struck him down with his battle-axe. Then he turned to Richar. 'If you,' he said, 'had but gone to the aid of your brother, he would never have been put in those ignominious chains!' And him, too, he killed. Meanwhile, the traitors had found out that their gifts were not gold at all, but gilded bronze, and they started to complain bitterly. Clovis had a ready answer. 'It is the kind of gold,' he said, 'that is meet for those who betray and deliver their masters. Such men would be well advised to think themselves lucky to be alive, lest their barbarous treachery be repaid with torture.' There now remained one more brother of Ragnachar named Ragnomer; he was put to death at Le Mans on Clovis' orders."

"I'd rather not say what I think," said Juliette tersely.

"At the time when Clovis was fighting against Syagrus, the Frankish King Chararich had adopted a somewhat doubtful attitude. Twenty years had passed since Soissons but that has already shown us that for Clovis vengeance was a draught to be drunk cold. By trickery he captured

Chararich and his son and caused them to be tonsured and ordained as priests. Chararich bewailed his fate and his long hair, which was the insignia of his royalty. His son tried to console him. 'This foliage,' he told him, 'has been cut from a tree that is still green; it will swiftly grow again; and may he who has been the cause of all our misfortunes perish equally swiftly.' This imprudent remark came to the ears of Clovis, who promptly executed them both and took possession of their land and treasure.

"In this way, then, Clovis ensured his sovereignty over the Frankish peoples by killing off all his relatives. One day, however, while surrounded by his most intimate friends, he started to bemoan his lot. 'Woe is me,' he cried, 'who now remain like some traveller in a foreign land and surrounded by strangers. If adversity should threaten, I have no kith and kin to succour me!'"

"Poor lamb!" said Juliette scornfully. "Is this where I burst into tears?"

"There is no need, Madame. According to Gregory this was but another little ruse to try and find out whether there was anyone else he ought to kill."

"And your Bishop was proud, I suppose, to see his Church supported by a murderous assassin like that?"

"Well, yes—I suppose he was. You see—the other Germanic kings were no less cruel, but they had much less character. Gregory knew that a recrudescence of barbarism was inevitable. If one had to have an assassin, he probably argued, it was better that he should be a Christian. And, when he reported on the murders of which I have just told you, the Bishop wrote: 'Each day God struck down Clovis' enemies and added stature to his kingdom, for he marched before Him with an upright heart and did those things that were pleasing unto Him.'"

"... that were pleasing unto Him! By God! He had a nerve, your Bishop!"

"He was a statesmanlike Bishop, who realised that you cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs. And you must admit—France is a quite lovely omelette!"

"When Clovis was buried in 511 in the capital he had chosen on the hill we call Sainte-Geneviève, he had lived but forty years, and France had taken shape.

"His grandsons took her to pieces again."

## Turmoil and Fury

Circa A.D. 600—*All or nothing. Preferably nothing.*

"THE Clovetian dynasty," continued Chronossus, "reigned—if you can call it reigning—for two hundred and seventy years, from 482 to 752, longer than either the Valois or the Bourbons. Nearly three centuries of despotism, tempered to a fine art by assassination; three centuries of blood, impotence and loose living. In such circumstances, the lives of Kings and peoples become more than ever a story full of turmoil and fury, told by an idiot. And you will, I hope, forgive me if I prefer not to be the idiot in question.

"It is quite impossible to make head or tail of these Merovingians. Why—even their name is the result of an etymological error; just because some bounder of a chronicler asserted that the name Merovig meant 'son of the sea', they invented for him a miraculous origin, which was most uncomplimentary to Chlodio, the great grandfather concerned. One day, they said, when his wife was bathing in the sea, a monster rose and took her in his embrace, and that is how Merovig came to be born and the illustrious unknown monster to give his name to the Clovetians. These latter, incidentally, had equally flimsy grounds for calling themselves thus. The name Clovis itself is an invention. It was a fabrication that started with the Latin Chlodovechus, which later became first Ludovicus and then Louis. Clovis, by rights, should have called himself Louis I.

"On the other hand, it seems quite plausible that this terrible progeny should have been the issue of some fearsome monster, for it certainly confirmed in every detail the prophesy of Clovis' mother. I need not remind you of Basine's dream—you remember it, of course?"

"Whose dream?" asked Juliette. "Oh! . . . Oh! Yes, of course! But . . ."

"Say no more," replied Chronossus. "Even the best memory has a gap in it sometimes, doesn't it?"



*A Woman whose Eyes were by no means Cold*

"Childeric, the future father of Clovis, had been expelled from his kingdom by the Franks, because they considered that he was leading too luxurious a life. I will leave you to imagine for yourself what they meant by that! He took refuge in Thuringia, at the Court of King Basin, whose beautiful young wife was named, appropriately enough, Basine. Childeric was then twenty-three years old, and . . . well . . . let us continue. There is no doubt that he left behind him an unforgettable memory, for eight years later, when he had recovered his throne, who should put in an appearance but Basine! 'What happy wind has brought you here?' asked Childeric, to which she replied with the utmost politeness. 'I have no reason for coming other than the esteem in which I hold your manliness and the great liking which your good qualities and your charm have inspired in me. If for a moment I had thought to find anywhere a Prince more valorous than you, I would have gone to the ends of the earth to find him!' And Childeric at once married this woman, who, obviously knew all about how to talk to men.

"But whether this attribute was a sufficient reason for branding her as a sorceress I rather doubt. Be that as it may, for a pretty go-ahead young woman, who liked men very much and made no bones about it, she gave him a queer sort of first night on their honeymoon. I will tell you the story as it was told to me. I myself was not present on the occasion.

"When they had got into bed, Basine said: 'Let us refrain! Get up and go out into the courtyard of the palace and then return and tell thy servant what thou hast seen there. Childeric rose and did as he was bid. In the courtyard he saw lions, unicorns and leopards roaming round, and he returned and told Basine what he had seen. 'Go again,' she said, 'and return and tell thy servant what thou seest this time.' Once again Childeric went out, and this time he saw bears and wolves. The third time he saw dogs and other mean, petty animals of the sort. Husband and wife spent a night of chaste purity, and when they got up in the morning, Basine said: 'That which thou hast seen with thine own eyes is founded on the truth. To us a lion shall be born. The unicorns and the leopards were the symbols of his valiant sons. To them shall be born bears and wolves for courage and ferocity. And the last Kings will be the dogs, and the host of other mean little creatures represent those who will rouse the fury of a people badly served by their Kings.'

"Basine's vision was absolutely accurate (if she ever had a vision). The lion was Clovis. His four sons fought valiantly and even intelligently. They restored to Gaul her natural frontiers of the Pyrenees, the Alps and the Rhine, which Julius Caesar had assigned to her. But their battles were

fought in vain. The worm was already in the fruit—by which I mean in the race itself, soon to become degenerate and depraved both in its way of life and in its laws.

“For more than a thousand years there was nothing that did our country more harm than the Germanic custom of divided inheritance; later came the corrective in the form of the rights of primogeniture, but we still persisted in failing to discriminate between private affairs and public issues, and France was destined to be dismembered and put together again at the whim of various marriages.<sup>1</sup>

“At the time of which we are speaking, however, the divisions of inheritance still obtained. This custom resulted in family relations which we should feel bound to describe as delicate in the extreme, but for the fact that they were invariably settled at the point of a knife. But Clovis’ sons, after all, were not the originators of this policy; all they did was to derive their inspiration in the art of settling family affairs in terms of current expediency from the example given them by their father.”

### *Family Affairs*

“During a campaign in Thuringia, Thierry<sup>2</sup>, on the pretext that he wished to confer with him, invited Clotaire<sup>3</sup> to come to his tent. He had posted assassins who, at a given signal, were to hurl themselves on his half-brother (Thierry was a son of Clovis by a previous marriage). Unfortunately, however, the feet of the hired cut-throats protruded from beneath the curtains behind which they were hiding. Clotaire noticed them as soon as he came in, and he ordered his own escort to remain with him. Thierry, too, could not help seeing these very annoying feet, and he was most embarrassed. At length he had a good idea. He grabbed a beautiful silver salver and offered it to his brother. ‘Let’s put the feet on this salver, shall we?’ he said with a rather forced laugh.<sup>4</sup> Clotaire, who appreciated a joke as well as the next man, took the salver and went his way. ‘Thierry,’ remarked Gregory of Tours, ‘was most skilful in the use of ruse.’ He was, indeed, and he was also a most careful man, for, to recover his losses, he sent his son, Theodebert, to Clotaire and the young man succeeded in getting round his uncle and returned with the silver salver.

“Children, of course, suffered too. One of the brothers died, leaving three children of tender age, who went to live with their grandmother,

<sup>1</sup> Right up to Marie Antoinette who called her brother, the Emperor of Austria, to her aid, to lead back to obedience her people who had revolted, exalted by the new idea of a French Nation.

<sup>2</sup> Son of Clovis and King of Austrasia.

<sup>3</sup> Son of Clovis and King of the Franks.

<sup>4</sup> The authenticity of this remark has not been challenged.

Clotilde. Their uncles hit upon the happy idea of grabbing the childrens' portions and splitting them among themselves. Saying that they wished to see the children placed firmly on their rightful thrones, they persuaded the grandmother to hand the infants over to their care. Then they sent a messenger, who was none other than Arcadius, the grandson of our old friend, the Bishop Sidonius Apollinaris, to Clotilde with a pair of scissors and a drawn sword. 'My masters bid you choose, most glorious Queen,' said the envoy. 'Is it better that the children should live, shorn of their locks, or that they should be despatched?'<sup>1</sup> Grandmother Clotilde, saintly woman though she was, was very much a creature of her race and epoch, and her sons were betting on a certainty. 'I would rather see them dead,' replied the Queen, 'than tonsured.' Whereupon Clotaire, full of fun as always, fell upon the children and slew first the eldest and then the second. Childebert, on the other hand, was overcome by a wave of tenderness, and the third child managed to flee and take refuge in a monastery near Paris. This was little Cloud, who gave Saint Cloud to Paradise and a very delightful suburb to the city of Paris.

"So much for the leopards. I don't think I need say very much about the dogs which followed, those degenerates, enfeebled by the delights of Gallo-Roman life and all the more viciously cruel as a result, who became fathers when they were fourteen and who died of exhaustion when they were twenty-five."<sup>2</sup>

"Michelet puts it superbly, when he says: 'These emasculated children at Jumièges,<sup>3</sup> these inarticulate young Princes, who fled on a boat and were carried by the stream down to the ocean, these were the symbols of their race. But they were given haven in a monastery. For the priest was the real king.'

"Heaven alone knows what they might have done and what might have become of us, if the Church had not been there to protect us! But unfortunately, even the Church was not omnipotent, and frequently she found herself compelled to compromise with these infantile despots, obsessed with their passions and their women. For every now and then women, too, took a hand in the efforts being made to reach a general settlement. If you are not already nauseated, I can parade before you the Grand Guignol of Fredegonda and Brunehaut. You will not cry out in horror?"

"You can rely on me to maintain a completely historical serenity," said Juliette.

<sup>1</sup> Any Merovingian King lost his throne if he visited a barber's shop.

<sup>2</sup> Before, that is, they had time to go bald, thus avoiding the delicate problem which a bald King would have raised.

<sup>3</sup> The reference is to a tableau of Clovis' two sons, at Jumièges.

"I hope you can," said Chronossus. "For myself, fearful of losing my own I prefer to hand over the narrative to a monk, whom I met at Brunehaut's Court. He was a courier, who carried despatches between the Queen and Gregory the Great—you know, the inventor of the plain-chant. It's a great consolation, don't you think, to know that these people slaughtered each other and sent each other to Heaven to the suave tones of the Gregorian chant?"

"Our monk was endowed with a critical faculty as distorted as his mind was simple; and that, I think, is why he was called Candidus. Are you ready? Very well. I will hand you over to Candidus, the Queen's Messenger."

*Fredegonda and Brunehaut; Melodrama in Divers Acts of Savagery*

"Behold, I am Candidus, a monk in this year of Grace 613. The noble Brunehaut is no more! Clotaire, the son of the ignoble Fredegonda, mounted her on a camel and delivered her to be outraged and ravished by the soldiery! At the age of sixty-six! Thus he tortured her for three days. Then he tied her by the hair, one arm and one leg to the tail of a horse, which with whips he goaded into a furious gallop, until the body of the unfortunate Queen was nothing but a shapeless lump, which he then cast into the fire.

"The poet Fortunatus, that fine Italian mind, who had seen her in all her splendour as a bride at the Court in Metz, says her complexion was as fair as a lily, that her eyes, gay and sparkling, were of surpassing loveliness and that her figure, noble in its proportions, was perfect. She was beauty personified—and she spoke Latin!

"The ignoble Fredegonda, on the other hand, was nothing but an upstart servant, beautiful without dispute, who had raised herself by trickery and assassination to the couch of Chilperic, King of Neustria.

"Among others, Chilperic had a wife named Audouera, a sweet and fecund woman, who gave birth to a daughter while the King was away waging war against the Saxons. The ignoble Fredegonda, who had gained great influence over the King, whose mistress she had become, and also over the Queen, whom she was to succeed, perfidiously advised the innocent Audouera to have the baby Princess baptised at once and to become herself her Godmother. 'In that way,' said the ignoble Fredegonda, 'you will become doubly her mother—in the flesh and in the spirit.'

"When Chilperic returned, the ignoble Fredegonda said: 'What glory can compare with that of the King? He returns victorious and finds his House enriched with a Princess as lovely as the dawn. But, Sire, with

whom will you sleep to-night!' 'With the Queen, by heaven!' replied the King. 'Alas!' sighed the ignoble Fredegonda, 'that would be a mortal sin; she has become thy kinswoman and the Godmother of thy daughter.' 'Well—if I can't sleep with her,' replied the King, who still retained the elements of religious scruple, 'I'll sleep with you!' And so he did. And he repudiated Andouera and married the ignoble Fredegonda. And the Queen departed to a monastery with the music of the wedding feast ringing in her ears.

"When his brother, Sigebert, married the noble Brunehaut, the pretty Visigoth daughter of Athanagild of Toledo in 566, Chilperic felt somewhat disgruntled and himself demanded the hand of Galswinthe, the elder daughter. His reputation being what it was, there was a certain amount of difficulty, and he was compelled to swear to the Queen of Toledo that he would put aside all his other wives and concubines. In this, moreover, he was perfectly sincere, for he was deeply in love with Galswinthe, who with her person would also endow him with great treasures. When the two brothers had thus married the two sisters, were we not entitled to hope for peace at last? Alas! Though the ignoble Fredegonda had been repudiated, she had not lost her cunning, and she succeeded in being allowed to remain in the palace as a servant. Very soon the King fell once more beneath her spell. The young Queen, thus scorned, begged to be allowed to return to Spain and offered to leave all her treasures behind her. Chilperic, however, felt that it would be safer to strangle her as she slept.

"The ignoble Fredegonda at last had her reward; she now sat on the throne of Neustria, while Brunehaut sat on that of Austrasia in the East; and the two sisters-in-law, in the glowing splendour of their twenty years, vowed mortal and eternal hatred.

"Sigebert, having defeated his brother with the aid of the Germans, entered Paris, which, under the Convention of 567, had been declared exempt from division among the heirs, and sent for the noble Brunehaut. Then he pursued Chilperic as far as Tournai. At the Villa de Vitry, near Arras, the nobles raised Sigebert shoulder high on their shields, and the rank and file were still expressing their approbation with loud clashings of their swords, when suddenly two young men, pushing their way through to pay their homage, plunged their daggers into his heart. They had been corrupted by the ignoble Fredegonda, who had given them a magic potion to drink. Sigebert fell dead to the ground, and the noble Brunehaut was a widow.

\* "Alone in Paris, she was at the mercy of Chilperic . . . and then it was that she gave proof of her royal blood; rising above her private grief, she

offered her hand and an alliance to her brother-in-law, the murderer of her sister and her husband—in short—to Chilperic.

“This would have re-united at one stroke the Eastern and Western Franks and restored, under Chilperic’s sceptre, the Kingdom of Clovis. Alas! The ignoble Fredegonda clung obstinately to her husband. The noble Brunehaut was exiled to Rouen. All seemed lost. But not a bit of it! God sent a lover to her aid, a son of Chilperic named Merovig. In Paris this young man had been greatly moved by the noble Brunehaut’s beauty, and I do not doubt that, the father having failed in his duty, she encouraged the son for the sake of the Kingdom. Bishop Pretextat secretly married aunt and nephew. Alas! Pursued by the hatred of the ignoble Fredegonda, Merovig was constrained to take Holy Orders and seek asylum at Saint Martin of Tours, while the nobles of Austrasia got their Queen back again. Then the loving Merovig managed to escape and rejoined her at her Court. But of what use to her was this tonsured and outlawed husband? The noble Brunehaut sent him away. Merovig, abandoned by everybody, felt he had nothing more for which to live, and he begged a friend to run him through with his sword. This his friend obligingly did.”

“But that’s nonsense!” exclaimed Juliette. “Why commit suicide for a little thing like that!”

“Let Candidus speak for himself,” replied Chronossus.

“As for Bishop Pretextat, he was stabbed in his church on Easter Sunday. The ignoble Fredegonda went to see him and protested that she would spare no pains to find the culprit. ‘The criminal,’ replied the Bishop, ‘is the same person who has caused Kings to be assassinated, who is quite used to spilling the blood of innocents and who has filled the Kingdom with crime.’ The ignoble Fredegonda pretended that she had not understood. ‘I have some excellent physicians,’ she said. ‘I am sure that they will be able to cure you.’ Whereupon Pretextat, beside himself with rage, cried: ‘Tremble, woman! For God will surely take vengeance for all the blood you have spilled!’ and. . . .”

“And died,” said Juliette.

“. . . and died,” repeated Chronossus. “Please do not interrupt Candidus.”

“One of the Frankish nobles had the hardihood to protest to the Queen. She made no attempt to defend her actions, but simply begged him very courteously to drink that mixture of absinthe, wine and honey which it was customary to offer to a distinguished guest in the royal household. Scarcely had he swallowed it, than he fell. . . .”

“Dead!” exclaimed Juliette. “That’s one . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . four corpses!”

“Then the hand of God descended, as prophesied by the Bishop, on the

House of Chilperic. His two sons, the Princes Clodebert and Dagobert, died. And all that now remained to Chilperic was one son (by his first wife Audouera), a young man of twenty-five named Clovis. The ignoble Fredegonda accused him of having killed his brothers by means of malpractices, the details of which she went to great pains to invent; then she had him stabbed to death."

"Five . . . six . . . seven—if one counts the children!" counted Juliette.

"There now remained only Rigonte, the ignoble Fredegonda's own daughter, to oppose her. The animosity between mother and daughter was so great that sometimes they actually came to blows. Then one day the Queen called her daughter into her boudoir, opened a chest full of trinkets and precious stones and started pressing them by the armful on her daughter. Then, as though tired out by her efforts, she stopped. 'I am fatigued,' she said. 'Help thyself. Take whatever pleases thee!' Rigonte advanced and bent over the chest to reach down to the bottom. The ignoble Fredegonda, taking her time, lowered the lid and pressed it hard on the neck of her daughter. . . ."

"Who forthwith died!" interposed Juliette.

"Not so," said Chronossus. "Do not interrupt Candidus."

"Her eyes were already starting from their sockets, when someone dashed in just in time and saved her.

"At the end of September 584, Chilperic returned from a day's hunting at Chelles, near Paris. As he was dismounting from his horse, a man stabbed him twice; and in her turn the ignoble Fredegonda became a widow. Can this have been the hand of the noble Brunehaut? . . . of God? Nay—rather was it the hand of the demon of the flesh, for the assassin was the lover of the ignoble Fredegonda.

"The same year a son was born to Chilperic and the ignoble Fredegonda and was named Clotaire, the same one who, twenty-nine years later, was destined to tie his noble aunt to the tail of a horse.

"Brunehaut, too, had one son, Childebert. The nobles of Austrasia had banded together and were plotting against her. But once again she gave proof of her strength of character. Aided by her son, she got rid of them all, one after the other, by assassination.

"Magnovald was commanded to the Palace in Metz to watch a fight between a wild beast and a pack of hounds; he was watching the spectacle from a window and he was roaring with laughter, when a slave cut off his head with a single blow of his axe. Rauching, Ursion and Berthefried had formed a plot with the nobles of his enemy, King Clotaire II, to kill Childebert. Rauching received a friendly invitation to visit the Palace in Metz. As he was leaving the royal apartments, he was set upon by slaves

and battered to death. Gontran-Boson, another conspirator, was pierced by so many spears, that he remained upright after he was dead. Ursion and Berthefried had the temerity to seek asylum in a church dedicated to Saint Martin. The church was set on fire. Ursion died in the flames, but Berthefried escaped and fled at full gallop to Verdun, where Bishop Airy gave him asylum in the private chapel of his episcopal palace. The soldiers of the noble Brunehaut, ever respectful of the sanctity of asylum, refrained from forcing the Bishop's door. They climbed up on to the roof, tore a hole in the roof and stoned the renegade to death with a hail of tiles."

"One . . . two . . . three . . . four, five more corpses," said Juliette. "Seven and five—twelve."

"In this way, thanks to the vigilance of his mother, the noble Brunehaut, King Childebert escaped from the plots of the ignoble Fredegonda. He died peacefully in his bed in the year 595, leaving two children, one of eleven and the other of nine years of age. The noble Brunehaut, their grandmother, seized the reins of Government in their name. But the ignoble Fredegonda took advantage of the uncertainty of the moment to seize Paris and the Ile de France. Whereupon the noble Brunehaut, followed by her two Kings, advanced to the frontier of the Soissonais territories, while the ignoble Fredegonda marched against her with her son Clotaire, and we were treated to the spectacle of three Kings, each at the head of his army, the eldest of whom was but eleven years of age.

"Alack and alas! The army of Clotaire and the ignoble Fredegonda cut to pieces those of the noble Brunehaut and her grandsons. But the ignoble Fredegonda did not survive to reap the fruits of victory. This woman, who had been the perpetrator of so many murders and plots died, peacefully, unfortunately, in her bed in 597. Thus the noble Brunehaut was at long last relieved of her enemy, and in 600, at the battle of Dormelles, on the banks of the Orvane, she amply avenged the defeat she had suffered three years before. In order to be able to guard closely against any treachery on the part of her own nobles, the Queen took up her position on the battlefield itself. An angel was seen to join her ranks and strike down the warriors of Neustria with his sword, and the carnage was so handsome that the little stream was turned into a torrent of blood."

"What about corpses?" asked Juliette. "Had they given up keeping a tally?"

Candidus ignored the interruption.

"This great victory opened the way for the noble Brunehaut to the Kingdom of the ignoble Fredegonda's son. Her troops indulged in an orgy of pillage, rapine and slaughter, she herself took possession of the major portion of the Kingdom of her nephew, Clotaire II, but not the



whole of it; and this act of clemency was destined to prove fatal to her!

"From that moment misfortune after misfortune descended upon the noble Brunehaut. Her grandson, Theodebert, though he was but fifteen years of age, had already begun to give proof of his independence. It was in vain that the queen ordered the assassination of Guentron, who had gained too much influence over the young King, for the latter immediately married Bilichilde, one of his grandmother's slaves, a delightful and intelligent girl, who quickly gained a powerful influence over her husband.

"It was also in vain that the noble Brunehaut, jealous as always of the royal prerogative, ordered the assassination of the patrician, Egila, with whom her other grandson, Thierry, King of Burgundy, had fallen in love; she relied greatly on her favourite, Protadis, a Roman noble, a man of pleasing appearance and keen and penetrative genius, but this, too, proved to be in vain, for Protadis himself was also assassinated. In very truth, to maintain her authority over her two grandsons the noble Queen had a great deal to do, not excluding some supervision of the royal beds. But Thierry was not content with the concubines his grandmother provided. He took it into his head to marry Ermenberge, a young Visigoth Princess. But the noble Brunehaut made such excellent use of her magic potions against the charms of her new daughter-in-law, that, try as he might, the King was quite unable to have and enjoy her as a husband should and was finally compelled to send her away.

"Incredible though it may sound, there was actually one Bishop who protested against the spirited and decisive conduct of the Queen. The noble Brunehaut had him executed at once.

"Finally, in a last supreme and regal effort to bring about the unification of the Kingdom, she sent Thierry to attack his brother. Defeated at Cologne, the rebel Theodebert was cast into chains and taken to the noble Brunehaut, who, exercising her grand-parental rights over him, caused him to be tonsured and then put to death. As for her two little great-grandchildren, Clotaire and Merovig, in her wisdom she never had any intention of sparing them. It has been asserted that she dashed out the brains of little Merovig against a tree with her own hands. But justice obliges me to state the fact that she left them to the tender mercy of their great-uncle, Thierry. Were the two kingdoms of the grandchildren at last to be united? . . . "

"Don't ask me," said Juliette. "I wouldn't know. But I'd be surprised!"

"Let the courier Candidus give us the answer," said Chronossus.

"One small sister had been spared, and Thierry decided to marry her. and here the noble Brunehaut all but made a grave mistake: she opposed the marriage, for it seems that she had an exaggerated *penchant* for her

grandson. God, however, held her back on the brink of incest, and Thierry died in Metz, at the age of twenty-six, struck down by a thunder-clap."

"You see what that implies?" intervened Chronossus.

"Me?" said Juliette. "Not a hope!"

"This left the noble Brunehaut as the sole regent and guardian of the four sons of Thierry and his concubines," explained Chronossus.

"It was then," continued Candidus, "that Clotaire, thanks to the treachery of the Austrasian nobles and helped by the Arnoul and Pippin factions, advanced as far as Andernach without encountering any opposition. Nevertheless, the noble, the indomitable Brunehaut succeeded in raising an army and forcing him to retire to the banks of the Aisne. The battle was about to start, when the Burgundian *seigneurs*, wheeling about at a given signal, deserted the Queen and went over to her enemy. The noble Brunehaut fled towards Burgundy in search of asylum, closely pursued by the King of Neustria. She was captured in the town of Orbe, on the shores of Lake Neuchâtel and taken to her nephew, the son of the ignoble Fredegonda, who was in Renève-la-Vingeanne, near Dijon. A few more of the great-grandchildren were put to death, but this time by their great-uncle. . . ."

"How many?" demanded Juliette.

"Oh!" replied Chronossus, "only a couple of them."

"Then it was that the son of the ignoble Fredegonda tied his aunt, the noble Brunehaut, to the tail of a horse, which at a mad gallop dragged through the dust the bleeding body of this courageous Princess, a daughter, wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother of Kings."

"Well—there you are. I hope you've understood this very complicated melodrama?"

"Not a word of it," replied Juliette. "And you needn't worry—I've no intention of trying to do so."

"Good!" said Chronossus.

"Except. . . ."

"Except?"

"Well—I should rather like to know why your courier Candidus found Brunehaut noble and Fredegonda ignoble?"

"That," said Chronossus, "is quite simple. Fredegonda<sup>1</sup> had denied the Holy Trinity, whereas Brunehaut had abandoned Arianism and had embraced the Roman faith."

<sup>1</sup> Fredegonda certainly had a nerve. In defiance of the Salic Law, she went so far as to assert that a woman was perfectly entitled to own land, and to inherit from her husband; in this way, she was responsible, with the collaboration of the London merchants, for the Hundred Years War.

"Then that was why. . . ."

"Yes, that was why. And the monk had carried messages in which the Pope had written: 'Your faith and your endeavours have made a great contribution to the triumph of religion.' Or, on another occasion: 'The solicitude displayed by Your Excellency is worthy of all the praise that a Government can bestow upon it.'"

"Good heavens!" cried Juliette. "Did the Pope really write things like that to Brunehaut?"

"Certainly," replied Chronossus. "Or perhaps you would prefer this tribute to her saintly life and pure morals: 'The Frankish nation is the happiest of all nations, because it has deserved to have a Queen endowed with all the virtues. (Signed) Gregory.'"

"I must say, you were certainly right when you said that the history of these Merovingians had neither head nor tail," observed Juliette. "Except the tail of the horse, of course."

"And, if you please, the head of Gregory the Great who, throughout all this reign of tumult and terror, was clever enough to safeguard the goods and chattels of the Church."

## A Night with Mirofède

A.D. 629–639—*A ray of light in the Merovingian shadows. Dagobert and the Government of Saints*; A.D. 632—*Mahomed dies and launches his resigned Faithful on the conquest of the unresigned Infidels*;  
A.D. 633—*Chronossus discovers love and invents the jalousie.*

"LIFE is very queer," sighed Chronossus.

"Come, come," said Juliette jovially, "don't let's go all sentimental. We're still only at six hundred and something, and Brunehaut has just been setting fire to. . . ."

Chronossus sighed deeply again. "It was such a lovely time," he said.

"It looks very much to me as if your mind is not on your history book," said Juliette severely.

"I was just sixteen centuries old when I awoke to the delights of love. Poor Mirofède! I loved her for the space of a day, for the space of the reign of one single Merovingian King. I was a pupil at the School of Political Science in the Palace; my Mirofède was one of Dagobert's concubines.

"I ought to explain that Clotaire, the aunt-burning incendiary, had a son named Dagobert, who reigned from 629 to 639—ten years of peace, during which we all believed that the country had regained its equilibrium; and yet . . . there was something which, somehow, didn't seem to be quite in order."

"In Dagobert's Palace?" enquired Juliette pertly.

*Clichy was not the Centre of the World*

"Mahomed," replied Chronossus with a grim expression. "At the school, nobody told us, when he died—seven years before Dagobert—in 632. No one warned us that exactly one hundred years later in 732, his Mussulmans would be in Poitiers. All the same we ought ourselves to have taken heed. Islam means 'resignation'; and Mahomed had left the

clearest possible instructions to his followers. 'Go forth and conquer those Infidels who have not resigned themselves,' he had commanded. But we people here bothered no more about that than we did about China, where the illustrious T'ai Tsong was about to found the T'ang dynasty; or any more than about Byzantium, which was then the capital of that Mediterranean civilisation, whose death-knell Mahomed had already sounded. We thought that the hub of the world was Clichy. From Romilly to Rueil, from Compiègne to Soissons, from villa to villa, Miroflède and I passed and loved and made love. The King was wont frequently to change his residence, for no place could support for long his way of life and his large entourage, with its Officers of the Household, the King's thirty Queens and concubines, the pupils of the School and the periodical assemblies of all his nobles. I myself liked Clichy best, because there the School was housed in the same wing as the women. Miroflède, too, preferred Clichy, because right on the fringe of the forest she had her Parisian merchants who supplied her with all her frivolities. Then again it was at Clichy that we trod the first measures of our Merovingian interlude."

#### *Merovingian Fun and Games*

"'You can't imagine how delighted I was,' said Miroflède one evening, 'when Dago told me that he was moving his seat of government from the banks of the Moselle to the banks of the Seine. I couldn't hope for Lyons or Marseilles, of course. . . .'

"'His Sublime Highness,' I stammered, 'no doubt has recalled to mind the example of his illustrious ancestor, the great Clovis, who, in his wisdom. . . .'

"'All right, all right, *mon petit*,' interrupted Miroflède. 'You're not in the School of Political Science now!'

"As a matter of fact we were in her bedroom."

"Aha!" said Juliette. "The plot thickens!"

"I had got in through the window, having leapt through the papyrus with all the aplomb of a gymnastic gold medallist. I had steeled myself to encounter and overcome affright, affront and umbrage. I had been received with a ravishing smile—and had felt completely intimidated. I did not even dare to use the Latin *tu* in addressing her. My shyness, I think, piqued her a little, for she started pacing nervously up and down the room; and with each step that she took, a long slash in her *négligé* of blue silk opened to show the length of her leg. Three round brooches of rubies set in silver claws fastened the slash, but not very tightly and . . . that leg. . . ."

"Was it as lovely as all that?" asked Juliette, piqued, apparently in her turn.

"Was it lovely! Ah me! And her nose! And those eyes that sparkled and sparkled! And her throat! . . . And she had a lovely sensuous mouth that demanded adoration on bended knee—and yet had something mockingly tender about it, too."

"Go on! Get on with it, get on with it!" said Juliette.

"That is more or less what Miroflède herself said to me at the time. But I remained gaping open-mouthed like a clot. You may not believe it, but apparently she found my stupidity flattering. She made me sit beside her in a gilded armchair, patted the folds of her dress and gave a little sigh. 'Oh well!' she said, 'we may as well talk. It all fits in nicely and we have the whole night—or anyway half the night, because I'm expecting the King. . . .'"

"I bounded to my feet. . . ."

"Sit down, my pet, there's nothing to get scared about. He has certainly gone to Saint Denis again, as he has done every autumn for the last four years, ever since he inaugurated this Wine Festival. I wonder what he finds there . . . wine and girls, I suppose—and, of course, his dear monks! My God! What a bunch! By the way, do you know that Eloi<sup>1</sup> has been unfaithful to me?"

"What!" cried Juliette. "Eloi! . . . and the concubine?"

"How could you even suggest such a thing! No, no! Eloi was a saint, like all the other clergy, to be sure," said Chronossus.

"I have just heard," Miroflède went on to tell me, 'that he has made an absolutely adorable enamel brooch for that straight-laced bigot, Nantilde. As if the King cared two hoots for his premier Queen! Between ourselves I cannot understand why he did not get rid of her a long time ago, like he did Gomatrude. After all, it's Ragnetrude who has given him his heir. I've even heard that he intends to send him to reign over Austrasia as soon as he's three, because he knows quite well that Nantilde is perfectly capable of killing the child. And he still keeps her—I ask you! If you ask my opinion, I think Dagobert is completely under the thumb of his women. Three Queens and thirty-two concubines—that's fine when one's young. But we're now—let me see—yes, in October 633, and he himself is just on thirty, a record for a Merovingian! Oh well! At this rate in five or six years he'll die of old age!'"

"So great a King," I muttered.

"Listen! I'm his concubine Number one—so I ought to know!"

<sup>1</sup> Eloi was Dagobert's Court Jeweller and Prime Minister; he was later made a Bishop and finally canonised.

“He,” I continued, ‘who has become King of the whole Kingdom of the Franks, thanks to the providential deaths, in rapid succession, of his brother, Caribert and his nephew, Childeric.’

“‘Providential? Come off it!’ cried Miroflède derisively. ‘What on earth do they teach you at school?’”

*How the Saints Became Attached to the Police Force*

“She looked at me with the speculative eye of a connoisseur. ‘Not very much, I fear,’ she said with a sigh.

“And in that sigh I seemed to discern the curriculum of a whole new course of study. Her hand fluttered slowly around and near my neck. Inside me, I felt myself gripped by a sort of panic, and I sought frantic refuge in my scholastic knowledge.

“‘I have learnt a great number of things,’ I said. ‘I know that the Counts are bad administrators and that the Bishops are good ones. The Counts are cruel, untruthful, hard on the people and dispense justice simply in order to be able to put the fines in their own pockets. The poor therefore turn perforce to the justice of the Saints which is free (once they are dead), but also just about as ambiguous as “a judgement of God”. At the school, we think that the Saints ought to be attached to the Police Force. When a theft was committed in the church of Saint Colomba, Eloi didn’t send for the Police. He addressed himself to the Saint herself. “If you don’t cause the stolen objects to be restored at once,” he told her, “I’ll have your church closed with a thicket of thorns!” What do you say to that, Miroflède?’

“But Miroflède’s pensive look from beneath her lowered lashes made me think she was not giving any serious consideration to the problem. I lowered my gaze and continued.

“‘The Bishops,’ I said, ‘are the Princes of the Poor and the mentors of us all. Cahors had no water; Didier brought water to the town by means of aqueducts. Auvergne was in the grip of a drought; Quintean sang a chant, and behold, the rains came. Clermont was in flames; Gae extinguished them with the help of the gospel. For the Bishops are neither upstarts like the Counts, nor decadents, like the Romans. They come from the noblest and most learned families. Shall I recite Ouen’s treatise to you, Miroflède?’

“I looked up. Miroflède had closed her eyes.”

“‘You don’t say!’ ejaculated Juliette. “I’m astounded!”

“It astonished me, too. I could not believe that she had fallen asleep, so I continued. ‘Saint Ouen expressed himself most lucidly,’ I said, ‘when he declared: “The Church must address herself not to the limited circle of

leisured philosophers, but to the whole human race. Of what use to us are Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle? Or the works of those vicious poets Homer, Virgil, Menander? Or Sallust, Herodotus, Livy and the rest who grind out history for the Gentiles?"

"I felt a gentle pull at my hair.

"How sweet he is," murmured Miroflède in a dreamy, far-away voice.

"What a really sweet little fellow he is!"

"She was lying luxuriously at ease, but she was most certainly not asleep. And that's how I came to make a cuckold of King Dagobert."

... And how Dagobert had no Thought but for the Saint Denis Fair

"It's a great pleasure," murmured Miroflède, quite a lot later, 'a really great pleasure to find a young man from the School who doesn't look upon himself as a minor saint. What with all the episcopal Ministers—Eloi, Paul, Didier and Ouen—old Ouen-Ouen, who wears a shirt of Nessus beneath his gold embroidered robe, I'm honestly beginning to wonder whether sanctity hasn't become quite the fashion these days. They're not a bad bunch of old so-and-so's, mark you. Eloi himself has been as sweet as honey to me ever since the King promoted me to the status of concubine, and, you know, he really is a first class jeweller. Tell me, did you admire those long brooches, shaped like a shrimp? They're completely out now. Eloi has launched the round brooch, something very severe and completely in the modern style. Look!"

"She leapt out of bed. Her naked feet went flip-flap across the mosaic floor, and her hips swayed harmoniously below her adorable waist. She gave a little stamp. 'Look!' she repeated.

"It was her ear-rings that she was inviting me to look at—pearls set in gold.

"I'm not sure that I oughtn't to wear these blue crystal ones,' she said 'to match my robe.'

"I just love your robe,' I replied. 'When it's lying on the floor—that is.'

"Miroflède smiled. 'Monsieur is progressing,' she said. 'No! I'll wear my amber necklace, to keep your love and the King's.'

"Ah!' I murmured, 'to keep my love you need nothing more than the magic of your lovely eyes.' Then, in a burst of tremendous enthusiasm I added: 'Miroflède! Why don't you chuck Dagobert!'

"You talk the most delicious nonsense *mon p'tit*, but it's nonsense all the same. He's the one who provides for us, isn't he? And pretty poorly he does it, too! Oh! I don't say he's anything like those misers on the Danube; but he fritters. He's much more generous to his Bishops than to his women,



you know. When I think of all that gold and all those stones which he used to cover the walls of the Basilica at Saint Denis! Don't you think it was sinful, when he has thirty and more queens and concubines to provide for?'

"To say nothing of the fact that very soon there'll be no more money anyway,' I observed. 'I heard Eloi complaining to Ouen about how he had been compelled to exempt all those nobles from taxes, in order to pay them for their loyalty or their support, their obedience or their treachery. Treachery is particularly expensive. Then there are the Saxons, who invariably forget to pay their annual tribute of five hundred cows, and at three sous a cow, that makes quite a hole in the revenues.

"And at the same time he refuses to let me spend twelve sous on a new slave,' cried Miroflède. 'The fact is, the price of slaves is going up all the time, and it's already as high as that of horses.'

"Let us hope,' I retorted, that the Fair of Saint Denis will restore the economic equilibrium.

"But Miroflède was not interested in political economy.

"Stop talking about Saint Denis and come and make love to me,' she said.

"I took her in my arms. There ensued a long silence, punctuated by a few sighs. Miroflède's eyes seemed to be dancing, an effect caused perhaps by the wind and the flickering of the oil lamp; and I, as proud as a rooster, was telling myself that I wouldn't change places with the King himself (or would I—for a while, I thought with a grin).

"Even so, I certainly advise you to lay in as big a store of everything as you can, *chérie*,' I said authoritatively. 'Prices are going up, you may be quite sure of that. Ouen-Ouen himself told us so in a lecture he gave us at the School the other day. It's because of the Jews.'

"That's exactly what I've always said,' replied Miroflède. 'Dagobert ought never to have forced them to become converts.'

"And the net result is—there's no one left to lend money, and business is slumping badly. It's a situation that can't go on for ever. From the time that the towns became too big for those who lived in them and the lovely residential quarters have been turned into market gardens. . . .'

"It's all the fault of those Bishops!' cried Miroflède, wrathfully.

"No—It's the fault of the Emperor of Byzantium,' I retorted dogmatically. 'It was he who insisted that Dagobert should persecute the Jews because the stars, he said, had predicted that a circumcised race was about to devastate the East.'

"Well, now perhaps I can tell you something you don't know,' said Miroflède. 'Dagobert has whispered in my ear that there's another race

which is also circumcised. The Musul . . . something or other, he called them.'

" 'A fatal error!' I cried.

" 'Don't you believe it,' retorted Miroflède, 'Dago isn't such a fool as he looks. He only pretended to believe in the portents of the stars in order to be able to fleece the Jews. But it won't last.'

" 'Are you absolutely sure? D'you think he's going to allow them to pick up again?'

" 'Of course he is! In order to be able to fleece them again! . . . By Diana and Minerva! The worst has happened!'

"Miroflède had just sneezed."

"That's what comes of making economic speeches instead of making love," observed Juliette.

"Exactly! But we swiftly made up for lost time. You will forgive me if I refrain from any detailed recitation on the subject . . . the art of love-making has hardly changed at all since the days of the Merovingians. And in any case we were approaching the end of our dalliance for that night. Miroflède was so distracted by her sneezes, that she flung herself upon her knees and promised Diana that for the January Calends she would disguise herself as a calf. She was actually promising to give her New Year gifts,<sup>1</sup> when there was a sound of approaching footsteps along the corridor. I just had time to grab my clothes and leap out of the window. Dagobert had returned from the Fair of Saint Denis.

"Clinging to the bars of the window, I peeped through a slit in the papyrus. (I really think I invented the *jalousie* that night!) It was obvious that Dagobert had spread himself without counting the cost to ensure the success of the Fair of Saint Denis; his great white cape, slung from his shoulder was covered with wine stains, his purple tunic was all crumpled, and his stockings had concertina-ed round his ankles.

"Miroflède, as naked as innocence itself, held out her arms to him.

" 'Bébert,' she murmured, '*mon Dago chéri*, who went away and left his little dove to catch cold!'

"Personally, I thought he looked too repulsive for words, with his red and shiny pug nose.

" 'Ah,' groaned the perfidious Miroflède. 'how I love your big, hungry mouth, your eyes shaped like dates . . . unforgettable dates. . . .'

"I myself, however, was shaking with silent laughter, and somehow I felt that I had had the last laugh. I had just noticed that Dagobert had got his breeches on the wrong way round!"

<sup>1</sup> A pagan practice, forbidden by the Church.

## Mahomed Paves the Way for Charlemagne

A.D. 732—*Charles Martel and Chronossus defeat the Arabs at Poitiers. And we are already confined to Europe; A.D. 751—The Church consecrates the first Carolingian (Pippin the Short). The throne and the altar become intimate allies; A.D. 768–814—Charlemagne creates his Franco-Saxon empire; A.D. 800—Charlemagne considers himself a Roman Emperor. The Church owns one third of the land; the Arabs have killed trade in the Mediterranean. The Franks learn to read; so does the Emperor; but no one succeeds in reading the portents by the Caliph of Baghdad's clock.*

"A HUNDRED years later I was fishing for gudgeon in the Clain, a little stream full of fish, just where it flows into the Vicnne at Cenon. My lengthy studies had culminated in just that—sitting on the bank of a river in military uniform, fishing. Incidentally, there was tremendous competition in this fishing; for a whole week Charles Martel's army had been fishing—those of them that were fishermen, that is. And you know what it's like when you go fishing—there's always a crowd of loafers who just stand and gape at your float. The loafers gaping at us were Arabs.

"On the seventh day, a Saturday in October 732, if my recollection is accurate, we dismantled our rods, and the battle was engaged. It was all very simple and quite devoid of any fuss. We adopted a formation *en palissade*, or, perhaps more accurately, we formed 'an immovable wall frozen solid by the cold', and with our pikes bristling between our shields we stood and waited. We didn't mind very much when they came, we were in no hurry. Actually, the Arabs came at once, at full gallop to impale themselves on our pikes. And so it went on all day."

"And then?" asked Juliette.

"Then night fell. Having despatched those who had been clumsy enough to impale themselves inadequately, we went to bed. At daybreak the Arabs' tents were still there in ordered rows, but the Arabs had taken

advantage of the darkness to beat it; and they didn't pause for breath till they reached Andalusia."

*The Mussulmans Condemn Us to Europe*

"I told you that Dagobert had been but a shaft of light in the Merovingian shadows. After him we had two called Clovis, a couple or more Chilperics or Childerics. . . ."

" . . . who from time to time took the air in their ox-drawn chariots," interposed Juliette.

" . . . and no one bothered about them at all. The aristocrats were in power represented by the Mayor of the Palace. And, since we then knew of no system of changing a Government other than death, the high office became hereditary, and the Mayors Pippin, fathers and sons, succeeded each other in an unbroken line right up to the last two, Charles Martel and Pippin the Short.

"They did not have too easy a time of it with the great aristocrats, who were always jockeying for more than their share. So, what with the system of divided heritage and the general confusion, the provinces had gradually acquired individuality and a measure of independence. Among the masses popular languages were beginning to take shape—Breton, Flemish, German, Provençal. But the best people, all over the country, still spoke Latin, of course.

"The burning question of the day, was, as everybody agreed, the Arabs. While our loafer Kings loafed about in their ox-drawn chariots, the Arabs were galloping at full speed on their small ponies round the periphery of the Mediterranean. In one short century they went right round it—Damascus, Toledo, Provence and even Rome. It was after that that they undertook that raid towards the Loire and the Seine which Charles Martel crushed with a hammer blow.

"If you think it is important that history should contain dates and the names of battles and so on, here is a memorable date for you—732. A date no less important than that of the fall of Roman Gaul beneath the blows of the Barbarians. Memorable because that year we saved Europe. Indeed, there were people at the time who went so far as to call us 'the Europeans'."

"People with a sense of history, obviously," interposed Juliette. "It's true that you had already saved Europe once—from the Huns. It seems to have been becoming quite a French habit."

"The date is perhaps even more important because the Arabs, by sealing off the Mediterranean, had written a chapter of history a century long the final full stop of which—Poitiers—condemned us to Europe. Only that, of course, was something we didn't realise, and Charlemagne didn't

realise it any more than the rest of us; for, like everybody else he lived with his eyes fixed on Rome and the Mediterranean and used the rest of Europe simply as a backyard."

*King by the Grace of the Pope*

"Mahomed made Charlemagne. But it was the Church, beyond any doubt, who made the Carolingians, in the same way as she made the Clovetians and was later to make the Capet dynasty. The Church made the Carolingians because she was very powerful and very weak."

"A remark of unexampled lucidity," remarked Juliette.

"There is no need to be sarcastic, Madame, as you will see in a moment. The Mayor of the Palace, all agreed, wielded the power; but from there to being proclaimed King . . . well . . . that called for an operation so delicate that they went on postponing any attempt at it for generations. Even Charles Martel, in spite of his brilliant victory over the Arabs, did not dare to take the plunge. His son Pippin the Short did, but he did it with sweet tactfulness. He wrote to Pope Zacharius and asked him just one, single question: 'Which of two families ought to sit on the throne—the family that has been exercising effective control for more than seventy years, or that which nominally holds the Kingship?'

"Zacharius, who was no fool, replied that it was better, more just and more expedient that the family which already possessed the supreme power should also bear the title of sovereignty. In November 751 Pippin summoned the nobles of the kingdom to Soissons and read to them the Pope's communication. Whereupon they promptly elected him King of the Franks."<sup>1</sup>

"Well—they were only showing their respect for the Pope," said Juliette, "there's nothing new in that."

"That is quite true, but they were also able to accept his juridical ruling all the more readily because all the High Officers of the kingdom were Bishops and a third of the land belonged to the clergy. When Pippin the Short was elected, you can imagine for yourself the solid weight of this body of electors, voting as one man. So much for the Church powerful. But it was because the Pope himself was weak that he supported the new King to the extent even of coming to Paris to perform the ceremony of consecration."

"Like another Pope, whose name I've forgotten,"<sup>2</sup> said Juliette, "who did the same thing for Napoleon in his own home."

<sup>1</sup> The Merovingian King and his son, duly tonsured, were relegated to the monasteries of Saint Bertin and Saint Wandrille.

<sup>2</sup> Pius VII.

"And for very much the same reasons. Powerful though he was in Gaul thanks to the Bishops and the divine prestige, in Rome the Pope trembled before the power of the small land-owners of Lombardy. So it was a case of 'scratch my back and I'll scratch your's'. The Pope created Pippin, and Pippin protected the Pope. There were, of course, a number in Gaul who dissented—legitimists, if you like, who refused to recognise the new King, even though he had already been consecrated by the illustrious Bishop Boniface. Pippin the Short, who was an astute statesman, killed two birds with one stone. He sent for the Pope. Officially, this was in order to protect him from the wicked Lombards, but Pippin took advantage of the fact that he had the Pope in the palm of his hand to have himself consecrated in order to silence discussion once and for all. On July 28th in Saint Denis the Pope anointed Pippin with the sacred oil from the baptism of Clovis. . . ."

"The phial!" cried Juliette. "They had found the phial again!"

". . . anointed, as I was saying, Pippin the Short and Queen Bertrade, nicknamed Bertha Bigfoot, because she had a club foot. Thus the King, who wielded his power by right of election, became now also the Chosen of God."

"May I summarise?" asked Juliette. "Pippin the Short was the first King to be consecrated, and it is therefore from him that kingship by Divine Right dates?"

"Yes—you can say that is so," replied Chronossus.

"But he had to be consecrated twice—the second time by the Pope in person. . . ."

"Quite right."

". . . because he was a usurper!"

"You know, you'll get me into serious trouble," said Chronossus. "If you don't mind, I think I'll pass on to the sequel."

"The summer of 754 was spent in carrying out the other side of the bargain. Pippin marched into Italy, vanquished the Lombards, captured their cities and presented them to the Pope. That was the origin of the Papal States, which endured until 1870."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Juliette. "When you 'pass on to the sequel' you leap like a kangaroo. 'The Papal States which endured until 1870'—That's a nice way to impart history!"

"This alliance of throne and altar," continued Chronossus, a little annoyed, "had created a double confusion by joining temporal power to the spiritual power of the Papacy, and the spiritual dominion over his subjects and the clergy to the temporal power of the King of the Franks. This was a chaotic state of affairs, the last traces of which did

not disappear until the Church and State were separated in 1905. . . .”

“Oh! Well jumped, Sir! From Pippin the Short to Vincent Auriol!”

“To Emile Loubet,” corrected Chronossus. “Pippin died on September 24th 768 at the age of fifty-four and was buried in the Abbey of Saint Denis. He had accomplished great things, he had founded a dynasty, had ensured his own personal sovereignty over the Kingdom of the Franks and his own personal predominance over all the other sovereigns of the West. However, the reputation of his son did nothing but wrong to his own reputation.”

### *Charlemagne at the Baths*

“There is no greater liar on earth than a poet, more especially the touching enthusiast who wrote the *Chanson de Roland*—how I wish he could have seen the ‘bearded colossus’ in the swimming pool at Aix la Chapelle! In place of the ‘luxuriant beard’, he would have seen the thin, drooping moustache which was then *à la mode* among the Frankish aristocrats; without being as small as his father—Pippin the Short—he was of very ordinary, modest stature, stocky in build, with a thick neck and a rather protruding tummy—all of them things difficult to conceal when one enjoys bathing naked with a hundred members of one’s Court. Apart from that, he had a round head, big and lively eyes, a rather long nose, a great mass of hair and a voice that was rather thin and shrill for his thick-set body. On the other hand, no one could hold a candle to him in the water, and he was a champion swimmer. On land he inspired respect thanks to the dignity of his carriage, and, believe me, it is extremely rare to find a man who can still maintain the dignity of an Emperor when naked.

“Except on gala days, he dressed like everybody else in a linen shirt or short tunic, very often scarlet, Gallic breeches strapped with leather, and, in winter, a waistcoat of otter fur and a blue or white cloak.”

“The dear man,” murmured Juliette. “A real tricolour!”

“His one extravagance was the silver cross-belt, from which his sword hung. He also affected a cane cut from an apple tree and remarkable for the symmetry of its knots.

“He had built himself this palace in Aix on account of the hot springs there, and he had adopted the way of life of the Romans, whose Empire he wished to resuscitate. There was also another reason for his choice, though he hated to admit it, namely, that his policy was for ever forcing him deeper and deeper into the continent.

“The palace was vast enough to accommodate the whole of the Court, including the quarters reserved for the Jews, on whom he lavished

particular protection because, now that the Mediterranean had been closed to the Marseilles trade, they were his sole link with the East. In the centre of the palace were the reception hall, the Roman bath, the apartments of the Emperor and his consort (he had four, but one after the other), his concubines (he had five, sometimes more than one at a time) and his mistresses (of whom he had I don't know how many), his three sons, his six daughters (whom he loved with such jealous tenderness, that he forbade them ever to marry),<sup>1</sup> and a few odd bastards. From his terrace, Charles could see everyone who entered the Palace.

"For he kept an eye on everything. From there he watched over the Elbe, the Danube, and the Pyrenees, the Danes, the Bavarians, the Saxons, the Avars, the Lombards, the Marches of Catalonia, of the Basque country, of Brittany, and the hens in his own farmyard. He dictated his famous *Capitulaires*, his legislative edicts, presided over the Council of Bishops, supervised the Gregorian chants, passed laws to ensure the eternal salvation of his people, listened to the reports of his emissaries, the *missi dominici*, the 'envoys of the Master', and at night, when he could not sleep, he used to pull out his tablets from under his pillow and teach himself to write. Every spring, when the grass began to grow in the meadows, he assembled his Franks and marched off to war. In the forty-six years of his reign he fought fifty-three campaigns. He was certainly a glutton for work, was Charlemagne."

#### *Charlemagne Inspired by Europe*

"Europe galled to him one might say like a vacuum calls for air. The Saxons felt the weight of his hand more than anyone else; thirty-three campaigns were reserved for their special benefit, for Charlemagne decided that he would not count the costs—which, incidentally, were amply covered by the booty and slaves he captured—until this perfidious race had been either converted or conquered. I am not quite sure whether his object was to conquer them in order to convert them, or to convert them in order thus to ensure their submission. Be that as it may, Charlemagne, having taken counsel of God 'attached to his army all the priests, abbots, doctors and ministers of the Faith best qualified to persuade this people to accept the sweet yoke of Christ'.

"Thus at Verden in 782, Charlemagne, having failed to secure the person of Witikind, the local resistance leader, who had taken refuge with the Danes—a people of whom we shall hear a lot later—demanded that his followers should be handed over to him; there were four thousand five

<sup>1</sup> They got married, all the same; and like Napoleon's family, the family of Charles survived the Empire of the Emperor.



hundred of them, and they were all beheaded in the course of a single day. The truth is that these Saxons were far too stiff-necked to accept the 'sweet yoke'.

"From each expedition Charlemagne brought back with him a number of men, women and children. He gave them land in Gaul and distributed the land they had possessed in their own country among his Franks. In this way a third of the whole population of some cantons was deported and exchanged. In 804, ten thousand men, with their families, were deported from Vigmodia and Nordalbingia. And when those who remained had been baptised, resistance in Saxony<sup>1</sup> ceased.

"With the ruthlessness of the warrior, however, Charlemagne combined the wisdom of an able administrator; once he felt assured that his enemies had been well and truly conquered and converted, he allowed them to retain their own customs and laws.

"Charlemagne experienced one setback—in Spain, against the Mussulmans. When Saragossa successfully repelled his assault, he returned home with what was left of his army via Roncevaux, where, on August 15th 722, his rear guard was cut to pieces by the Basques—this was a check pregnant with significance: the road to the South had been barred by the Saracens."

#### *Charlemagne, Emperor by Accident*

"The road to Rome, however, still remained undoubtedly open. As the Pope had been having more trouble with the rural population in the vicinity of the Eternal City, Charlemagne set off in the year 800 to restore order to the countryside and the Pope to his throne. On Christmas Day, Pope Leon III took advantage of the fact that Charlemagne was kneeling at prayer before the altar to place the imperial crown quite unexpectedly on his head. It so happened that in the church of Saint Peter there were quite a number of people present, who immediately shouted: 'Long life and victory to Charles Augustus, the crowned of God, the great and powerful Emperor of the Romans!'"

"That's a most astonishing yarn," said Juliette. "Are you suggesting that Charlemagne did not wish to become Emperor?"

"I am not suggesting anything. When he emerged from the church, Charlemagne turned to his official chronicler and said that had he known of the Sovereign Pontif's intention, he would never have entered the church on that day, even though it was the principal feast day of the year.

<sup>1</sup> Saxony, at the time of Charlemagne, must be understood to include all Germany as far as the Elbe.

"From that I must presume that he would have preferred to crown himself. For, to become Emperor of the Romans, was the dream of his life. And he deserved to become an Emperor, a hundred times over; only he ought to have become the Emperor of the Franco-Saxons."

"I think I see what you mean," said Juliette. "Rather as if today the President of the United States, enraptured with the France of the *Grand Siècle*, were suddenly to come along and get himself anointed as the *Roi Soleil* at Versailles."

*A Miracle of Good Sense and a Masterpiece of Absurdity*

"In 798 I had occasion to draft a report, in my capacity as secretary to Theodulf, the Bishop of Orleans, one of the most erudite men of his age. You have heard of the *missi dominici*? Well, Theodulf was one of them, and one of the most distinguished of them. If it would amuse you, you can still read his report, which he wrote, on the basis of my notes, in Latin verse.

"We left the Court in Paderborn. . . ."

"Just a minute—let's get this straight," said Juliette, "I thought you said Charlemagne lived in Aix-la-Chapelle?"

"So he did. But that year the great palace was being redecorated, and the Court had moved to Paderborn until the work was completed. Shall I go on? Well—we left the Court after the Annual March Assembly, which was held in May. . . . I beg your pardon?"

"All right, I didn't say it!" said Juliette.

". . . which had been held in May since the days of Pippin, in order to allow the clergy to celebrate Easter in their own dioceses and monasteries.<sup>1</sup> Everyone in the kingdom had the right to attend the Assembly and to vote upon the great issues which were being debated in it for such was our Frankish democracy—universal suffrage for free men. In actual fact, however, it was considered that the people were sufficiently well represented by those composing the entourage of the nobles, and for that matter, most of these latter didn't bother to attend the sittings of the Assembly, but preferred to remain outside in the Fair grounds. From time to time Charlemagne would emerge from the Assembly, wander round among the nobles, chatting amiably and enquiring how things were going in their own particular districts, while the real powers in the land got on with the debate."

"Ah! There really were some, then, who debated seriously and effectively?"

<sup>1</sup> Also to permit the deputies to complete their foraging (foraging for their horses, that is). And then because spring was also the season for pleasure trips, gossip parties, war and love.

“Indeed, yes! At least—they thought so. But to tell you the truth, all they did was to discuss decisions which had already been taken the previous autumn in secret committee. Charlemagne was a master of finesse, and he knew that as long as one could persuade people that they were free it was easy to remain an autocrat.

“So, as soon as ‘the people’ had given their assent to things which had already been decided upon six months before, Bishop Theodulf took the road to Lyons, where he was to join his colleague on the circuit, the Archbishop Leidrad. The *Missi*—Envoys—always went in pairs, but not necessarily one Bishop and one Count.<sup>1</sup> Charlemagne had no more zealous and capable servants than his ecclesiastical nobles; and these latter, drawn as they were from the whole universe of the Church, were at home in every country in the Empire. Thus the Archbishop of Lyons was of Bavarian origin and the Bishop of Orleans came from a good Gothic family in Spain; and the Bavarian and the Spaniard were to tour and report on Provence.”

#### *On Circuit with the Missi Dominici*

“Theodulf travelled by short stages. He would have been foolish to hurry, for he was entitled to a daily levy, paid by the occupier whom he honoured with his presence—four loaves of bread, three lambs, three measures of *cervoise*, a sucking pig, three pullets, fifteen eggs, four quarterns of flour. So we went our way, followed by a regular procession of carts. This levy represented about the only contribution made by the tax-payer to the central administration, this and the tolls paid on the main roads; but since the Mediterranean had been closed there had been very little movement of merchandise, and the tolls did not bring in very much, in the way of revenue.

“We always chose the best places to stop at, the fine villas with several farms attached, each surrounded by a well-kept hedge, with their bakeries, their wine-presses, stables, cowsheds, piggeries, sheep-folds and their herds of goats. The farmyard in those days was rather different from its modern counterpart; in it you found not only hens and geese, but also the ‘strange animals’, as we used to call them, peacocks, pheasants, partridges, pigeons, turtle-doves with plumage both tender and striking, and such delights for the eye as lilies, gladioli, heliotrope and the Damask rose, which the Arabs had left us as a souvenir.

“These villas were so organised that they were entirely self-supporting, like those of the Gallo-Romans in the third century, after the first

<sup>1</sup> The title “Count” (Comte) under Charlemagne signified the Commander of a Military District.

Barbarian invasions. All the labour required for the daily routine—blacksmiths, gold and silversmiths, bootmakers, cutlers, turners, carpenters, rope-makers—were all clustered round the Manor House. In the women's quarters the women made linen and cloth, coloured with vermillion or madder dyes. Sometimes the Lord of the Manor built a chapel, and the villa tended to become a village.

"The wealth of the country was in its rural areas. And in the towns themselves, under-populated behind their ramparts, you would find cattle and small market-gardens. For the towns, too, had become somewhat rural—a wise precaution against the famines which had been so frequent for a thousand years. I must say, however, that I did not hear of a single famine while Charlemagne was alive."

#### *The Church as a Large Landowner*

"As you may well imagine, we rarely encountered anything but large properties, a third of which, as I have already told you, belonged to the Church. That was because the Church was the protector of the weak, a protector much more reliable than the Counts ever since Saint Boniface had succeeded in having all those adulterous, debauched and usurious clerics kicked out, who had taken advantage of the confusion reigning in the Merovingian era to feather the ecclesiastical nest. As a result, the small landowners had flocked to the monasteries, seeking their security in uncertainty."

"Really?" said Juliette. "Security in uncertainty—another of your precious paradoxes, I suppose?"

"Not at all. It's quite simple. Say you owned a hundred acres of land. The Church gave you another hundred acres to exploit during your lifetime under its patronage. When you died, the whole two hundred reverted to the Church. You had doubled your income, the Church had doubled its capital, and everybody was happy, except your heirs, who became serfs of the monastery. I must add, however, that they were well treated. Thus the Abbot of Saint Martin of Tours had twenty thousand serfs under his command, while the Abbey of Luxeuil possessed fifteen thousand manses—a manse was that area of land required to feed one family. The Abbey of Saint Germain-des-Prés was more modest and possessed only fifty thousand acres. At the same time the Church prohibited the lending of money at interest, which it condemned as usury. This, one must admit, was very meritorious on the part of the Church, for in her possession she had a great store of precious metals, gifts from Kings and the faithful, which she might well have used to her further advantage. If you have not forgotten Blondina and the Fête of Cybele, you will

realise that the pagan bull's nose had been put thoroughly out of joint by the mystic lamb. The pity was, that the latter had become so gross and shaggy."

### *Business at a Standstill*

"We went down the Rhône by boat—Vienne, Valence, Orange and finally Avignon, where our tour of inspection was to commence. Theodulf marvelled at the elegance of these Midi villas, which still preserved the stamp of Roman urban civilisation. I must admit, by the way, that architecture in Charlemagne's time was pretty poor. The churches were still being made of wood, on the same plan as the Merovingian churches. Moreover certain people had removed timber and tiles from them for their own personal use; some of the priests used them for the storage of their harvests, perpetuating in peacetime the right of asylum, which was now no longer extended to men alone, but also to the animals of the farm-yard and the stable. Charlemagne restored quite a number of these churches and built a lot more in pseudo-Byzantine style. For this purpose he pillaged Graeco-Roman works of art in Italy, and all over the place one saw wooden churches adorned with marble columns and friezes and Greek cornices. It was just at this period that the Arabs were constructing that admirable mosque in Cordova. . . .

"But the Arabs had passed through Provence, and Provence was ruined. It was not that they had destroyed a great deal—for they were not violently destructive; but they had left terror behind them, the population had sought refuge in those eagles' nests perched on the mountain tops, of which we still have some today—Cabris, Gourdon, Eze and so on; but they had also left us the *blé noir*, which we now call buckwheat, the porous jar which keeps water cool and fresh, the date palm and saffron for our *bouillabaisse*; above all, though, they had left an empty void in the port of Marseilles. And Provence, which in olden days had been transformed by its eastern trade into the richest province in all Gaul, was now reduced to a land of thin and meagre agriculture.

"In Nîmes and Carcassone, in Arles, Marseilles and Aix, in every town, Theodulf and Leidrad set up their tribunal in the public square, and their petitioners flocked to them from all over the countryside. But in Narbonne Theodulf, surrounded by the notables of the town, presided over the tribunal in the ancient palace of Alaric II, King of the Visigoths.

"From early dawn, the good Bishop was at work, seated in the curile chair of the Count, surrounded by assessors selected from among the notables. The Count, who should have been there, was late. He had spent

the night celebrating, and was now engaged in sleeping it off, exuding the fumes of the wine he had consumed. Meanwhile his young wife was receiving those well-informed petitioners who knew that it was advisable to call at the Count's house before appearing before the Tribunal. The poorer among them brought modest offerings of linen or cloth, a scarf, a pair of shoes, gloves, a briefcase to hold manuscripts or cylinders of wax for use as tablets. The wealthy offered white and red leather from Cordova, mules, horses, arms, while the really rich came laden with crystal goblets, precious stones from Asia and Saracen gold coins. The choicest of all presents, however, consisted of antique vases or oriental satins and damasks, embellished with pictures of animals, a cow with her calf, a bull and a heifer, or wheels interwoven in intricate patterns. The Countess was going from one to another, uttering little cries of appreciative delight, when the Count appeared, swaying on his legs and still moist and redolent of the wine he had drunk.

"Are you off your head?" he roared, 'listening to petitioners when the *Missi* are in the town!'

"But his Countess flung her arms round his neck—incidentally risking a pretty good tumble in the process. She kissed his cheek, his throat, his hands and drowned him in a torrent of endearing phrases, for a woman is as skilful in the use of such artifice as is the archer in insinuating poison into his arrow."

"If you don't mind my saying so, wisecracks like that against women are a bit out of fashion nowadays," said Juliette tartly.

"Really!" retorted Chronossus. "And if you don't mind my saying so, Madame, I have taken this description of the conjugal scene from the Bishop's report (in Latin verse). I would perhaps have expressed myself differently. The Count resisted all his wife's blandishments. He knew that the Bishop's spy—by which he meant me—was waiting to escort him to the tribunal; so the Countess heaved a deep sigh and burst into tears.

"He doesn't love me!" she sobbed. 'He doesn't love me any more!'

"A sly-looking servant girl sidled up to her master. 'Why do you repulse her like this? Why don't you show some pity for Madame?' she said.

"Madame meanwhile was crouching in a corner snivelling. 'When any other woman asks anything, he's all ears,' she moaned. 'But I never get anything I ask for.'

"It's enough to break anyone's heart!" cried the servant girl. She ran forward, took her mistress by the hand and pulled her gently towards the master. 'Kiss him!' she urged.

“And to him:

“‘Promise that you won’t be unkind to her again!’

“‘All you damn women are alike,’ growled the Count. He turned and reeled away, quite forgetting to order the return of the presents. I joined him in the street. As he staggered along the passers-by cocked a snook at his back.

“At the portals of the palace there was another hullabaloo. Everybody was trying to jump the queue, and the porter, following his Count’s example, was readily corruptible.

“The Bishop simply could not make himself heard. The Count took his place beside him; he managed to get a hearing all right, by the simple process of bringing his stick down with a bang on the heads of the most clamant of his petitioners.”

#### *When Thieves Paid with Their Lives*

“That morning the Tribunal was hearing criminal cases. The civil cases, which brought most of the petitioners to the Count, were not to be heard till the evening. I won’t bore you with a recital of all the cases on which I took notes. To put it briefly, the law was indulgent towards murder and severe on theft, notwithstanding the mitigations introduced by Charlemagne. As in Frankish law, homicide was settled by a ‘*composition*’, in other words, a fine. This was by no means a bad arrangement, for most of the killings were perpetrated by the leisured classes, the licentious rich, who could afford to pay. But, since punishment by imprisonment was unknown in those days, how else could you punish a penniless thief, except by gouging out his eye for a first offence and cutting off his nose for a second? For the hardened habitual offenders there remained the hands, feet, ears and genital organs (the latter equivalent to a fine of six sous), and, as a last resort, death. It was all perfectly logical. A rich man killed and paid. A poor man stole, could not pay and was killed.

“It gave Theodulf no pleasure to have to impose these sentences, but he had no option. What he did hate were the so-called ‘judgements of God’, as practised by the Merovingians; and never once did I see him order trial by ordeal, with boiling water or red hot iron; he preferred trial by the cross, in which the accused was required to stand upright with his arms extended to form a cross; prayers would then be recited, and if he made so much as one movement, he was adjudged guilty.”

#### *An Inspector with a Kind Heart*

“Theodulf was a kindly man. There is one trait in his character which I

should like to tell you about that was typically Carolingian. He was quite capable of over-ruling the Count, who accepted bribes and gave correspondingly corrupt judgements, but he would have thought it ostentatious to a degree to refuse those modest presents, given in friendship and out of respect, of butter, eggs, chickens or goat's cheese. Theodulf really was a judge after Charlemagne's own heart, nor did his sound common-sense conflict in any way with his generosity of heart. Do you know of any other Inspector's report which concludes, like that of Theodulf, with the following peroration, that remains strikingly *à propos* to this very day?

"'You,' (he wrote) 'whoever you may be, who have poor people under your jurisdiction, be full of merciful kindness towards them; know then, that by Nature they are your equals. It is not Nature, but Sin, that has put them under your jurisdiction and has made one man subordinate to another. It is the sweat of their brows and their labour that have made you rich; you are rich only because of your association with them. The rivers grow mighty thanks to the tributaries that flow into them; the rich man becomes rich with the help of the poor. The body of one thrives by devouring the body of another. Thus the falcon and the hawk, ranging along the river banks. Thus, too, the wolf in the forest, the fish in the waters. Thus wild beast kills wild beast, the serpent is slain by the serpent and the defenceless cattle of the field must resign themselves to being devoured. Mortal man! take good heed of the example of carnivorous animals! May man never become to his fellow man what the beast of prey has become to other animals!'"

"I fear," said Juliette, sadly, "that your good Bishop was preaching in the wilderness."

### *Some Kind Gestures*

"It was this same Theodulf who, when he returned to Court, worked in collaboration with Alcuin to spread education. Charlemagne was very anxious that his subjects should participate in and enjoy the enlightened knowledge of Rome. He made known his wishes to one Abbot in quite a witty note. 'Many monasteries,' he wrote, 'have addressed messages to us announcing that the friars are praying for Us. We have noted that in the majority of these addresses, while the sentiments expressed are excellent, the words used are often extremely uncouth. We exhort you, therefore, not to neglect the study of letters.'

"Grammar schools were opened in the towns and monasteries, which were prepared to accept any child without any payment other than that which the parents could afford and wished to pay voluntarily. The Abbots



were advised to refuse no one, and the faithful were urged to send their children to school and to keep them there until their education was completed. This was the first attempt at primary education, not it is true, of an undenominational character, but free and, to all intents and purposes, obligatory.

“Charlemagne was now seventy-two and, his life’s work completed, he was preparing to retire from the scene. The year was 814, exactly one thousand years before the fall of Napoleon. But while Napoleon survived his Empire, the Empire of Charlemagne was destined to survive him. At least so he thought, and so thought all intelligent people.

“To ensure the re-establishment of the ancient order of things there remained but one thing lacking—that he should be recognised as Emperor of the West by his *confère* in the East. For thirteen years he had been negotiating with these cunning and hard-headed Greeks. At one time he had even contemplated marrying the Empress Irene<sup>1</sup>; but when his ambassadors arrived in Constantinople, they found that the Empress had been banished to a convent. That the two empires should have been thus united under a single crown was a dream too good to be true. For thirteen years, then, the Greeks had argued and split hairs; but at last the task was completed, and the ambassadors set out for home, bringing a treaty of alliance with them.

“Speed now became of the utmost importance. The superb health of this Carolingian sportsman had been declining during the previous three years. His doctors had forbidden him the roast meats and game on the spit in which he delighted, and had put him on a diet of boiled food, which he abominated. The previous autumn having with his own hand crowned his son, Louis, as Emperor—his ambassadors were taking their time on the return journey—he had wished to enjoy just once more the delights of coursing and had returned to the Palace in a high fever. Plain fare and water were of no avail, and in January 814 Charlemagne was laid low with pleurisy.

“Well—he could die contented. He had conceived great designs, and he had succeeded in executing all, or nearly all, of them.

“He left behind him an agricultural kingdom, prosperous and peaceful.

“He had taught the French to read and write. Not quite all of them, of course; there was still a job of work for Jules Ferry to do in this respect.

“He had based his policy on Christian morality.

<sup>1</sup> Who had succeeded her son after having had his eyes put out.

"He had commanded the continued obedience of officials whom he did not pay.<sup>1</sup>

"He had foreseen the Viking peril and had ordered the construction of a fleet.

"He had created an empire a little bigger than present-day Western Europe, and far vaster to a horseman than our whole planet to an airman.

"It was an empire of landowners baptised in the Roman faith. But. . . Along the shores of the ancient family sea from Cordova to Baghdad, over people who had previously owed allegiance to Rome there now reigned the power of Islam, from whom he had received nothing but polite words, an elephant and a clock. The Franks, however, in spite of Haroun al-Rashid's clock, did not realise that Europe's hour, France's hour, was now at hand. For, if Paris was destined to succeed Rome, we must thank Mahomed for the fact.

"As for Charlemagne himself, we must regard him with infinite compassion for never has such great wisdom devoted itself to a cause of such great folly. He possessed in the highest degree all the virtues of common-sense, so static and hidebound, in an advancing world. I grant you that more than genius would have been required to foresee the sublime French enlightenment of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. But, incapable of seeing four hundred years ahead, Charlemagne lived six hundred years behind his times and was the most grandiose reactionary in our history."

"Stop a moment," said Juliette. "Do I understand you to assert that Charlemagne was not a great man?"

"Grandiose was what I called him. Grandiose, like Prometheus in revolt against the gods, and equally futile, because he was in revolt against the course of history." A look of suspicion flitted across Chronossus' face. "You don't by any chance believe that great men are really of any use, do you?" he went on.

"I don't like them." replied Juliette. "because they always make their people suffer. But all the same, one must recognise that. . ."

"Piffle!" ejaculated Chronossus, "and, if I may say so, Madame, balderdash! They only become great because they are *agin* something or other, and for that very reason everything collapses as soon as they pass on. You've seen Vercingetorix and Clovis. Later you will see Saint Bernard and Napoleon. For the moment keep your attention fixed on Charle-

<sup>1</sup> He allocated territories to the Counts, and the latter fixed their own personal incomes and drew them from the contributions made locally, foremost among these being the fines imposed by the Courts of Justice and the contributions of wine. One must try to imagine a present-day *préfet*, who is a big industrialist, Chief of Police, Judge and jury, all at the same time—and five days' car journey away from the central authority.

magne. Less than thirty years later, this Empire, impossible to hold together, had been split into three by the Treaty of Verdun.

“Those free men, those yeomen middle classes whom he wished to protect, even though he kept them mobilised for the long space of fifty-three military campaigns, those redoubtable grumblers, the Saxons, were all reduced to servitude under the *Comtes* and the Abbots. The office of *Comte* became hereditary, and the State official became the first wielder of feudal powers.

“Don’t let’s talk about education and Christian morality. The two centuries before us were destined to be as sombre as those of the Merovingian era. And the pirate Vikings, with but little respect for Charlemagne’s *Capitulaires*, were about to give Paris and the ancestor of the Capets the chance to hold their first display of fireworks.”

## Four Dukes, Two Clerics and a Horse Found the Capetian Dynasty

A.D. 833—*Invention of the modern demagogue. Louis the Pious makes his confession. The end of Imperial prestige*; A.D. 843—*Treaty of Verdun. The Empire in pieces*; A.D. 885—*Paris besieged by the Normans. NO THROUGH ROAD!* A.D. 888—*Odo, Count of Paris, Duke of France and (prematurely) King of France*; A.D. 987—*After a hundred years of patience, Hugh Capet. The civil servants, having become feudal officials, cut the country to bits*; A.D. 1033—*The terror of "the year 1000" (could be applied equally well to any period during the five centuries of Barbarian shadow from which we were at last emerging).*

"ON November 24th 885<sup>a</sup> a fleet (seven hundred sailing ships, without counting the smaller barques) carrying forty thousand Danish men and women, was spread over the whole length of the lower Seine to within two leagues of Paris, and the Parisians were asking themselves in stupefied amazement into what strange vault their river had disappeared. The Normans. . . ."

"Danes or Normans? Or is it the same thing?"

"People had a generic name for them—'the Men of the North'. They themselves proudly used the name Vikings, literally 'Kings of the Bay', or, as we should say, 'Kings of the Seas', for, in their open ships, twenty-five metres long, with high prows decorated with fierce and vividly painted monsters, their raids took them a very long way from their native bays.

"Anyway, these Danes, Normans or Vikings, as you will, had no quarrel with Paris. What they were after was the rich province of Burgundy. But our fortified wooden bridges barred the two arms of the Seine, the *Grand Pont* (near the present *Pont-au-Change*) to the right and the *Petit Pont* to the left.

"The population of the city's outskirts had sought refuge behind the walled defences of the *Ile de la Cité*, which was then smaller than it is today, because those little islets in the left branch of the river and at the point we now call *Le Vert-Galant* were not at that time joined to it.

"On November 25th Siegfried, the Commander of the Invaders, sought audience of Bishop Gozlin in his episcopal palace. He demanded free passage up the river and promised in return that no harm whatever would come to the members of the Bishop's diocesan fold. Gozlin indignantly rejected this infamous proposal, and in this he was supported by his nephew, Ebles, the Abbot of Saint Germain-des-Prés and a renowned archer, and by Odo, the Count of Paris.

"At dawn on the 26th the Normans poured ashore on the right bank and launched an attack to destroy the tower of the *Grand Pont*, bombarding it at the same time with a hailstorm of darts and arrows. The fight raged throughout the day, and when the assailants retired in the evening, there remained nothing of the tower but its foundations. During the night, however, the Parisians, using stout planks, re-built their tower which by the next morning was stronger and higher than it had ever been before. The next day, the fight was continued. The valorous Odo, dashing from place to place all over the tower, exhorted and encouraged his men to great efforts. When the Normans tried to drive a sap at the base of the tower, he deluged them with boiling oil and molten lead. Ebles, the archer-abbot, hurled a javelin, which transfixed seven Normans, and jokingly he shouted to his men to carry the spit down to the kitchens. But there were forty thousand of them—against the two hundred defending the tower. . . ."

"Isn't that a bit of an exaggeration?" ventured Juliette.

"Well, it is a bit exaggerated, perhaps. But that, surely, is permissible in the heat of battle."

"Oh! you were there, were you?"

"You don't think I'd miss a show like that? I had the nomadic instincts of a Press reporter—I still have, for that matter, in spite of my twenty-nine centuries experience of the human comedy. You must think of me as a sort of war correspondent at the siege of Paris. Now—where had I got to? . . . Ah yes!

"In their efforts to assuage the agony of their burns the attackers dived into the river. Their womenfolk tore their hair at the sight and burst into tears. 'Where are you going?' they shrieked. 'Are you frightened of a bonfire, you cowards? Didn't we give you enough red meat to eat at home?'"

"You must hand it to those Norman women, all the same," said

Juliette. "I must tell that story to my cousin in Lisieux, who moved heaven and earth in '39-40 to wangle a special job for her husband."

"In spite of all the defenders' valiant efforts, the Normans succeeded in making a breach at the foot of the tower; our people flung a great wheel down on them and sent six of them to the devil. Then they set fire to the tower. But the Lord took pity on the Parisians and after an hour He put the fire out. In the evening the Normans withdrew.

"The next day, discouraged, they did not attempt any assault. They pitched their camp on the right bank, near the church of Saint Germain-l'Auxerrois, and while their cavalry and infantry took advantage of the lull to roam the countryside, pillaging and massacring, the remainder busied themselves for the next two months, mending shields, furbishing weapons and erecting terrible engines of war. On January 29th 886 they returned to the assault.

"They advanced under cover of a gigantic battering-ram, as though under the carapace of an immense turtle, and the sight of them chilled our hearts with fear. In the city, bells rang and trumpets sounded. The attackers clashed their arms together, shouting fierce war cries and making a tremendous din. Stones and darts flew through the air like swarms of bees. At the same time, the painted barques launched an attack on the bridge itself.

"But as the assailants emerged from their cover, the defenders took their toll. A dart found its mark in a gaping mouth. A soldier who sought to protect his dying comrade with his shield was, in his turn, hit by an arrow; and a third, running to their aid, fell pierced by a javelin. Daylight waned and night came, and still they had not captured the town.

"The next day they tried to fill in the ditches surrounding the city by throwing in earth, trees and even cattle and the bodies of prisoners they had captured and slaughtered. Bishop Gozlin implored the help of the Virgin Mary, to whom the city was dedicated. The whole town shimmered with the illuminations lighted in honour of the Virgin. Next, the Normans brought three of their largest ships upstream, filled them with timber and set fire to them. Dragged by tow-ropes from the bank and helped by wind and current, it looked as though nothing could prevent these flame-spewing ships from destroying the bridge and burning down the tower. While the matrons and the young maids prayed to the illustrious Saint Germain, the Normans indulged in an orgy of impious joy. Their exultant shouts mingled with the tearful groans of the Parisians. . . . Saint Germain hearkened to our prayers. . . . The fire-ships were wrecked on the mound of stones which had been piled up to support the buttresses of the bridge. Once again the enemy retired, discomfited and discouraged.

"But we, too, were becoming disheartened. For three months we had been enduring a siege, while Charlemagne's successor, Charles the Fat, was on a pleasure trip in Italy and did not give us even a passing thought. On April 16th Bishop Gozlin died, leaving the whole responsibility for the defence on the Count of Paris.

"The Normans meanwhile had crossed over to the left bank, from Saint Germain-l'Auxerrois to Saint Germain-des-Prés. Whereupon the saint showed, by a series of miracles, how very strongly he disapproved of this manoeuvre. One of the Normans, for example, who had spread an altar cloth from the church on his bed, was found the next morning to have been reduced in size and mind to infancy. His comrades could not recognise him. With astonishment they wondered how his bones could have disappeared, how his entrails could be contained in the cavity of so small a stomach; and it was in this reduced state that the man then died."

"Things like that must have been a great comfort to the Parisians," observed Juliette.

"Indeed they were," agreed Chronossus. "But let me hasten to assure you that at that time Saint Germain-des-Prés was NOT one of my haunts.

"In the spring, by which time Charles the Fat had returned to Germany, Odo slipped out of the city to go and invite his attention to what was happening to Paris. Between ourselves this was not of much greater importance than any number of other events in history, nor would it have attracted so much attention if Paris had not become Paris and the Count Odo King of France—provisionally, I grant you; but his descendants were to cash in on the fact for a thousand years. Seen in perspective, the siege of Paris was not an outstanding event. . . . I think perhaps I would call it an abscess formed by the Carolingian malady which had manifested itself after the death of Charlemagne."

### *Carolingitis*

"Carolingitis was a malady which developed slowly, but ended fatally; it was caused by virulent microbes called vassals. Charlemagne had been at great pains to choose his Counts from the ranks of the faithful of Austrasia, the cradle of the Pippins; but his precautions proved to be in vain. It was not long before they declared their offices to be hereditary and resorted to revolt in support of their claim. For those on the distant frontiers to shake off the shackles of authority was easy. Bernard Plantevelue took up arms in order to retain his *Comté* of Autun; and retain it he did, after giving a severe beating to the royal army sent against him. This Bernard was the son of a most attractive man, Duke Bernard of

Septimanie, who had been the lover of the beautiful Queen Judith. And it was over her that all the trouble began.

"Louis, called the Pious because, when saying his prayers, he used to weep and prostrate himself till his forehead touched the ground, was a handsome man, clear of eye and brawny-chested, a sportsman and a modest man, yet well educated enough to be able to read and understand the Scriptures; he was so devout that he could not envisage love outside the bonds of matrimony and at the same time so strongly sexed as to be unable to bear the sad state of widowerhood in which, in the full bloom of his forties, and with three sons, the Empress Hermengarde had left him, in October 818."

#### *The Beauty Queen Competition*

"Something had to be done—quickly. Louis the Pious at once arranged a beauty competition among the aristocracy of the Empire; the daughter of a rich Bavarian landowner, Judith by name, carried off the prize, and Miss Bavaria became Empress the following February.

"This Beauty Queen, however, also had political ideas of her own; she came into immediate conflict with the Prime Minister, the Abbot Wala, who also not only had political ideas, but had more of them than the Queen and more, indeed, than anyone else in the world. He is credited with being the author of the *Ordinatio* of 817, a masterpiece of constitutional legislature, which brilliantly settled the hash of the system of divided inheritance. Being of the opinion that not all sovereigns could hope, like Charlemagne and Louis, to lose their brothers, he established the principle that only the eldest son could become Emperor and that the others should remain simply hereditary Governors. Wala had discovered that fundamental thing—reasons of State."

#### *A Modern Politician*

"This great politician was unfortunately to demonstrate that he was also a master of all the dirty little tricks known to the modern politician. When Judith gave a small brother to Louis' three children, she claimed for her baby, Charles, who was to become Charles the Bald, the state and dignity of Governor. This was a perfectly logical claim and quite in accordance with the constitution. But the Abbot Wala seized the opportunity to checkmate his adversary; he rose in his wrath as the rugged champion of the Written Word and, by declaring his determination to safeguard the integrity of the Empire, he took the first step towards ruining the Emperor.

"He accused Judith of being the mistress of Bernard, Duke of Septimanie, whom she had called to office in his place; a publicist in his pay



published a scurrilous and damaging pamphlet; he created the party of Pure Imperialists. One party, one ideology, defamation and a Press campaign. He was certainly the forerunner of things to come, wasn't he?

"He fomented a first revolt, which failed. In 833 he launched an appeal to the people—that is to say, to the feudal officials—inviting all who loved God and the Empire to work in unison . . . against the Emperor 'in the name of peace and unity'."

### *Louis Sets up his Autocracy*

"This time the revolt, with the assistance of the Pope and the treachery of the nobles at that meeting at Rothfeld in the plains of Alsace which came to be known as 'The Field of Lies', ended in the complete discomfiture of the Emperor. Called upon to appear before the Assembly in Compiègne on October 1st 833, he was forced to listen while two accusers, Bishops who were Wala's puppets, accused him of the very crimes which they themselves had committed: that he had weakened the heritage of Charlemagne to such an extent that the Empire, once so spacious, united and peaceful, had now become 'the object of pity among its friends and scorn and derision among its enemies'.

"On October 7th the unfortunate Prince was conducted to the church of the monastery of Saint Medard at Soissons, where there were assembled the Bishops, the priests, the deacons, a whole multitude of other clerics, his son (Lothair, the Emperor designate), all the nobles and as many of the people as the nave could contain. Kneeling on a cilice before the altar, he received from the hands of the Bishops a list of the crimes of which he had confessed himself guilty and read them out aloud, thereby gaining for himself the name of 'Pious'. Then with his own hands he divested himself of his cross-belt (which he laid on the altar), and his royal garments and dressed himself in the robes of a penitent."

"I must say, that reminds me very much of the sort of thing one reads now and again in the papers," intervened Juliette, "what they call 'voluntary confession' or 'auto-criticism'. And what was the beautiful Judith doing all this time?"

"She was exiled to Tortona in Italy, and her small son, Charles, was shut up in the monastery in Prüm. As for Louis himself, he remained a prisoner in the hands of his son, Lothair.

"A worthy forerunner of our modern blockheads, the Champion of Imperialism had prevailed against imperial prestige; his flamboyant appeals for unity had paved the way for the partition of Verdun.

"The ring was now all set for a catch-as-catch-can dog-fight. Louis, the younger son of Louis the Pious, set to work to secure the release of his

father and two years later succeeded in placing him on his throne once again.<sup>1</sup> Dominated by the beautiful Judith, Louis the Pious was at last able to detach a portion of the kingdom for the infant Charles, taken from the share of his other son, Louis, who, it seemed, was every bit as pious and meek as his father. Lothair was pardoned and accepted the post of guardian to his young half-brother; but the moment his father died, on June 20th 840, he repudiated the oath of fidelity he had sworn and claimed the 'Empire which had previously been confided to my care'—in other words, he proposed to adhere to the constitution of 817.

"Next Louis and Charles got together and started against their elder brother, Lothair, the War of the Three Brothers. (The fourth brother, Pippin, had died in the meanwhile, in 838; and his son, the King of Aquitaine, had thrown in his lot with uncle Lothair.) It was during this conflict, in 842, that Louis and Charles exchanged the famous *Serment de Strasbourg* the first document we possess written in old French, and which resulted in the no less famous Treaty of Verdun in 843. Therein Lothair quite openly and cynically abandoned his young ally, his nephew of Aquitaine, and the three brothers divided up among themselves the heritage of Charlemagne. I do not propose to say very much about treaties in general, but there are a few things I must tell you about this particular treaty."

"I'm sure there are!" exclaimed Juliette. "At school I was taught that it was the most important treaty in the history of France."

"You might even go so far as to say that no more important treaty is to be found in the history of the whole world. And do you know how it came to be made. On what basic principles?"

"I don't," replied Juliette. "But I'm quite sure you'll tell me!"

"It was made in accordance with the principles enunciated by the Gangster Bosses. Each of the participants put into the kitty the territories of the *Comtes* who were his followers. But these fellows were agricultural gangsters. Consequently it was deemed essential that the territories in question should be suitable for the cultivation of every variety of agricultural produce considered necessary for existence. After prolonged labour on the part of lawyers and surveyors, one hundred and twenty experts produced Germany, France and, between them, a corridor fifteen hundred kilometres long and two hundred kilometres wide, which joined the two capitals of the West—Rome and Aix-la-Chapelle. Allocated to Lothair with the sham title of Emperor, this long serpent quickly produced its own apple of discord—Lotharingia, or, as we now say, Lorraine. The surveyors had cut deep into the living flesh of Gaul; and well might the

<sup>1</sup> On this occasion, the same Bishops proclaimed that he was innocent of all the crimes of which they had previously found him guilty.

heroes of Verdun in 1914 have said that the knives of the negotiators of Verdun in 843 inflicted on France wounds which to this very day have never healed."

*Don't Shoot the Surveyors*

"There's something here that doesn't make sense," said Juliette.

"I don't doubt it," replied Chronossus. "But to what, in particular, do you refer?"

"To you and the subject of great men," said Juliette. "You have shown me history as a current. . . ."

"As a concatenation of collective forces. . . ."

"Please! Don't interrupt! . . . As a current which carries great men to their greatness or sweeps them and all their works away. According to you, Clovis was a tool, Charlemagne was blind. . . . And I do see how it was that everything fell to pieces when they had gone. Only—well, here you have a handful of surveyors who succeed in changing the whole course of history for the next thousand years! I give it up!"

"And you are quite right! I did indeed talk of the course of history; but I should have to be more than a Charlemagne, I should have to be God Himself, to be able to guess with certainty the course and direction that will be followed by the human stream."

"In short," retorted Juliette. "You are very intelligent, but too late."

"Always too late. But of one thing I can assure you, and I shall have occasion to repeat the same assurance many times, and that is, that those philosophers who claim that they are compelling life into certain specific channels are miserable charlatans.

"Historical necessity is, undoubtedly, an indisputable fact—our surveyors were obliged to cut up France. Whether they wished to do so or not, the absurdity of divided inheritance demanded it, and then again, just at the very moment when the central authority was breaking into bits, feudalism, which was ever growing in stature, eagerly snapped up the fragments in its jaws. The Treaty of Verdun is of capital importance because it ratified this disintegration.

"But the time will come, as you will see, when Royalty will reawaken and will pick up the pieces again, and finally we shall come to the day when we really can speak of those 'forty Kings who in a thousand years made France'. We shall have the right to say that, but only provided that we do not forget those generations of Frenchmen who, throughout this period, manifested the will and the desire for unity. The will of the great man and the will of the man in the street are two very different things.

"What actually happened, too, is an indisputable fact. In this case it

was purely fortuitous. If instead of the three brothers there had been only two of them, the division would probably have followed the natural frontier formed by the Rhine, for which we have fought so often during the last eleven centuries.

"Meanwhile, the Parisians who were withstanding the Norman siege did not know that they were defending the capital of France, and their leader, the Count of Paris, was fighting for his own fief and not for France, of whose dismemberment he was one of the most ardent supporters."

"Since we left Paris," observed Juliette, "the Normans, surely, must have raised the siege?"

"Not a bit of it! They were obstinate fellows, those Normans, and full of audacity. From the time when they had started to feel just as at home in our country as they did on the high seas they had become unaccustomed to meeting with resistance. For, of course, they had not appeared suddenly before Paris, like a rabbit out of a hat. For fifty years they had been amusing themselves, sailing up such of the French rivers as were navigable to their ships. Louis the Pious had done what he could; finding that it was not possible to construct a fleet, as his father had ordered, he hit upon an astute alternative idea. As it had become a tradition that all our invaders allowed themselves to be converted, how would it be, he thought, if we went into their country and converted them there instead? Then perhaps they'd cease to become invaders. Unfortunately, however, Christianity did not penetrate sufficiently widely and deeply among them to rob them of their love of travel, and in the middle of the ninth century they came as usual to pillage and massacre along the banks of our rivers.

"The peasants fought and died on the spot; those among us who had the means to fly, fled; the monks and the saints, who had contacts everywhere, retreated by easy stages.

"Let us follow the course of the retreat of Saint Philibert, whose remains were venerated in the island of Noirmoutier.<sup>1</sup> The monks found shelter for him near Nantes. The Normans followed him, and an asylum was next found for him in Cunault, upstream from Saumur. This turned out to be a singularly unhappy choice, for sailing up the Loire had long ago become one of the favourite pastimes of the Normans! In 862 the Saint was once more on the move. This time he was taken into the heart of the country to

<sup>1</sup> The monasteries, the homes of civilisation and the treasuries of wealth, were objects of particular attraction to the Normans. The body of Saint Martin himself became a great traveller. In November 853 they destroyed his beautiful basilica which towered defenceless above the plains on the banks of the Loire. It was re-built in 858, but Saint Martin was compelled to flee successively to Cognery, to Orleans, to Léré in Berri near Cosne-sur-Loire, to Marsat in Auvergne, to Auxerre and finally to Chablis. Between each alarm, the monks used to take him back to Tours. When the siege of Paris came to an end, the Normans remained peaceful, and Saint Martin remained in Tours.

Messac in Poitou. Ten years later, however, this new refuge proved to be still too close to the ocean and had to be abandoned in its turn. The monks then thought it would be a wise idea to place the central massif between the invaders and their Saint. They settled in Saint-Porcion in Auvergne; but not for long. Soon the valley of the Saône was beckoning to them, and Saint Philibert found his last asylum in Tournus, where, later, the Hungarians were to come and burn down the town."

"Hooray!" exclaimed Juliette. "Now the Hungarians! Let 'em all come! Anyone would think that France had become a public convenience for the whole of Europe!"

"Just a moment, please! It was just about this time—859 to 862—that the Vikings undertook a quite amazing round trip. Starting from the south of the Seine, where they had settled permanently, they went down to Galicia, round Spain via Gibraltar, defeated the Moors in Morocco and brought back with them specimens of the local inhabitants—the blue people, as they called them—to sell in Ireland. Then they returned to Spain by the same route and, on the other side of Gibraltar, struck at the coast of Murcia, the Balearics and Roussillon, where they penetrated as far as Arles-sur-Tech. Then the expedition went up the Rhône and invaded Camargue.

"They ranged far and wide, pillaging the Roman villas as far as Valence. The following spring, the Vikings continued their exploits. They sailed along the coast of Italy and visited Pisa, Luni and Monte Magra. In 862, returning via Gibraltar, they went back to Great Britain.

"Like those other Vikings, who used the Russian network of rivers and waterways and appeared before Constantinople in 865, the Normans had circled the whole of Europe.<sup>1</sup> And now they were besieging Paris."

#### *King of France (pro tem.)*

"Odo, the Count of Paris, slipped out of the city as I have told you, to beg Charles the Fat to intervene. But do you know anything about the origins of this Count of Paris, whose issue were to become the Capets? No? Nor do I. One day in 852, Robert the Strong drew attention to him. They said he was the son of a butcher. . . . Anyway, he was the Abbot of Marmoutiers,<sup>2</sup> and among the most virulent of the officials in revolt. He was also one of the most able at obtaining his price for a return to the fold—Charles the Fat created for him a Duchy between the Seine and the

<sup>1</sup> Others, sailing westwards, went even farther afield; but they found nothing worth pillaging in that desert continent. They did not know that it was America.

<sup>2</sup> Before the Gregorian reformation in the eleventh century, laymen were allowed to become the heads of Abbeys—as protectors . . . and to make what they could out of them.

Loire, Roland's ancient Marches of Brittany, facing the turbulent and truculent Bretons and appointed him as one of his principal councillors. Even then, his advice was not given gratis. *Comtés* and Abbeys were showered upon him including the Abbey of Saint Martin of Tours.

"He was killed fighting valiantly against the Normans. His son, little Odo, was but six years old. Hugh, the Abbot, managed the Duchy so brilliantly for him that he became a sort of manager for the whole kingdom, and this Duchy, situated between the Seine and the Loire and in the very heart of the kingdom, became known as the Duchy of France. The Abbot Hugh died on May 12th 886, just before Odo slipped out of besieged Paris. The upshot of all this was that when this Count of Paris presented himself to Charles the Fat, he did so with the title of Duke of France, which he had just adopted. He was then twenty-eight.

"When Charles the Fat at long last arrived, in September, at the foot of the heights of Montmartre, this great, fat epileptic did nothing that was worthy of his regal majesty. Although he had an immense army, he did not dare to fight a battle, and at the end of October he came to terms with Siegfried. First of all, under the pretext that the Burgundians had refused to recognise his sovereignty, he gave Siegfried permission to pillage Burgundy during the whole of the coming winter. Then, when they returned in the spring, the Normans received seven hundred pounds of silver as the price of their withdrawal. After that the Emperor returned to Germany. And from that moment the Carolingians had lost everything, including their honour. But the honour of Paris was safe, as was that of the young Duke of France.

"Charles the Fat who, by a twist of the laws of succession, had inherited all three of the Verdun kingdoms, died two years later, in 888, without a direct heir, and the stage was ideally set for Odo to take the crown of France."

"There again," interrupted Juliette, "there's something which doesn't sound quite right. I was always told at school that the first King of the Capet dynasty was called Hugh Capet."

"And that he ascended the throne in 987? I don't want to confuse your mind, and, strictly speaking, what you say is correct. Nevertheless one hundred years before that we had his great grandfather, Odo, sitting on the throne. But the plum was not yet quite ripe; Odo had any amount of trouble with a whole heap of Carolingian legitimists, headed by the Archbishop of Rheims, who crowned a grandson, of very doubtful legitimacy, of Charles the Bald as King. The net result was a period of turmoil and civil war. In the end, it was agreed that the little Carolingian should succeed Odo, and this he did, with the title of Charles the Simple."

*After a Hundred Years of Bucolic Patience, the Capetians . . .*

"The Capetians—in those days they were called the Robertians—had enjoyed only an interim period of kingship. They had jumped too quickly to the top, but they went much more slowly about regaining their place next time. They waited patiently for a whole century.

"The Carolingians, mark you, were by no means a complacent lot. Apart from one or two exceptions, like Charles the Fat, they had nothing in common with the Merovingian idlers. This Charles the Simple, for example, was a great King. His name does him an injustice, for 'Simple' did not mean 'simpleton' or 'innocent', but 'loyal', 'devoid of any duplicity'.

"Odo, the upstart King, had felt that he ought to take a vassal's oath of fealty to the Emperor of Germany, who had supported him. But Charles the Simple, on the other hand, marched resolutely on Aix-la-Chapelle, gathered round him the nobles of Lorraine and re-affirmed France's right to that province. With the Normans, he executed a master-stroke. By the Treaty of Saint Clair-sur-Epte, concluded with Rollo in 911, he converted these Barbarians into vassals, and in this way the Duchy of Normandy was created. It was soon to become the most prosperous Duchy in the kingdom.

"The Carolingians, however, had the feudal officials tied firmly to their apron-strings. The Robertians therefore played a double game. They barked and they snapped; and every time they did so, they got a bone in the shape of a *Comté*, an Abbey or a rich marriage or something of the sort. While the Carolingians ruined themselves paying for people's fidelity, the Robertians grew rich by selling theirs. This has been called the 'policy of vindication'.<sup>1</sup> One of them married the Emperor of Germany's sister; the other, Hugh Capet, married the Duke of Aquitaine's daughter;<sup>2</sup> his brothers became Dukes of Burgundy; he had a friend appointed as Archbishop of Rheims. In fact, his hand contained everything except the ace of trumps—God. But even that did not matter very much, for very swiftly a miracle occurred! Bare-footed, Hugh Capet was transporting the reliquary of Saint Valéry, and at the mouth of the Somme the incoming tide paused to let him pass with his precious burden. Better still—Saint Valéry appeared in a vision to Hugh Capet and told him that he would be King and that the crown would remain with his progeny for seven generations."<sup>3</sup>

*King, by the Grace of Two Clerics and a Horse*

"Adalberon, the Archbishop of Rheims, was a man of great intelligence and one of those prelates who wished to reform the Church. He had

<sup>1</sup> Odo's son, Robert, allowed himself to be crowned in 922. He was killed the next year. Fifteen years later his son was offered the crown and refused it.

<sup>2</sup> Who, incidentally, was a Carolingian.

<sup>3</sup> For a clairvoyant, Saint Valéry was a bit short-sighted!

appointed a monk, Gerbert, as headmaster of the Cathedral School, which was soon to become famous throughout the Christian world. Gerbert was later to become Pope under the name of Sylvester II.

"And it was these two men of God, who, with the aid of a horse, were about to put Hugh Capet on the throne of France."

"Really!" exclaimed Juliette. "You have a most frivolous way of recounting history!"

"It's not me—it's history that is frivolous, and there's nothing I can do about it, any more than we can do anything about the fact that Hugh Capet got his crown thanks to his love of Germany!"

"Thanks to his Lorraine origins, Adalberon was more than a little pro-German, and Gerbert was no less so, because the Emperors Otto I and Otto II had shown marked admiration of his philosophy. Later, we shall see Voltaire seduced in the same way by Frederick the Great. Philosophers are always very responsive to anything like that."

"Now—wait a minute," said Juliette. "Are you asserting that the first of the Capets were traitors to France?"

"Good heavens—no! Why we hadn't even invented such a thing as the idea of national consciousness yet. Moreover, we often used to call Germany 'Eastern France'.

"When the German nobles refused to crown the heir of Otto II, the three-year-old little Otto III, the Archbishop and the monk took council together. They decided to depose the Carolingian Lothair and to put in his place Hugh Capet, who would certainly support the young Otto. Gerbert wrote one of his friends the following letter, which is very reminiscent of the communication addressed to Pippin by Pope Zacharius:

"We write this veiled and unsigned letter in great haste. Lothair, the King of France, is not King save in name. Hugh is King in everything but name. If you would seek his friendship, if you would unite the cause of his son, Robert, to that of Caesar's son (Otto III) you would have nothing to fear from any hostility on the part of the King of the Franks.

"Lothair found out about this plot and accused Adalberon of treason...."

"You did say—treason?"

"Oh! A figure of speech, used by those in power. In those days, those in opposition were called 'traitors'—didn't you know that? Lothair, then, was preparing his case against Adalberon when he died on March 2nd 986. Louis V succeeded him. He was only nineteen, but he was every bit as resolute as his father. He marched on Rheims, and Adalberon was constrained to agree to appear before the Frankish Assembly, to be convened in Compiègne.

"The Assembly duly met and the trial, on a charge of high treason, was



about to open when a horse upset the King and the whole apple-cart. On May 22nd 987 Louis V took a toss while out hunting and was killed.

"Adalberon and Gerbert at once seized Fortune by the forelock. They transformed the judicial assembly into an electoral assembly; from being the accused they became the judges, and in no time they had succeeded in having the Duke of France elected King. Thus was founded the Capet dynasty. By accident. But by an accident that had been carefully prepared by a hundred years of prudent patience.

"Unfortunately, Hugh Capet who, as a vassal, had been a great man, turned out as a sovereign to be nothing more than a petty feudal King. He had, indeed, been one of the most zealous of those who had done their best to break up the kingdom of which he now took possession. Previously, the feudal lords had raised armies on behalf of the King; now they started to raise them on their own behalf—and how could Hugh Capet complain? Office had been turned into grace and favour privilege—otherwise, how could there ever have emerged a Duke of France? Grace and favour privileges had in turn become hereditary fiefs—how could the Duke of France otherwise have become independent? Justice had become a source of private revenue, the royal prerogatives had been usurped by the feudal officials—for how else could the Duke of France have become so rich? The whole country now bristled with fortified wooden *châteaux*, many of them his. And the ancient Duke of France reaped his reward for having realised that for a King to make laws which the vassals were determined to ignore was a sheer waste of time. To get to the top had been simply a game of patience and chance. The problem now was to stay there. But patience, that peasant virtue with which the Capets were so well endowed, was destined to bring its own reward—permanence."

### *The Abandoned People*

"Such great political confusion was matched by an equally great confusion of thought and by the sufferings of the people. Nearly two centuries had passed since the days of internal peace under Charlemagne, two centuries of fear, famine, rapine and pillage. It is perfectly true that Charles the Simple had settled the Norman question. But now, although the Normans had been transformed into Christian farmers (and had reserved their more violent tastes for export), there were plenty of other marauders eager to take advantage of the torn kingdom and to pillage the country. The Moors of Saint Tropez will make you realise into what an extent of utter helplessness the unfortunate people had been plunged.

"One night in 887—the siege of Paris had just ended—a handful of some twenty Arabs from Spain were shipwrecked on the coast of Provence

during a south-westerly gale. They managed to get safely ashore near the port of Saint Tropez."

"Dear Saint Tropez!" murmured Juliette. "I must say, your Carolingian stories are set in the most delightfully habitable places."

"You are lucky that you were not spending your holidays there at the time, Madame. The Arabs took advantage of the darkness to massacre all the inhabitants of the village and then sought refuge in the neighbouring mountains, where they established themselves firmly and proceeded to sow panic all round them. From then onwards they lived the spacious life of brigands. Delighted with their good fortune, they called on their friends to come over and join them. In point of fact only about a hundred Mussulmans accepted this first invitation. The feudal lords of the country, however, were quite incapable of uniting against them, and the bandits prospered mightily. Then further contingents, men, women and children, began to arrive, always by sea. Saint Tropez had now become their base port, while Garde Freinet, some way inland, was the outpost line of this strange Islamic State, injected into the middle of a Christian land.

"Pillage soon became an accepted institution, and the Count of Arles, realising that he could not subdue the invaders, entrusted the guarding of the Alpine passes to them. Thence they set off on a sensational raid—against Germany, if you please! Otto the Great was still on the throne at the time. Filled with consternation at the appearance of Saracens in one of the Duchies of his Empire, he sent a stiff note to the Emir in Cordova. The latter, however, was quite unable to exercise any control over these *enfants terribles*, and their pillaging continued unabated, until a seemingly good stroke of fortune brought about their downfall. By luck, they captured the saintly Mayeul, the Abbot of Cluny, and held him to ransom. This saintly prelate was one of the glories of the Christian world, and the affair created an enormous sensation. The Count of Provence and his brother joined forces with their neighbour, the Marquis of Turin, and determined to put an end to this band and its activities. The mountain stronghold was stormed, most of the Mussulmans were massacred and the survivors were led off in captivity. But this quasi occupation of part of Provence by the Mussulmans had lasted for more than a century.

"Then there were the Hungarians. They came from farther afield, from the edge of the Obi desert in Siberia, and they were equally audacious and enterprising. They were of Finnish extraction, with a dash of Mongol and Turk. From generation to generation they had been gradually migrating westwards, gathering up the remnants of the Huns and the Avars as they went along. Having crossed the Carpathians about 860, they settled, in

896, in the Danube plains which now bear their name. They made this their permanent home, but from it they initiated a series of raids not only against Germany, but also into France and Italy. Champagne, Burgundy and even Languedoc were destined to see the prancing steeds of these bold Finns, so reminiscent of the terrifying Cossacks of Attila. They were ferocious, and their strident war-cries alone sufficed to spread terror and panic.

"Let us watch them on one of their forays. They had reached Sens. They crossed the Loire, penetrated into Berry, pushed on as far as Aquitaine and then retraced their steps, cutting diagonally across Burgundy by way of Bèze, which then experienced a Hungarian blaze for the fiftieth time. From there they went down the Saône, and the remnants of Saint Philibert all but perished in the flames lighted by these Hungarians, for the church in Tournus, where, as I told you, the saint had taken up his final asylum against the Normans, was partially destroyed by fire.

"The people had forgotten what it was to have a King who protected them. But the Emperor of Germany was powerful. On August 10th 955, at the battle of the Lech, Otto the Great annihilated the last of the Hungarian hordes which had launched an assault against the West. The Christian faith had also contributed towards this success; the Hungarians had by then begun to allow themselves to be converted. Very shortly Geiza, their Chieftain, embraced the Christian faith in order to be able to marry Gisela, the daughter of Duke Henry III of Bavaria; their son, the great and pious King Stephen was destined in the year 1000 to receive at the hands of Pope Sylvester II (formerly Gerbert) the crown and title of 'His Apostolic Majesty'. With the Hungarians as with the Normans, the Church had played its role as a peace-maker. But we ourselves were in dire straits."

### *Black Magic*

"We no longer had a King, and God had forsaken us. And, as it was very difficult for us, at the time of the first Capet, to become rational Republicans, there remained but Satan. We had been through every possible sort of experience, and there remained only the cult of black magic. Satan was seen all over the place."

"Excuse me," interrupted Juliette. "Did you yourself ever see Satan?"

"Me? Oh! no. I was much too much of an infidel."

"Pity! I should have liked to know what he looked like."

"But there were any number of people who did see him. It's really quite simple; anyone who had not received a visit from him was considered to be quite beyond the pale. The macabre was very much à la

*mode*. What I am now about to tell you I had from a monk named Raoul Glaber, who shouted loudly and with a most wonderful tremolo, that he had been afflicted with all the vices.

"The monk Glaber was in very close touch with Satan, and this is what he has to say on the subject:

"At the foot of my bed I saw a little black monster in human form. As far as I was able to see, his neck was thin, his face emaciated, and his forehead low and heavily wrinkled; he had very dark eyes, a broad nose, an enormous mouth and thick lips; his chin was short and pointed, and he had a goatee beard; his ears were pricked up and straight, his hair was stiff and bushy; he had dog's teeth, a domed head, was pigeon-chested and a hunchback; and he was dressed in rags. He pranced and gibbered in fury. He seized the wooden bed-rail, shook it violently and cried: "*Thou shalt not remain here for long!*"

"And indeed, Glaber, who exchanged monasteries every four days, saw Satan again and again—in Auxerre, in Tonnerre, in Avallon. He was obviously a crank, or what our modern psychiatrists would call unbalanced. I would not have quoted him to you, but for the fact that he is a worthy representative of a multitude obsessed with folly. Such visions, when they become accepted as part and parcel of normal life, bear eloquent witness to the prevalent mentality of the time; everyone, fleeing from the real horrors of the age, sought refuge in the horrors of a dream; nightmare had become reality, and life a fantasmagoria. The more atrocious the stories, the more readily they were believed."

"Fine!" cried Juliette. "I adore stories that make my flesh creep!"

"People stopped you in the street to tell you about an earthquake, a heresy or an epidemic. In Joigny, they said, it had rained stones."

"Oh!" said Juliette disappointedly. "Is that all?"

"In Tournus, human flesh was being sold in the meat market."

"Ah! that's more like it!"

"I will continue in the words of the monk.

"At this time of horror and desolation, the human race was threatened with imminent destruction. For three years on end the whole earth had been so flooded by the rains, that not a furrow could be found in which seed could be sown. Alas, that we should be forced to believe such things, but the horrors of starvation have led to further examples of that atrocity happily so rare in history, and man has once more been devouring the flesh of man. The lone traveller on the road falls beneath the blows of his assailants; he is torn asunder, and his limbs are grilled on the fire and devoured. Others, fleeing from their homes to escape the famine, are offered hospitality on the way, and their hosts kill them during the night

—for food. Men entice children to them with the offer of an apple or an egg, and then sacrifice them to satisfy their hunger.

“Three miles from Mâcon, in the Chatenay forest, stands a lonely church, dedicated to Saint John. Some wretched criminal built himself a hut nearby, and there he used to kill the travellers who tarried a while with him. This monster then fed on the flesh of his victims. One day a man came and asked for shelter for himself and his wife. He had been resting for but a few minutes when his roving eye saw in each corner of the hut—human skulls. Worried and frightened he decided to depart, but his cruel host barred the way. Fear of death gave the man strength, and with his wife he escaped and made all haste to the town. As quickly as he could he told Count Othon and all the people of his gruesome and horrible discoveries. A large party of men set out forthwith and at speed to verify the facts. When they reached the spot, they found the ferocious beast in his lair with the skulls of forty-eight human beings, whom he had slaughtered and whose flesh he had devoured. He was taken into the town, bound to a stake of wood and cast into the fire. We were ourselves eye-witnesses of his execution.

“‘People believed,’ continued Glaber, ‘that the order of the seasons and the laws of nature which had hitherto governed the world had reverted once again into chaos, and they feared that the end of the world was at hand. . . .’

“I really must apologise,” interrupted Chronossus, “for not having silenced this macabre babbler long ago. . . .”

“Not a bit,” replied Juliette. “It reminds me very much of our papers today, when they start talking about the H-bomb. It’s true we’re getting near to the year 2000. But I for one am not sorry to have heard the testimony of a witness of the horrors of the year 1000.”

“I am sorry to have to disappoint you,” replied Chronossus, “but these horrors of the year 1000 are the inventions of historians who did not take the trouble to examine closely the evidence before them.”

“But surely—this monk of yours—he was there, on the spot!”

“My monk, don’t forget, was mentally deranged. He could have given equal rein to his delirium on the subject of other horrors throughout the whole course of the eleventh century. But the ‘end-of-the-world’ horror was the ideal crowning horror to all the horrors of the century. It was first added to the rest by a chronicler of the sixteenth century, whom they promptly put in jail without taking into account that Glaber had been talking about the year 1000 of the Passion of Christ, which is exactly the year 1033. Some scholars in their expositions have equally confirmed that the Church took advantage of this end-of-the-world complex to gather

in mass contributions and donations. In support they quote a formula discovered in various charters: "The end of the world being at hand, I hereby donate. . . ."

"That, however, is a formula which dates from the seventh century and which happened to crop up again in the eleventh century. No no! Enough of this end-of-the-world horror! One thing, however, is certainly true. The two centuries which came to an end with the advent of Hugh Capet on the scene were the most frightful in all our history. Let's leave it at that."

### *The White Robe of the Church*

"But signs of our resurrection were beginning to emerge. The Mussulmans gradually re-opened the Mediterranean, first to pilgrims, and soon after to commerce and to the Crusades. Satan could no longer fill the bill, and his clients were going off to pray at the sepulchre of the Saviour in Jerusalem. Black magic was fading and disappearing before the advance of ineffable hope, and the vampire of Mâcon had to cede pride of place to the mystic Burgundian, whose story became a source of such edification for the people.

"A certain Liébaud of Autun, among others, set out for Judea. This fine fellow, having visited the holy places, climbed the Mount of Olives. There he flung himself flat on his stomach and with his arms spread-eagled did his utmost to rise like a bird into the sky (without success). He begged Jesus that, if he were destined to die that year, he should do so here, on the very spot from which He Himself had ascended to Heaven. That evening after dinner, when the Autun pilgrim had fallen asleep, he was heard to shout: 'Glory be to God! Glory be to God!' He was in a bad state, he received the last rites and died with his face turned towards the sacred hill.

"If faith does not always raise the human body on wings into the air or move mountains, it was nevertheless about to sustain the white robe of the Roman Church and the enthusiasm of the Crusaders; and in the snatch and grab tourney of the vassals it is faith that will maintain our unity, grouped round our King by Divine Right, until the time of Luther and the voluptuous Renaissance."

PART THREE

The Years of Adolescence





## Soldiers and Clerics

A.D. 1022—*Robert the Pious invents the stake for heretics; A.D. 1057—Orleans, the seat of learning and the leader of progress, acquires civic liberties; The Eleventh Century—Woman still man's handmaiden. The chevalier 'sans peur' is not yet 'sans reproche'. The Monks of Cluny, guardians of culture. Wooden strongholds do not make old bones. They are replaced by real fortresses of stone. The authority of the Church is categorically confirmed by the Roman arches. The French procreate and multiply rapidly. They begin to colonise their own country and to spread out all over the world—Spain, Sicily, England (1066). The great wanderlust of the pilgrims. France burgeons into bud.*

“If I had had the pleasure of meeting you, Madame, round about the year one thousand and something, I would gladly have spent a little time in your company on the top of my feudal lord's stronghold—Oh! Please don't mistake my meaning! My intentions would have been strictly honourable—just to cast a glance with you at the century at our feet.

“From that height there would have been nothing to see except a typical bit of the countryside of the *Comté* of Anjou; but the whole of France had been smashed into such small pieces—and the whole of France was reflected in each such bit of the jig-saw puzzle. We ourselves were rather prone to look upon 'elsewhere' as some place far nicer than home. The French at that time had acquired a positive mania for travel. They were extremely prolific, their numbers were increasing at great speed, and they were popping out all over the place, like rabbits in the dew, delightedly astonished to find roads here, there, and everywhere and that they could travel along them as they wished.

“There was one, as a matter of fact, that passed by the foot of our stronghold. It was not one of those paved Roman roads, along which one rattled as straight as a die. Oh! no—we had put our serfs on to tracing

new roads, sinuous roads made of sand and pebbles, and, in summer, very dusty, the real roads of the Middle Ages.

"Let us pretend, if it please you, and return hand in hand to the eleventh century. At the moment our road is a mass of mud, for it is autumn. Here we are on the topmost battlements of our stronghold. Look!"

### *The Villeins Who Feed Us*

"You see those hirsute villeins, black as soot, leading their waggon-loads of barrels across the drawbridge? We needn't bother about them. They are only the serfs who have just finished pressing the grapes in the wine-presses of the *château*. Those mud huts with the thatched roofs and no windows are the dens in which they live. They have straw on which to sleep, some of them have a table and a stool or two, and every now and then one finds one with even a bed; but it would be quite useless to expect any gratitude from them. . . ."

"It seems to me," Juliette cut in, "that you have a very queer conception of Christian charity."

"Forgive me, Madame. Perhaps I should have been more explicit. At the time I was only a youngster of nineteen centuries, and youth, in those days, was without pity. And since we have gone back together, I am now speaking to you as a real knight of the eleventh century would have spoken.

"All these villeins are any use for, as the Bishop of Laon so aptly said, is to provide us with gold, food and clothing. Sometimes, of course, we find ourselves obliged to extract these things from them by force. Gold incidentally, is nothing but a figure of speech, for where could we sell the products of our estate? Certainly not in Angers or in Saumur, the battlements of which you can see down there, if you look up the valley of the Loire. For those two strongholds belong to the clergy, who are just as averse to trading as are the Barons in their *châteaux*. Each individual lives on his own land and makes the best of things. That, of course, is all very well for the peasants, who have no more needs than the beasts in the field, but a cultured soul has need of feasting and revelry, and we very often find it extremely difficult to make both ends meet. Fortunately, however, we can always go off and pillage our neighbours."

### *The Greater the Sin, the Longer the Journey*

"Now—about the people passing along the road itself. As you can see, they are obliged to pass very close to our port-cullis, and that they do just as quickly as they can. Those woodmen, who go from place to place, cutting down the forest, are of no interest, any more than those youngsters,

off in search of new pastures, or the absconding serfs (provided they are not your own), who are constantly bolting, lured by the bait offered by other enterprising feudal lords."

"Oh! So your feudal lords are business rivals in the labour market, are they?" asked Juliette.

"Indeed, yes. And would you believe it—there are actually some unscrupulous nobles who proclaim that they are creating a new 'sanctuary', or even a new stronghold on land that has already been cleared, where they are prepared to offer employment on very liberal terms. I should say, perhaps, on very much more restricted terms of servitude. That sort of thing is too sickening for words!

"You see those others over there, with their big staves, their scallops and their cloaks? Those are the well-to-do fellows, for the rich mingle with the poor when they go to pray to Saint Martin of Tours, at Mont-Saint-Michel, to Saint Martial of Limoges or farther away to Our Lady of Vezeley, Our Lady of Puy, Saint Sernin of Toulouse and farther still to Saint Jacques of Compostelle, at Monte Cassino, at Rome even, to say nothing of Jerusalem itself. The more gravely they have sinned, the farther afield they go; and the better lined, too, are their purses. They, then, are of some interest; actually, however, we prefer the hawkers from Flanders, even though they have now acquired the unpleasing habit of travelling in bands, flanked with bodies of armed men, which naturally complicates matters for us. For there's nothing quite like an unarmed man."

*The Sweat of the Peasant . . .*

"I don't think you're terribly interested in agricultural matters are you? Well, behind us, to the north of the Loire, on the other side of that forest of ours which is full of game, begin the long, unfenced arable lands, ploughed by our Gallic two-wheeled plough; nowadays they use shoulder harness<sup>1</sup>—that is to say, a rigid collar which rests on the horse's shoulder instead of half strangling the wretched animal."

"And horseshoes?" asked Juliette. "Have you invented them yet?"

"Horseshoes? Hm—let me see. . . . Why yes, of course, we had horseshoes. A knight is a horseman, after all, isn't he? Don't say I said so, but I rather think it was the Arabs, with their delight in handsome trappings who gave us the idea. Now—where was I?"

"Farming," said Juliette.

"Oh, Hell! Must I go on about it? What a bore! Well—corn has to be harvested with a sickle and cut just below the ear, for the straw remains the

<sup>1</sup> The importance of this seems to have escaped Chronossus. We shall revert to the subject in the twelfth century.

property of the village as does also the 'second crop' from the meadows. Down there to the south you see the beginning of the hedges and low walls of the *bocage* country of the Vendée, the land of small holdings and cultivation with the spade. But let us leave these trivialities, unworthy of a pretty woman and a gay knight. Let the peasants go on working and sweating. Later, when the harvest is in, we'll come back and pillage it."

... and the Pleasures of the Knight

"Generally speaking, these forays of ours are the easiest thing in the world. We set off with our skirmishers and trained incendiaries. Behind them come the foragers, whose job it is to collect the booty and cart it back to the waggon-train. Then, when we ourselves appear on the scene, the fun starts. If the raid has been well planned and prepared, we are on the spot before the peasants and their animals have time to seek refuge within the precincts of the *château*. They bolt all over the shop, shouting mightily, and the shepherds hastily gather their flocks and drive them into the forest nearby, in the hope of saving them. The skirmishers pursue them here, there, and everywhere, the foragers clear out the village and the incendiaries then set fire to it. The panic-stricken villagers in the place are either burnt to death where they are or are captured and led off to join the other booty. By this time the tocsins are sounding all round, the panic spreads, helmets flash in the sun, pennants flutter in the breeze, and the knights can be seen galloping hither and thither over the countryside. What a joyous spectacle! Sometimes the feudal lord will sally forth to engage us, but mostly he prefers to stay put in his *château*, knowing full well that it will be more expedient for him to recoup his losses later, when the opportunity occurs, at the expense of one of his neighbours."

"In fact," said Juliette, "your fun is quite without danger."

"Completely—no risk at all," laughed Chronossus. "With a good coat of mail on one's back, the villein, as you can well imagine, is about as dangerous as a rabbit."

"The rest of our time we spend in overcoming boredom, either by coursing—that forest is full of deer, bears and wild boars, and we don't fancy eating pork every day—or tilting the quintain. The latter is a little straw figure fixed to a stake in such a way that if you strike it clumsily with your lance, it swings round and slaps you on the behind as you gallop past. We have two other games—*la paume* and *la saule*, from which tennis and football have emerged. But none of these compares with the splendid tournaments at Easter and Pentecost, in which often many hundreds of knights enter the lists; and on those days the meadows are plentifully sprinkled with blood, believe me."

*The Sweet Gentleness of Anjou*

"I must say, as far as war is concerned, we in the *Comté* of Anjou are very spoiled. If the day were a little clearer, you would be able to see the towers of Angers. There are sovereigns for you—real terrors! and with it all highly cultured fellows, too. They have created a famous school and their Court sets the tone for all the other *Seigneuries*. They it was, too, who constructed the first *château* strongholds in stone—the *château* of Longeais and the *château* of Loches . . . against formidable great places like that there's nothing doing . . . a bit different from the old wooden stronghold where we now are, which always stands a very good chance of being burned down. If the alarm were to sound now, you'd see us rush off as fast as we can to slaughter and skin some cows, in order to cover the platform with fresh skins, which prevent it from catching fire.

"The last Count, I mean the one who died six years ago in 1060, Geoffroi Martel, was a tiger of a warrior. Goodness! What a dog-fight we had under him against the Duke of Normandy! We captured Tours from the Count of Blois without much difficulty, but the Bishop of Le Mans gave us a lot of trouble. Geoffroi kept him in prison for seven years! A Bishop in prison! That was something no one had ever seen before. Even so, our good Geoffroi found his master in the Duke of Normandy; and in God, too, for that matter, for he died a monk in the monastery of Saint Nicholas. I must admit he was a most pious man; every time he took a new concubine he founded a new Abbey.

"His father, Foulque Nerra, was, I think, even more formidable. Anyway it was he who founded the State of Anjou.<sup>1</sup> I ought to tell you that relations between father and son were not always very cordial. In 1035, for instance, when Foulque made his third pilgrimage to the Holy Land—he used to go there whenever he reckoned that his accumulated sins had reached just about the maximum that Divine patience would stand—(and he used to have himself led half naked on the end of a rope through the streets of Jerusalem, with a couple of slaves beating him with whips, while he himself kept up a cry of, 'Lord! have mercy on a sinner!') well, when he returned from this penance, number three, his son refused to hand back to him the State of Anjou, which Foulque had entrusted to his care. And that little *contretemps* let us in for four years of war, at the end of which son Geoffroi, badly wounded in the thigh, had to surrender. His father forced him to walk many miles with a saddle on his back and then to come, still thus accoutred, and kneel before him. 'Well,' said Foulque, with his foot on his son's head, 'Are you broken-in yet?' 'Yes,' replied Geoffroi, 'but by my father.' "

<sup>1</sup> From him, too, were descended the Plantagenets, who reigned over England.

"A good answer," observed Juliette. "The lad, obviously, was not lacking in filial respect."

"Foulque was a true Baron of our times. Religion and the ferocity of a beast of prey were fused into one in the burning crucible of his character. He had a square head, prominent cheeks, a low forehead and deep-set eyes, below thick, black eyebrows. He could not bear to be opposed—even by the Saints. When he set fire to Saumur, the monastery of Saint Florent began to blaze merrily. Foulque wanted that Saint. 'Saint Florent,' he cried. 'Let your old monastery burn and come with me! I'll build you a far finer home in Angers.' He had the Saint's body put on a boat on the Loire, but the rowers pulled in vain at their oars—the Saint refused to budge! You ought to have heard the abuse that Foulque poured on the saintly head, because the Saint did not want to let himself be moved to the beautiful city of Angers!

"Incidentally, Foulque also set fire to his own city of Angers, when he found that his wife was being unfaithful to him, and she, poor lady, was burned with the rest of the town."

"So that," observed Juliette. "is what the poet means when he speaks of the 'sweet gentleness of Anjou'!"

### *Big Sharks and a Little King*

"Or of 'sweet gentle France', for that matter. Oh these poets! People of Foulque's stamp were to be found, at the time of which we are speaking, more or less all over France. Our neighbour, the Duke of Normandy for one. (He was the one they called the Bastard. He was a most pure man. He hadn't even swopped wives once! An astonishing fellow!) Then there were the Dukes of Brittany and Burgundy, the Count of Flanders, the Duke of Aquitaine, the Duke of Gascony, the Count of Toulouse and many others; a round dozen of these War Lords between them owned nine-tenths of the whole country. Can't you hear the snapping jaws of these great sharks? I'd rather not say anything about the King, who only had a kingdom about the size of a haricot bean between Senlis and Orleans and who let himself be thoroughly done down by the Sire de Monthléry. Do you know that as early as 1057 Orleans—which was, I grant you, a city of learning and a shining light among the towns of the kingdom—obtained from its Bishop and from the King the right to elect representatives to the municipal administration? Things were beginning to look up, weren't they?"

### *Right-minded Clerics*

"But let us be serious. It was not the riff-raff of the *bourgeois* and the

people who ever bothered the nobles; it was the Church. Mind you, there were some right-minded people among the Bishops and even among the monks. In Angers, at the Abbey of Saint Laud for example, we had a perfect monk, who wrote:

“God Himself has decreed that mankind shall be so divided that some shall be Lords and others shall be serfs, and so fashioned that the Lords shall love and worship God and the serfs shall love and worship their Lords, in accordance with the words of the Apostle, who said: Servants be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling.”<sup>1</sup>

“He was pretty sound that monk, don’t you think? I myself consider that the Bishop of Rheims, however, was even more categorical. ‘Thus’ (he said), ‘saith the Apostle Peter:<sup>2</sup> Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.’

“Thus then the Scriptures. By what right then do irresponsibles like Bishop Ive of Chartres proclaim that ‘in the sight of Christ there are neither servants nor masters; those admitted to the same sacraments are in all respects equal’. Bishops like that ought to be shot—I mean, ought to have their silly heads chopped off.”

### *Ill-natured Serfs*

“After all that rubbish are you surprised that the serfs revolted? Silly fools! Didn’t they know the weight of our hands? Had they forgotten the repressive measures of Count Raoul? I’ll tell you the story as William of Jumièges told it to me.

“Although the young Duke Richard was endowed with all the virtues, a wave of pestilential discord swept across his Duchy, for the peasants, with one accord and in every *Comté* of the Norman land, set up committees and divided up the land, issuing title deeds as their fancy dictated. When the Duke heard of this, he sent Count Raoul against them with a multitude of soldiers to curb this rural ferocity and to break up the rustic assemblies. Count Raoul seized all the delegates, cut off their hands and feet and sent them back thus useless to their homes, to deter others from pressing their project and to make them more careful in the future.

“Let me end my remarks on this vexing question by saying that in my opinion if the Church really believed in equality, she ought to have made a start by taking steps to free her own slaves. Look—I have a charter,

<sup>1</sup> Saint Paul, Epistle to the Ephesians vi. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Saint Peter, First Epistle ii. 18.

drawn up by the monks of Marmoutiers, dealing with an unallotted baby. It might interest you:

“We, the monks of Marmoutiers, have carried out a distribution of the children, male and female, belong to divers parents. For ourselves we have retained from among the children of Renaud de Villana a boy, Bartholomew, and three girls, Hersendre, Milsendre and Letgarde; and from among the children of Guascelin a girl, Arcembourge, and a boy, Gauthier. One small girl, still in her cradle, remains unallotted. If she lives, she will become our common property until it has been decided by agreement to allot her to one or the other *Seigneurie*.”

“I rather think, Sir Knight of the eleventh century,” said Juliette, “that indignation warps your judgement and that you seek offence in everything the Church says or does. For my own part I have always heard it said that it was the Church that imposed upon us the peace of God.”

#### *The Spoil-sports*

“Those spoil-sports! Don’t talk to me about the peace of God! When people like Bishop Warin of Beauvais try to impose oaths on us! Just listen to this! I ask you—isn’t it enough to make any knight’s blood boil?

“I swear that I will not break into Churches or into the store-rooms of Churches. I will not assault clerics or monks, who do not bear secular arms. I will not carry off any man’s goods or any beast of burden. I will seize neither peasant man nor peasant woman, nor any merchant. I will not whip them to extract their belongings from them. . . .”

“Damn it! If all those things are to be forbidden to us, what, I ask you, the blazes will become of us?”

“Don’t ask me. You’d become a little less savage, I suppose?”

“And as if that weren’t enough for them, d’you know what else they’ve invented? The ‘Truce of God’, if you please! By it, we are forbidden to go about our business from Saturday evening until Monday morning. There’s a fine idea for you!”

“It certainly is,” retorted Juliette. “It does at least ensure a peaceful week-end.”

“And in Provence, it now seems, they have extended this truce to mean from Wednesday evening till Monday morning. Two days a week during which to fight is enough for them, apparently.”

“Well, they’re only running true to form, anyway.” said Juliette. “We all know they’re not renowned for guts in the Midi, don’t we?”

“And the last straw of all is this damn nonsensical asylum of theirs.



All your enemy has to do is to take refuge in some church or other, or at the foot of one of those calvaries dotted all over the shop along the high-ways, or even to grab hold of one of those rings the monks fix to the walls of their monasteries—and you can't touch him!"

"Deplorable!" said Juliette. "That's not war, is it? It's puss in the corner!"

"Not only that—there are plenty who abuse the privilege. It's always the best fellows who get killed. You've heard of Hugh, the Abbot of Cluny? Don't tell me you haven't heard of the Cluny Order which was founded just before the year 1000 by William of Aquitaine<sup>1</sup> to ensure the existence of a community of monks wholly independent of the temporal power and which has now become the greatest monastic community in the Christian world? Incidentally, they are very highly educated people and very clean—for monks (they are entitled to have a bath twice a year), and I would not for a moment hold their indulgence in charitable activities against them, were it not for the fact that by these they are in grave danger of making the common people soft. They are, you know. Why—when the Abbot's father and brother were killed, the murderers actually went to him and begged for asylum in his Abbey!"

"And he granted their prayer?"

"Alas—yes!"

"I can quite see why you don't like Saints," said Juliette. "They make you feel ashamed."

### *The Invention of the Stake for Heretics*

"I refuse to allow the Church to prevent us from cavorting—rampaging round on the pillage, I mean—with their truces and their peace of God. But that doesn't mean that I'm not an ardent supporter of the Faith, mark you. The people must respect the clergy, of course. And these Cluny monks, I'm sure, are very well-meaning; but they don't seem to realise the danger inherent in the free and quasi-obligatory instruction they give, even though it is religious instruction. It has already given rise to quite a number of heresies, you know, and, if you please, in just the one place where the best brains in the country are to be found and to which the King has just granted a very considerable measure of municipal liberty—Orleans.

"If you give people an inch. . . . In 1022 there was a bunch of fourteen

<sup>1</sup> In the chaotic and ferocious world of budding feudalism, the monasteries of the Cluny Order were the oases of enlightenment which saved the culture of the ancient world. William of Aquitaine was the far-distant forerunner of those American capitalists whom we see today founding the Princeton Institute, where the Einsteins of our race can live in a community free of all material anxiety and devote themselves to the study of the higher fields of scientific speculation.

of them, who appeared in chains before the Bishops and the King's Barons in the cathedral. Robert the Pious, assisted by his Bishops, argued with them for nine hours. On the question of the Immaculate Conception, they asserted: 'What is contrary to Nature cannot be reconciled with the Creation.' Then the Bishop of Beauvais asked them: 'Do you not think that, before the establishment of the natural order of things, it is possible that God the Father created everything through the medium of His Son?' 'Fairy tales!' they retorted. 'You, of course, are perfectly at liberty to make people of mean intelligence believe them, people who are prepared to accept without scrutiny the queer nonsensical inventions that have been scribbled on the skins of asses and sheep. As far as we are concerned, we have a law inscribed within us, on our consciences, by the Holy Ghost. We believe only those things which God, Ruler of the World, has revealed to us.'

"From this attitude they refused to budge. The masses, who could see no possible point in going on arguing with them, demanded with loud and insistent shouts that they be put to death. When they emerged from the cathedral, Queen Constance, who was standing by the entrance, upped with her cane and poked out the eye of the Canon Stephen, who had also been her father confessor. The whole party were then burned alive.

"The populace of our towns is wholly and ferociously Christian. One of the manias of these heretics—for they were not all dead—was to abstain from eating meat. The result was, that whenever the mob saw a man who was unusually pale, they yelled: 'To the stake with him.'<sup>1</sup>

"In spite of all this, there are, I assure you, quite a lot of things in life that make one laugh. Robert the Pious, the man who initiated death by burning for the heretics, was a most sweet-tempered and charitable man. And he also had a great sense of delicacy! His vassals were required to swear an oath of fealty to him on the reliquaries of a Saint. More often than not, of course, they broke their oath. So—what did Robert do? It was only after his death that they found out that he had secretly removed the saintly bones in order to save his vassals from adding to the crime of infidelity the sin of sacrilege!

"With so benevolent a character it was obvious that this King wouldn't go very far. In addition, he was completely under the thumb of the redoubtable Queen Constance. As he was both a poet and a musician, she asked him one day to compose a hymn in her honour. He did as he was asked

<sup>1</sup> This heresy, under the name of catharism, spread rapidly in the following century among the Albigois or Cathars in the far south—for education had made great strides. And as an inevitable result the massacres became much more frequent and far more numerous.

and produced a picture of his mournful conjugal state under the famous title *O Constantia Martyrum*. And that is about all we owe to Hugh Capet's son—a conjugal picture and the invention of the stake for heretics.<sup>1</sup> The great deeds of the day were done by the great feudal lords."

### *Life in a Castle in Spain*

"I have already told you about our most valorous Counts of Anjou. But I must admit that our neighbours and enemies, the Normans, are also first-class buccaneers. At this very moment, as I am speaking to you, they are in the process of re-conquering Spain from the Mussulmans—just that. It is true that the Burgundians, set afire by the monks of Cluny and blessed by the Pope, are calling the tune, but their best pipers are their Norman recruits. To go and bask in the sun, to re-conquer a Christian land that has been desecrated by those miscreants, to become pleasing in the sight of Heaven by massacring people—that, you must admit, for an ebullient feudal lord, is a piece of cake. Just recently they captured Barbastro. One of the *Comtes*, an Aquitanian, has remained there to defend the place. Actually, he's really living in a castle in Spain—the spacious life of the Alhambra! A Jewish businessman told us all about it. The Aquitanian has taken up residence in the Emir's palace, has adopted his predecessor's style of dress and passes his days reclining on a couch, surrounded by the most beautiful of his captives, whom he has taken as his wives. He has sacks filled with silver and gold and bales without end of silks and brocades. All this he showed to the Jew, and to do him honour, he said to one of his women: 'Take thy lute and sing some of thine airs for our guest.' She sang. Tears streamed down her cheeks, and the Aquitanian sat back, roaring with laughter and drinking. Stories like that set one afire. Even the poets are poking their fingers into the pie. I expect you've heard that new song about the Saracens? It's only poetic fancy, of course, but it's very flattering to our heroism. It's called. . . . Damn it! What is the thing called? It's all the rage and you hear it all day and every day. . . . Oh, yes! The *Chanson de Roland*."

<sup>1</sup> He was also the inventor of the King's Evil (scrofula—chronic cervical adenitis of scrofulo-tubercular origin). It was from the time that they were consecrated that the Kings, freshly anointed with the holy oil, acquired the habit of performing miracles. They used to pass through the sick, kneeling in long lines, and on the face of each they made the Sign of the Cross, saying: "The King touches thee, God will cure thee." Louis XV, after his consecration, touched two thousand scrofulous suppliants, Louis XVI two thousand four hundred. But these sovereigns prudently contented themselves with a pious wish. The formula was changed to: "May God cure thee." Charles XI could raise no more than a hundred and twenty odd to touch. Some claim that this ceremony was initiated by Clovis, for whose consecration a dove brought a special phial of holy oil. Sceptics, however, refuse to admit that these miracles were performed before Robert the Pious.

*The Normans Capture an Island*

"If I told you what the Normans have been doing in Sicily, you wouldn't believe me. At the moment they are engaged in nothing less than carving out a kingdom for themselves. They're pretty good at the job of pinching islands, those jolly rascals! They did it in a trice, four years ago, in 1062, and all because one day some Norman pilgrims on the way back from Jerusalem stopped at Saint Michael of Gargano on the Adriatic—thanks to their own Saint Michel in Normandy, they had a soft spot for the place. The inhabitants of Salerno begged them to rid them of a marauding band of Saracens. To be asked to cut up a bunch of infidels was just what the doctor ordered, of course, for the Normans, and they did the job with great gusto. Then the people of Salerno begged them to stay. They offered them citrons, almonds, nuts and other delicacies and robes and mantles of purple. Nothing doing. The Normans wanted to go home, and home they went. Others, however, their mouths watering at the tales the pilgrims told them, decided to take the road to this earthly paradise.

"They were a seasoned band of warrior knights, practitioners of robbery with violence, who pillaged and spared neither old nor young, neither men, women nor children, neither goods profane nor goods sacred, and Calabria suffered three plagues at one and the same time—cholera, famine and the Normans. The Pope excommunicated them and raised an army against them. They crushed him at Civitate. Then, however, they really were in a quandary—they had thrashed the Pope! They flung themselves at the feet of their captive and implored him to impose a penance equal to the enormity of their sin. Leon IX complimented them on their devout sentiments, gave them his benediction and set about planning his vengeance. He died, however, the following year. His successor officially recognised the Normans' conquests, both present and future in Apulia, Calabria and Sicily (lands, incidentally, over which Rome had no jurisdiction whatsoever) and granted to their blond, herculean leader, Robert Guiscard, the title of Duke.<sup>1</sup> And that, I think, is about all I have to show you on this flamboyant autumn day in the year 1066," concluded Chronossus. "I think now we might come down from the Angevin battlements."

"I agree," replied Juliette. "These autumn evenings are pretty chilly."

<sup>1</sup> Such was this Robert's prestige that he inspired respect even in his sons. His son Roger II later took the title of the King of the Two Sicilies and granted religious freedom and equality of status to Norman Catholics, the Greek dissidents, the Jews and the Mussulmans alike—all, of course, within the strict framework of the Norman feudal system. As a result, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies at the beginning of the twelfth century presented to the world the incredible spectacle of a kingdom in which the vassals obeyed their sovereign and where religious freedom and tolerance reigned.

"The sun is settling to rest in the bed of the Loire. The shadows are lengthening over forest and meadow. The serfs have crept into their huts. . . ."

"Let's just have a peep at the house itself, and then we'll go," said Juliette.

"Certainly—nothing could be easier," replied Chronossus. "All we have to do is to disguise ourselves as ghosts. That is the obligatory evening dress for visits to these ancient strongholds."

### *A Really Feudal Evening*

"I have already mentioned that wooden strongholds like ours make a splendid bonfire. That's why they don't make old bones; but those modern strongholds, with their walls fifteen feet thick are real fortresses which will stand up right into the atomic age. The hillside just here wasn't quite steep enough, so the serfs brought up earth and stones and built this artificial moat. Into the walls of it they built our cellars and water-tanks. You've already seen the main moat full of water, and the wooden palisade and the drawbridge leading to the main portals of the *château* on the first floor. The ground floor is taken up with cellars and granaries, for a *château* is a storehouse as well as a refuge. I'll show you quickly round the second floor—the girls' room, the boys' room, those of the guard and look-outs, the guest room for visiting knights—inns are few and far between and quite unworthy, anyway, of a feudal lord—and finally, the chapel. A stool, a chest and a bed in each room is all we require. The beds, as you see, are big enough for three or four people."

"Well! that's a nice habit, to be sure!" exclaimed Juliette. "D'you mean to say that you sleep four in the same bed?"

"Well—er—you see—er," replied Chronossus, a bit embarrassed, "that is, it keeps one warm, and that's very important when one goes to bed naked."

"And naked to boot!"

"Important, as I was saying, when you haven't got a fireplace in your room. Oh well! you might as well know it, *chère* Madame, among us the supreme proof of friendship is to invite your friend to share your bed."

"In that case," retorted Juliette wryly, "I fear that we shall never become real friends."

"The loss is entirely mine, *chère* Madame, entirely mine. Will you please follow your guide? On the first floor the lord's room is no more luxurious than the others, but it has a fireplace, behind that curtain which forms a sort of private retreat. It is here that he has his dressing room, where

he occasionally has himself bled, and where the women take the smaller children to keep them warm. The kitchen is in a special annexe, a lean-to of the *château* itself, on account of the danger of fire; but it has this door leading straight into the great hall, in which the master lives, eats, dispenses justice, calls his vassals to conference and plays dice or chess—when, that is, he is not sitting in the kitchen, which is the only place that has a fire all day. All the windows are covered with sheets of oiled cloth; glass windows are still a luxury reserved for the churches alone. This evening a fire has been lit in the great hall, for there is a guest to dinner.

“A large trestle table has been brought in—what they call ‘laying the table’. To the usual joints of pork and venison have been added roast peacock and swan in honour of the guest, and all the dishes have been seasoned with those black sauces, made principally from pounded pepper, ginger cloves and nutmeg. I expect, too, that they have served up something from the fishpond or even perhaps a salmon from the Loire. Those sauces set your throat on fire, but the wine round here is very good and has been appropriately spiced.

“There you see their seats—chairs with backs for the members of the family, and for the rest of the company trusses of straw. The floor, too, is covered with straw, on which the company now sprawls at ease in a circle round the huge fireplace.

“Our guest is leaning on his elbow, his head in the lap of one of the daughters of the house; through the opening in his blouse she has slipped her hand beneath his linen shirt and is gently scratching his chest. That is a politeness one owes to one’s guest, for hospitality demands that he should be put at his ease. And isn’t it, indeed, one of the joys of life to be gently scratched—particularly when one doesn’t get a bath very often! The Countess looks encouragingly at her daughter. Mother and daughters wear long cloaks, open from top to bottom, over an under-garment; a belt marks the waist, the arm-holes are wide and loose, and the sleeves are tight-fitting and gathered at the wrist; the material is patterned with roses and four-leaf clover, except that of the Countess herself, which is of white damask embroidered with gold. Fashion, I’m sorry to have to say, has not changed much since the days of the Merovingians, perhaps because woman, from the time she had been forced to live in the midst of an armed camp, has forgotten that she is a woman.”

#### *To Each Soldier His Beldame*

“She is no longer completely her husband’s servant, for she now has the right to succeed to the property and the possession of the *seigneurie*. Then there has been another great step forward—the man looks upon his wife

as the bringer of a dowry; by marrying frequently, he amasses quite sizable profits, and the baron who has not repudiated two or three wives is a poor and sorry sort of nobleman.

"As regards modesty, she fears no one; established custom requires that she should court men, who are sometimes cruel. Woman is a useful chattel, at times a most agreeable chattel, man is a free agent, and occasions are not lacking when he has been known to clinch an argument with a punch on the nose.

"Woman then has grown up in the school of our splendid, virile energy. And to tell you the whole truth, if our barons of this eleventh century are rough and ready warriors, there floats around their spouses a very distinct aura of the virago.

"This evening they are all chatting pleasantly. The visiting knight is a good talker, who knows how to pay for his dinner with amusing stories and the latest gossip, while the daughter of the house continues her comforting ministrations. I dare say he has told them the story of the chatelaine Aubrée, who had a tower of exceptional height built at Ivry. She was so delighted with her architect, that she had his head cut off to prevent him from placing his skill at the disposal of her neighbours. But she also desired to live as she pleased in her famous tower and she turned out her husband, who made a forceful return to the conjugal nest and stabbed her to death. Or perhaps the story of the famous Mabilie, the wife of the Count of Montgomery, who took great pleasure in fleecing the nobles of the *seigneurie* until she had reduced them to begging on the roads. One night when she went to bed, she found four of her victims waiting in her room to cut off her head.

"I wonder if our knight had ever heard of Julienne, to whom her husband entrusted the defence of their *château* against her father? Finding herself besieged, she proposed a parley to her father, and when he appeared she loosed off an arrow at him, but missed. Hunger eventually forced her to surrender. The father demanded that his daughter should descend naked on a rope from the top of the tower right down into the moat—a cruel punishment, for the time was mid-winter.

"Oh yes! there's one bit of news that he will certainly have told them. It appears that last week the Normans brought off another of their *coups*. William the Bastard has landed in England and has crushed the Saxons at the battle of Senlac. It has further been positively asserted that he hastened on to London, where he had himself crowned King. The burghers of London, who, after all, were quite used to being invaded<sup>1</sup> couldn't do

<sup>1</sup> A habit which, after the Normans, they seem to have dropped completely, as Philip of Spain, Napoleon and Hitler can testify.

anything about it, and lo and behold, another fine colony has been added to the Norman crown!

"Well—the knight has more than done his duty in regaling his hosts with hair-raising stories and bits of authentic news. We must now accompany him to his bedchamber. The daughter of the house brushes off the bits of straw from the visitor's breeches and lights his way up the staircase. She knows her duty, of which the Comtesse has already reminded her: 'Make neither fuss nor strife, go sleep with him and in all things attend his pleasure.'"

### *A Burgeoning France*

"Well!" exclaimed Juliette. "They are pretty fresh, your Frenchmen of the eleventh century."

"No—no," replied Chronossus. "They are not fresh at all; indeed, to a delicate nose, they are rather disgusting. They are men with a strong bouquet of their own, but they are ebullient, they are full of ferment. And I know nothing more ridiculous than the judgement passed on them by one of their contemporaries, the author of the *Life of Saint Alexis*, which is one of the first works written in the French language and which begins:

"Bon fut le siècle au temps des anciens,  
Car foi y était, et justice, et amour,  
Croyance aussi, dont maintenant n'y a pas beaucoup.  
Il est tout changé, il a perdu sa couleur  
Jamais plus ne sera tel qu'il fut aux ancêtres.

In a literary début, it would be difficult to cram more damned nonsense into five lines. To bemoan the old days—when we are just emerging from five centuries of barbarism! To deplore the lack of faith—when the Cluny monks are blazing a trail across the whole world, when *Notre Dame la Grande* in Poitiers is raising its mighty arches to Heaven, when everywhere Roman art is confirming the authority of dogma! No, no! Never, indeed, had the Church been more sovereign than in the eleventh century.

"But a world teeming with animals and human beings is advancing down the corridors of time, thrusting forward to its very portals, invading its lintels and bursting forth in vivid colours. The violence and the sensuality of the feudal world is burgeoning in the grim and austere temples. In a word—France is breaking into bud! And the springtime of her life will burgeon during the two centuries on the threshold of which we now stand, the two centuries which, beyond all doubt, are the most bountiful



in all our history. Timid, furtive faith will stride forth with fervent speed, the enslaved serfs will gain their freedom, the *bourgeoisie*, which is now of no account, will bring new life to the towns and wrest for themselves civic liberty; while the King, who is also of no account now, will re-fashion a kingdom in unique alliance and concord with his peoples against the feudal lords. The rough and ready warriors will write the epic of the crusades and learn honour. And the women will re-discover love."

## Love and Hate, Bloodshed and Gaiety

A.D. 1095—*The First Crusade. France takes up arms to deliver Christ; But, The Twelfth Century—The King stays at home and tends his cabbage patch. The awakening of the principle of kingship. The vassals flock to the King and the standards of Saint Denis against the Emperor of Germany (1124). The villeins re-discover the damnable idea of profit-making and re-invent commerce. A good businessman doesn't go crusading; he waits till the Crusaders have opened up the eastern markets for him. The stern-post, the compass, the horse-shoe, the horse-collar and the windmill all combine to bring about the liberation of the serfs, the expansion of agriculture and the fortunes of the businessmen. Towns grow visibly. The new inhabitants of the "bourgs", the bourgeois, win or purchase civil liberties for themselves. Kings, bishops, nobles, bourgeois and the common people band together and build the "People's Palaces"—the efflorescence of the French cathedrals (misnamed Gothic); A.D. 1079-1142—Abelard resuscitates the logic of the Ancients; A.D. 1150—Eleanor of Aquitaine and a group of gracious ladies create a fashion full of sex appeal and, with the collaboration of the troubadours, invent love. But Eleanor, flighty and inconstant, flits to England, taking her heart of gold (and her dowry) with her. Result: the first Hundred Years War (1154-1249); A.D. 1180-1223—Philip Augustus, the first of the three great Capets; A.D. 1214—France as a nation wins her first victory—Bouvines.*

"IN the spring of the year 1096 a horde of fifteen thousand arrived in Cologne. There were old men, women and children, peasants, beggars and a few adventurers, crammed, with their baggage, into two-wheeled carts, drawn by oxen shod like horses. And the Crusaders stretched out their arms towards the town, asking if this were the city of Jerusalem, towards which Peter the Hermit was leading them.

"Small, thin, swarthy of skin and hair, with a long beard, a robe of

hemp and bare-footed, the monk had spent the whole winter traversing the Auvergne, Berry, the Capetian territories and Lorraine, leading the life of an ascetic, lavishing on the poor all the money that was given to him and inflaming the crowds which packed densely round him to hear him preach on the Crusade."

"But that's absurd!" cried Juliette. "How could they possibly. . .?"

"These unfortunates were not going off to fight, but by storming Heaven, to die. The souvenir hunters pulled hairs from Peter the Hermit's mule, and the whole multitude cried: 'It is God's will! It is God's will!'

"Urban II had launched the Crusade movement, but nobody had given Peter the Hermit the task of preaching this mad enterprise; his zeal, however, and the mysticism of the people had quickly outstripped the initiative taken by the Pope. The Counts were still thinking over their preparations, the knights had hardly started to think about it at all, when the multitude, swollen by the advent of Rhenish mystics, passed through southern Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria, devoutly massacring any Jews they found *en route* and incurring, thanks to their predatory behaviour, the most horrible reprisals at the hands of the local people. In October their decimated remnants reached Asia Minor, where hunger, thirst and the Turks completed the disaster. With a handful of German nobles, Peter the Hermit alone escaped the final catastrophe."

### *France on the March*

"In the meanwhile Urban II had been busy organising the real crusade. In order to avoid too much strain on the resources of the countries through which they were to pass, it was decided that two armies should march overland through the continent and that two further armies should proceed by sea. This First Crusade saw France on the march.

"Everything that we have seen of the eleventh century had paved the way for this prodigious levy. The love of battle, pillage and conquest, nostalgic memories of fruitful expeditions to Spain, Portugal, Sicily and England, hatred of the heretic, the rapid increase in the population—all gave impetus towards expansion, as did also the re-awakening of the merchants, who hoped thus to re-open the markets of the East. The Church, which had put a curb on the violence of the rough and ready warriors by the imposition of its Peace and Truce of God, now enrolled them in the service of God, the widow and the orphan by taking over, in the name of religion, the whole knight caste. Everybody, in short, had taken up this habit of pilgrimages *en masse*, when the Turks, by taking possession of Syria, initiated a system of vexations and persecutions of

Christians, both those resident in Jerusalem and those who journeyed thence as pilgrims. This was not to be tolerated.

"A French Pope (from Cluny), Urban II, conceived the bold project of using the ebullient knights of his own country to set free the tomb of Christ. At the Council Assembly in Clermont Ferrand on November 28th 1095 he placed his idea before a concourse of Bishops and nobles. It was received with indescribable enthusiasm. 'Each and every one of us must renounce self-interest and devote himself to the cause of the Cross!' he cried. And with loud shouts of: 'It is God's will!' everybody forthwith fixed a cross of red cloth on his shoulder."

"And you yourself—what did you do?" asked Juliette.

"Me?" replied Chronossus. "I did what everybody else did, I cheered and crossed myself. What do you take me for?"

"For a pretty hard-headed fellow!" retorted Juliette.

"You flatter me," said Chronossus. "No, really—you see, at that time the Red Cross was like an epidemic. No one could escape it. Now—do you mind if I set off on the Crusade? Thank you very much.

"It was at this same Assembly of the Council that Urban II excommunicated the King of France. The Church was all powerful, the King was quite powerless. Is it not a sufficiently remarkable fact that this Pope, who lorded it over Kings and nobles alike, was himself the son of one of those villcins whom they treated like beasts in the field? That same year the intractable Urban II excommunicated all three Kings of the West—William II of England, Henry IV of Germany and Philip I of France."

*Young Man—Take Me!*

"Our own King was excommunicated because he had married an adulterous woman and had repudiated his own wife. Of itself, this was a fairly common occurrence, but the Pope had other, ulterior motives, to which I shall return later, for coming down hard on the King. In 1092, Bertrade of Montfort, the Countess of Anjou, a woman as ambitious as she was beautiful, wrote to Philip and told him that she was in love with him. This feminine initiative, which was all in keeping with our custom and which, into the bargain, came from a beautiful and voluptuous woman, pleased the King. Bertrade had good grounds for her action. Her husband, the Count of Anjou, had married her as his fourth wife; he was known as, we now should say, the 'Querulous'; he was worn out by debauch; and, as a last straw, he had corns."

"Poor Bertrade!" sighed Juliette. "Any one of those reasons would have been good enough. Though I rather wonder whether corns. . . ."

"It is a point that deserves mature reflection. Anyway, Philip, without any reflection at all, dismissed his wife, to whom he had been married for twenty years, received Bertrade at his Court and raked up two Bishops, instead of the usual one—of Troyes and of Meaux—who were willing to marry them.

"Foulque the Querulous bore no malice at all and accepted his ex-wife as the legitimate Queen. She herself managed to bring her first and second husbands to the same festive table and, to put the seal on the reconciliation, invited both of them to share her bed with her, according to the prevailing rules of friendship."

"She must have had charm—that woman!" observed Juliette.

"A charm to which the Pope, alas, remained quite insensible," replied Chronossus.

### *The Bishops Get Tangled Up in the Mire*

"The truth is that Urban II was waging war on the prevalent system of investitures even more furiously than his predecessor, Gregory VII. I have already told you that the Bishoprics were sold by auction, and in this racket Bertrade had been busier than most. But these two great Popes, supported by the monks, wished to put an end to this scandal, which led inevitably to a loosening of moral values—there was not a single priest who was not living with a 'priestess'! Against them they found ranged the King, himself of no great account, but formidable because he had with him the Bishops who were in the bidding for places; the nobles who were putting them up for auction; the priests, who clung tenaciously to their girl friends; and the people, with no particular views at all, but indignant because a bunch of Italian legates seemed to be attacking their Bishops and their priests. This was a furious quarrel, which was swept away by the Crusade and which ended, like all quarrels which involve matters of principle, in a compromise. Even so, we had monks denouncing their Abbots, Canons denouncing their Bishops, and the ecclesiastical authorities came out of the squabble with very crumpled and dirty mitres. During all this confusion, a new force was emerging and was growing rapidly; the *bourgeoisie*, whose numbers were increasing day by day in the episcopal cities. They went fishing in these troubled waters and pulled out quite a number of civic liberties."

### *From Paris to Orleans . . .*

"And these things, one and all, were to the advantage of the King of France. His quarrel with the Pope gave him a good excuse for abstaining from taking part in the Crusade. He had another, even better reason:

while France on the march was opening up the road to Jerusalem, the King of France was most anxious to open up the road from Paris to Orleans. Before he died he succeeded in gaining possession of the key-point of Montlhéry, and the road was open as far as Etampes. To reach Orleans, however, was another story, of which you still see the after-effects to this day. The Roman road went straight down via Saclas, Méréville, Autruy and Saint Lyé. But Philip and his merchants made a detour via Angerville and Toury. And to this day the *route nationale* and the railway make the same detour, because in the eleventh century the direct route was barred to the King of France by the robber *Seigneur* of Méréville."

. . . and from Constantinople to Jerusalem

"However—our four armies of Crusaders—marvel of marvels—had all assembled at the rendezvous and were spending the winter in Constantinople. We country cousins had never imagined a city as being anything but a place with five or six thousand inhabitants and surrounded by high walls; in this great capital, with its million souls, its gilded domes, its marble palaces filled with the masterpieces of ancient art, the riches of the world and ravishing Byzantine women, most knowingly made-up and attired, the temptation to forget all about Jerusalem was very strong. The Emperor was terrified lest we should settle there for good; at last, in May 1097, he succeeded in getting us to move across the Narrows. Try and imagine in your mind's eye these hundred thousand knights, followed by seven or eight hundred thousand pilgrims, setting out on their march on Jerusalem. It was a march that was to last for two years. Six hundred thousand died *en route*;<sup>1</sup> misled and betrayed by the Greek guides as they crossed the burning plain of Phrygia, those on foot perished at the rate of five hundred a day. The pack animals died in such numbers, that the baggage had to be loaded on dogs and rams. The confusion was even greater when we went into action in the narrow defiles of the Taurus mountains, harassed by the Turks, who had become experts in taking evasive action and avoiding battle. By the time we could feast our eyes on the riches of the Cilician plain, there were not more than half of us left. Then another scourge descended upon us—discord among the Barons, excited by the sight of so much potential booty. As there was no King on the Crusade, we had not one Commander but a whole number. But you can ignore all but two of them—Bohemond, a Norman from Sicily, a fine soldier, tall, fair, with greenish-blue eyes, a sceptic and an impostor among all these believers, but a great General, to whom was entrusted the

<sup>1</sup> Chronossus expresses himself with the garrulous exaggeration of the chroniclers of the age. It would be wise to divide his figures by two.

supreme command in all the battles we fought; and Godefroy de Bouillon, a charming and energetic knight, broad of chest, with blue eyes, fine features and a gentle voice. Rather in the background when the expedition started, he became so popular later, that he was elected Guardian of the Holy Sepulchre.

"We had been brought to a halt before the four hundred towers of the battlements of Antioch. After eight months of a siege in which we suffered the pangs of hunger every bit as much as did the besieged, Bohemond succeeded in getting the gates opened for him by a traitor in the Turkish garrison. It was only just in time. Two hundred thousand Turks were hastening to the assistance of the city, and from being the besiegers we quickly became the besieged. We ate some of the horses, but most of them we had to keep to fight on. So we ate leather, grass and, above all, the Turkish prisoners—roasted, all except their heads, which were stuck on long poles and exposed to the full view of the enemy. A few of the more attractive Mussulman women were spared for the amusement of the soldiery and the rest."

"A few pretty women!" exclaimed Juliette. "They were lucky that there were only four hundred thousand of you!"

"Set your mind at rest, Madame, about the pretty dears. Disease and famine had carried off at least another hundred thousand of the Crusaders. More and more knights were slipping out at night, determined to try and get back to Europe. But the rank and file preserved their faith in the divine character of the enterprise, and their faith wrought miracles. Saint Andrew appeared to a poor priest from Provence and revealed to him that the spear that had pierced our Lord's side was buried at a certain spot. And, believe it or believe it not, the spear was found, and the pilgrims went delirious with joy. Some unbelieving sceptics, however, demanded that the originator of the story should undergo trial by fire. This he did, passing successfully through the flames and having the presence of mind not to die until several days later. Bohemond, who was a great sceptic, suspected the Count of Toulouse of having staged the whole thing, but the rank and file were as firm as a rock in their belief in the Holy Spear and were proportionately uplifted.

"The day before the Feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul, full of confidence in the divine mercy, we first went to confession and then, emerging from the gates of the city, we marched against the Turks. The Holy Spear, carried on high before us, was such a source of inspiration to us, that from the first clash of battle we broke and scattered them.

"Once again, it was the faith of the rank and file that pushed us on to the Holy City. You can imagine the tremendous joy that filled us when we

caught sight of Jerusalem, for which hundreds of thousands of men had laid down their lives without ever reaching it. After the first moments of intoxication, we noted that the town was furnished with solid ramparts and defended by a formidable garrison, and that it would be able to put up a resistance at least equal to that of Antioch. The enemy had destroyed our possible sources of water supply, and thirst threatened to be our undoing. The Shilo spring was choked with the soldiers who had fallen into it and with the bodies of animals. Strong men fought to the death over any place where a trickle of water emerged through the fissures in the rock, while the weaker among us had to be content to slake our thirst at the fetid puddles. Huddled all round the spring itself were the sick, who could not cry out, for their tongues were parched and swollen, and who used silently to open their mouths and stretch out suppliant hands towards those fortunate ones who, they saw, had managed to obtain some water.

"The Barons realised that unless the attack were speeded up, they would have to abandon all hope of success, and they made a last, heroic effort. Of all the prodigious feats of the Crusade, the taking of Jerusalem on July 15th 1099 by forty thousand emaciated men was the most truly astonishing.

"The atrocities that were then committed in the Holy City defy description. It is true that we had undergone incredible hardships. . . . All the same, you would not believe me if I were to quote to you an official letter written from Laodicea two months later by the Cardinal Legate Daimbert, the Count of Toulouse and Godefroy de Bouillon to the Pope:

'If you wish to know what we did with the enemy found in Jerusalem, know then that in the porticos of Columbus and in the temples our men waded in the unholy blood of the Saracens, and our accoutrements were soaked in it to above our knees.'

"I admire your fervour," observed Juliette. "At the very place where Christ said: 'Love one another' . . ."

"There was one episode that was even more atrocious—the methodical massacre of prisoners, old men, women and children that was ordered three days after the capture of the city, because the Barons feared they would be attacked by forces coming from Egypt and would be betrayed by the inhabitants."

*The Crusaders seek Peace—and Saracen Beauties*

"After that, quite a lot of our people refused to return to their native



*châteaux* and became colonisers. They adopted long robes, passed their time in the baths and built themselves luxurious houses, designed and decorated by native artists. Some of them learned to speak Arabic, married Syrians or Armenians or even Saracens who had allowed themselves to be baptised. Those who had been paupers in France found themselves opulent here, and many a man who did not own even a village in France now reigned in Asia over a whole town. Why should they go back to the West, when the East was offering them all that their hearts could desire? This country was at least as good as—nay, better than—Spain or Sicily. Nor did they lose their military virtues, and they defended their conquests and the Holy Sepulchre with the greatest vigour.

“At the same time, the merchants of France and Italy—Marseillais, Pisans, Genoese and Venetians—helped the Frankish King of Jerusalem to capture the maritime towns of Syria, and the Turkish ports became Christian ports to the greatest possible advantage of trade and commerce.

“As reinforcements arrived but very spasmodically, Orders of warrior monks were founded—The Order of Saint John, called the Hospitallers, the Order of the Knights Templar and the Order of the Brothers of the House of Germany—or the Teutonic Knights. It was these warrior monks, much more than the Crusaders themselves, who became the real bearers of western civilisation to the East.

“Such, then, was this extraordinary enterprise, abundant in suffering and violence, in perfidy and heroism, in barbarism and miracles. And you will admit, I hope, that even though there was not much else to our heads except our helmets, we at least had plenty of guts.

“For us at the time, one fact emerged clearly—the triumph of the Papacy which had organised it all. But the ultimate result was the quite astounding ascendancy, achieved at incredible speed, of the King and the *bourgeois*, who had remained quietly at home. Urban II had guaranteed great benefits to those who were prepared to undertake to walk in the way of God—salvation in the world to come and, for the plebs in this world, exemption from the payment of poll tax (which put them on an equal footing with the knights who were exempted from all servile taxation); he also guaranteed loans without interest (the only snag here being that in these circumstances no one was prepared to lend money). The next thing we saw was a wave of selling; the feudal lord who one day was bursting his sides with laughter at a brother feudal lord for selling his properties for a song, came along the next day, roused to a pitch of frenzy at the thought of a Crusade, and disposed of his lands for a handful of crowns. The women who remained behind in the *châteaux* were reduced to circumstances of most straightened distress.”

"But surely," said Juliette, "these conjugal deserters, living like fighting cocks in the Holy Land, could easily have sent their poor wives some Red Cross parcels. . . ."

"A lot they cared! They had but one idea—to colonise. Philip himself was actively engaged in the countryman's traditional business of increasing his holdings. For 60,000 sous he bought Bourges from a nobleman who was anxious to be off.

"The *bourgeois* were doing the same thing, buying—not land, but civic rights and liberties.

"The extent to which the monarchy had progressed became clear in 1124, when the Emperor of Germany presumed to intervene in a quarrel between the King and the Duke of Blois and declared that he would burn Rheims. The King, Louis VI, the Fat, raised the red oriflamme of Saint Denis, and all his vassals flocked to his support—including the Duke of Blois. The German called it a day and went home again."

#### *The Emergence of the Bourgeois*

"Now—these *bourgeois*, who have suddenly appeared on the scene—do you know where they came from? From nowhere, and certainly not from the towns. On the contrary, they went into the towns, or, to be perhaps a little more precise, they attached themselves to the towns, as they attached themselves, for example, to Paris on the right bank, opposite the *ci te*. They were clod-hopping peasants, obsessed with the craze for travel, superfluous younger sons, in whom a queer idea had germinated, the idea of making profits. At the same time as a certain Bishop, congratulated by the Venetian merchants on having purchased a *pallium*—a robe—for half its value in Constantinople and horrified at having committed the sin of making a profit, had hastened to send the difference to the seller, these poor devils devoid of land suddenly found out that it was a splendid idea to buy at a low price in order to sell at a higher one.

"This little brain-wave ushered in a new world. It would, however, have remained nothing more than a brainwave, if the Mussulmans had not re-opened the Mediterranean and the Crusaders the markets of the East; if the hinged stem-rudder and the compass (from Asia, in its original form simply a magnetised needle stuck in a straw and floating in a bowl of water) had not greatly facilitated navigation; if the Arabs had not given us horseshoes; and finally if the rigid shoulder collar had not enabled the horse to pull heavy loads without being strangled.

"Now—please don't ask me which came first—the idea or the means; did commerce create the merchant or did the merchant create commerce?"

That is a question we can safely leave to material philosophers<sup>1</sup> or to those idealists who find it so easy to explain life by completely ignoring one half of it. The thing that mattered was that the idea and the means had joined hands. Let's have a look at one of these *nouveaux riches*, shall we?"

### A Nouveau Riche

"A member of a large and poor family of Picard serfs, he was born towards the end of the eleventh century. As soon as he was old enough to feel that he stood a chance of getting clean away, he bolted. His master failed to catch him. Like numberless other miserable wretches throughout the ages, he became a beachcomber, searching and picking among the flotsam thrown up by the tide. Shipwrecks were frequent in those days, and a dismal piece of good luck one day brought him a windfall which enabled him to set up as an itinerant pedlar. He had amassed just a few sous, when he got the chance of joining a group of merchants. (You remember how the merchants had taken to going about in groups for greater security.) Business then prospered so well that he was soon in a position to join his colleagues as a partner, to charter a ship in conjunction with them and to engage in the carrying trade along the coasts of England, Denmark, Flanders and northern France; in those days, when all produce was consumed or disposed of on the spot, all he had to do was to buy goods at some place where they were plentiful and then sell them elsewhere, where they were scarce; in those days, too, when there was no time in any year when there was not a dearth of something somewhere, when making a monopoly in grain had become a traditional practice, all he had to do was to buy where the harvest had been good and sell where the people were dying of starvation—and pocket prodigious profits in the process."

### *The Towns become the Burghs of the Bourgeoisie*

"But these merchants were not all the time at sea, on the road or sailing the rivers (which still continued to be the main lines of communication). They needed permanent establishments in which to spend the winter with

<sup>1</sup> "The windmill gave rise to feudal society, and the steam mill gave rise to capitalist society." This fine phrase from the Communist Manifesto is justly famous among the Marxists. It is full of half-truths or half full of truth. But what about taking a look at the horse-collar? From the horse-collar emerged transportation, from transportation commerce, from commerce the *bourgeoisie*, from the *bourgeoisie* civic rights and liberties, from civic liberty the third estate, from the third estate the French revolution and Denis Papin, from Denis Papin steam-driven machinery, from steam capitalism, from capitalism the Russian revolution. To recapitulate in brief: from the horse-collar there emerged the Russian revolution. I hope that people will be very grateful to me for having brought my grist to the materialist mill—to the water mill, of course. For the windmill, which made its appearance in the twelfth century, did not give rise to a feudal society, for the simple reason that such a society had already been in existence for three hundred years. The windmill made flour.

their families and in which to store their merchandise. To this end, they used to settle at the foot of some fortified town, right under the very shadow of its ramparts, to which they clung, literally, like a swarm of buzzing bees. Very soon this new type of hive gave rise to the necessity for a new set of laws. How could the Bishop of an ancient city become the Queen of these bees, searching avidly for gain? Gain and profit were sinful. How could the Bishop possibly participate in the organisation of free circulation of trade? How could a judicial trial settle a commercial dispute? Two totally different worlds found themselves face to face, and if you would like one last example of the absurdity of the situation, here you are. These *nouveaux riches* could marry only serfs (soon impoverished nobles would be giving them their daughters in marriage but for that we must wait about a century); but, according to feudal law, if they married a serf they themselves became serfs!

“Add to that the fact that these merchants produced nothing themselves—which was something quite new—but bought everything they required for their daily needs, and you will realise why we very soon had hordes flocking into the towns—vagabonds and absconding serfs, who set up as bakers, bootmakers, stevedores, haberdashers, inn-keepers and so on. We shall not see another migration like this from the country to the towns until the great industrial revolution of the nineteenth century. The town was no longer a hive, it had become a powder mill.”

#### Commune! A New Name—a Detestable Name!

“Then, as in the nineteenth century, technical innovations gave birth to entirely new classes of society and presaged entirely new ways of life. The workers will later have their revolutions—those of 1830, of 1848 and of the *Commune*. The *bourgeois* staged the present revolution on a communal basis.

“The fact that these revolutions occurred to the north of the Loire is due to the greater communal activity of the region where the Bishops<sup>1</sup> were more feudally minded than in the Midi, where there still survived some vague vestiges of Roman municipal administration. Cambrai, Saint Quentin and Beauvais raised the standard of revolutionary agitation. The very wise Bishop Ivo of Chartres was affronted. The Abbot Guibert of Nogent cried: ‘*Commune!* a new name, a detestable name!’ But it was he,

<sup>1</sup> I have, perhaps, over-simplified this feudal *imbroglio*. The Bishop was not always the sole ruler of the city. In Chartres, for example, the Count retained the city, the ramparts, most of the gates, half the customs, the finances and all the river upstream; the Bishop, apart from his palace, possessed one gate, a small portion of the river-front and exercised general supervision over the counterfeiters. Generally speaking, however, the nobles ruled in the *châteaux* and the Bishops in the towns.

too, who admitted that the bloody troubles in Laon had been due to the 'Perversity of the Bishops of the city'.

"I would like to describe one of these communal revolts to you.

"Gaudri, Bishop of Laon, treated the members of his diocese like serfs. He marched through the streets followed by a black slave, who acted as his executioner. To get rid of one Gérard de Quierry, a householder who annoyed him, Gaudri had him assassinated—in church.

"The *bourgeois* of the city took advantage of one of his absences (in England) to form themselves into a *commune*. When he returned and heard what had happened the Bishop was furious, but a large sum of money appeased him. He even swore that he would respect the *commune*, and Louis VI (also well paid) gave it his confirming sanction in the year 1111. The next year the King came to Laon for the Festival of Holy Week, and the Bishop hoped to use his presence there to destroy the *commune*. The *bourgeois*, warned of what was afoot, offered Louis four hundred livres to adhere to his undertaking. The Bishop offered him seven hundred to break it. The Bishop won, and the *commune* was abolished. The King, foreseeing the storm that would inevitably break, slipped out of the town at dawn.

"The effrontery of the Bishop, who proposed to raise the money from the *commune* in order to pay the man who had betrayed it, was the final spark which exploded the fury of the *bourgeois*. The shops were closed, and a few isolated cries of 'La Commune! La Commune!' were heard. Gaudri declared contemptuously: 'And what do these people think they will accomplish through this disturbance? If John, my negro, pulls the nose of even the most determined of them, the fellow would not even dare to complain to me.'

"The next day, however, bands of *bourgeois* armed with swords, axes, bows and bill-hooks flung themselves at the episcopal palace, killed all those who tried to defend it and searched everywhere for the Bishop, whom they eventually found, cowering in a barrel. Thiégaud, a serf from the Abbey of Saint Vincent, who was leading the assault, dashed out the Bishop's brains with an axe. Others broke all his bones and stabbed him in a thousand places. Then the tumult spread. The mob rushed to the houses of the nobles and the clergy, who escaped death only by disguising themselves and fleeing. The *bourgeoises*, as ardent as their husbands, insulted, beat and tore the rich robes off the backs of any noble ladies who had the misfortune to fall into their hands. Hotfoot on the heels of pillage followed incendiarism, and the cathedral itself was set on fire.

"The murder of a Bishop could not be allowed to go unavenged. The King's army marched against the insurgent city and took it by assault.

Returning in force, the nobles in their turn massacred the *bourgeois*, pursuing them through the streets and even into the churches. Then the peasants from the countryside poured into the town and for days on end pillaged the deserted houses. The *commune* disappeared in a bath of blood. And yet, sixteen years later, the King consented to its re-establishment—and by so doing pouched a nice little packet.

“While all this was happening in Laon, in Amiens it was the Bishops who supported the *bourgeois* against the Count. The city was plunged into a guerilla street-war, which lasted for four years. Then the King came down on the side of the *bourgeois* and tipped the scales in their favour.

“But the communal revolution, never violent in the Midi, was also not always so bloody an affair in the north. Very frequently the *bourgeois* purchased their rights, with the approval and support of the King. In his own domain, the latter sold these rights at a high price—so high, indeed, that there were cases in which the King threatened to impose supplementary taxation on those recalcitrants who refused to purchase the blessings he was offering them!”

“You’ll be saying next that the *bourgeois* acquired liberty in spite of themselves,” said Juliette.

“That, too, occurred in some places. You see, there was no question of that noble and cherished liberty of which we sing in the *Marseillaise*, but rather a question of far more definite and concrete advantages, on which the merchants put the price they considered equitable. In a world of privilege, they purchased privilege, even at the price of servitude.”

“Better and better Mr. Paradox Chronossus!”

“All right—take Arras as an example. There, these champions of liberty tried to pretend they were serfs of the monastery of Saint Vaast, in order to be able to claim exemption from octroi duty, which was a privilege enjoyed by the serfs.”

### *The Serfs Gain their Freedom, and Agriculture Becomes “Horse-powered”*

“The rush of people to the towns made no difference at all to the countryside, where more than enough were being born to fill the gaps. I have no actual figures, but I should not be surprised to hear that our population had increased by fifty per cent during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Be that as it may, by round about 1300 there were to be something like twenty-four millions of us, of whom only one-tenth dwelt in the towns. And the area under cultivation was as great then as it is now. I leave you to judge for yourself how the peasants must have cleared, colonised and cultivated.

“I am sure that I have already told you of the nobles who were enter-

prising enough to create a species of colonies with 'new towns', all beautifully laid out in precise mathematical rectangles. But the mass of the peasants preferred to advance independently and piecemeal; and needy nobles, rather than demand days of free labour and poultry, preferred to farm out their land, both cultivated and uncultivated. Thus, the serf, in paying his rent, was also paying for his emancipation—in money, since now he was able to sell his produce in the towns.

"Money was now at last circulating, and the grain was emerging from the granaries. The invention of the windmill, in which the wind took the place of the woman harnessed to the wheel, arrived just in time to transform all this grain into flour.

"All this large-scale cultivation, however, would not have been possible if the horse, replacing the serf, had not been harnessed to the plough, thanks, once again, to the rigid horse-collar. If it is true to say that today agriculture is becoming mechanised, it is equally true to say that during the twelfth century it became 'horse-powered'.

"Side by side with the horse and the windmill it is right that the monk should take his place. During the twelfth century the monks of Saint Bernard, who were called Cistercians after their founder-hostel in Cîteaux and always built their monasteries in the middle of a forest or a swamp, were implacable cultivators. In those days the waste lands were populated by hermits and anchorites, and Saint Bernard, who persuaded men to join their ranks, was 'the terror of mothers and young matrons'. Born of a noble family, this Saint, who was a great mystic, a vehement orator and a forceful politician, handled a scythe as well as any peasant and laid great store by his reputation as 'the perfect harvester'."

### *A Reactionary Genius*

"Saint Bernard descended like a shaft of forked lightning among the simoniac Bishops, the lecherous priests and the landowners turned fat and greasy *rentiers*. Even the monks of Cluny, with their monastic empire spread over the whole Christian world and their love of antique culture, were damnable in his eyes. He forbade his Cistercian cultivators to open a school or to read a book. Chastity, obedience, silence and ignorance<sup>1</sup> were inviolable rules. The monk-landowner was to him the same as an incendiary or a common thief.

"He was an extraordinary man, of whom it can be said that he ruled western Christianity from 1125 until his death in 1153. Did he not constitute himself, on his own authority, the supreme arbiter between two rival

<sup>1</sup> Ignorance even of religion. The Cistercian monks were only allowed to know four prayers by heart, and nothing else.

Popes and give his judgement not in favour of the one who had the better legal claim, but of the one who appeared to be the more worthy. After each striking achievement of this kind, he used to return to his prayers in the monastery of Clairvaux, which he had created in 1114 in a wild and desolate valley near Bar-sur-Aube.

"His cell was like a prison.<sup>1</sup> The curve of the staircase enclosed it in an angle in which he set up his bed; a log of wood, covered with some straw, served as his pillow. In the wall, under the mansard roof, was the only seat in the cell. When he wished to get up or to sit down, he had to do so bent double, or risk bumping his head. It was there that he lived for more than twenty years, and it was there that he died.

"Of noble birth and handsome in his youth, he had ruined his body with maceration and mortified his flesh to such an extent that he sometimes drank oil instead of water; a mystic, he was so far removed from this world that once he rode all day long on his mule along the banks of Lake Geneva and—never saw it! Yet he was a political force that intervened in the affairs of Kings and Popes; a man with energy which devoured fatigue, with a power of rhetoric that caused great men to tremble. He despised humanity, and yet was very sincerely the most humble of men; and he was capable—a thing unheard of in the Middle Ages—of being kind and tender not only to animals but also to Jews.

"Not one vestige survives of the work of this man of genius, who sought to stay the march of time. In Clairvaux he had imposed extremes of monastic asceticism. But as the sea calls to the rivers, so the Church attracts gifts from the faithful; and a century later his congregation had no cause to cast an envious eye upon even the luxuries of Cluny.

"He had striven to suppress the meddling of Kings in the appointment of Bishops. A century later, Philip the Fair was reigning over a Gallic church.

"He was nervous lest the Papacy should become transformed into a secular monarchy. Under Boniface VIII it became so.

"A fervent preserver of the established order, he had set his face against the liberalising movement of the *bourgeoisie*, which was destined to gather strength until it culminated in the French Revolution.

"He fulminated against the sensuousness of Roman sculpture—'this beauty which finds its source in distortion, and this distortion which aspires to beauty'—at the very moment, 1144, when the luminous sensuality of the choir of Saint Denis was about to shine forth.

"The Faith that was in him despised Reason—at a time when students were hastening from all the corners of Europe to imbibe the rationalist teachings of his rival, Abelard.

<sup>1</sup> Today it is, in fact, a famous prison.



“And this ardour, which would brook no obstacle, sent the French—on a second Crusade that was to end in disaster—to massacre other infidels. ‘The Knight of Christ,’ he asserted, ‘kills with a clear conscience and dies in greater tranquility; in dying, he finds his own salvation; in killing, he is doing the work of Christ.’

“Finally, the death of this champion of asceticism in 1153 coincided with the birth of courteous and glamorous love.”

### *Heloïse and Abelard*

“In opposition to Saint Bernard there arose the forerunner of Descartes (and the successor to the Armorican, Pelagus), the Breton logician named Peter Abelard. He was by no means the free-thinker he has been made out to be. But he did base his faith on reasoned, methodical doubt. He thought that Good and Evil did not emerge, pre-fabricated, from the cult of reliquaries, but came rather from the conscience of man, enlightened by the love of God. He preached religious tolerance six centuries in advance of his time, and as a torch of enlightenment for heretics he preferred the light of Reason to the flames of the stake. But in his logical reasoning, as in the fanatical humility of Saint Bernard, there blazed the same pride in a France that was now adolescent. He had faith in the power of Reason to induce Faith. In 1140 Saint Bernard presided over the Council of Sens to declare its condemnation of ‘this tortuous viper’.

“Abelard was the real founder of the University of Paris. I have just told you that students came from all over Europe to hear him. He was not only an incomparable dialectician; he was also a charming man, handsome and elegant, a poet, a singer and a musician, a combination of attributes rarely to be found in a Professor of the Sorbonne.

“That, too, was Heloïse’s opinion. She was living with her uncle, Canon Fulbert, and it so happened that Abelard also took lodgings in his house. She was an attractive girl of sixteen, deeply versed in philosophy. Abelard gave her private lessons, as a result of which a son was born, whom they named Astrolabus. The seducer played the game. He proposed marriage, and when Heloïse refused his proposal with quotations from Seneca, Theophrastus and Saint Paul, he even insisted on marriage.

“But this revolutionary little chit of a girl, in an age when women gave themselves in marriage as though they were perishable goods, invoked Saint Paul to underline the seriousness of marriage: ‘The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.’ She said that was point one. Then she turned to Theophrastus (*De Nuptiis*): ‘Should the sage marry? The answer is—no. Why? Because a woman will prevent him from

devoting himself to the philosophies and because it is not possible to serve two masters at the same time—his wife and his books. Women are always after something or other. Until they get it, they spend every night in interminable complaints—‘Why did you keep looking at the woman next door?’ ‘What were you saying to that little nursemaid?’ and so on. To look after and feed a poor woman is a burden, and to share life with a rich one is a torment. If she is attractive, all the men will run after her. If she’s ugly, it is she who will run after all the men; and so you are faced either with the task of protecting something that everybody else wants to grab, or with the bore of hanging on to something that nobody else wants.’ ‘That,’ said Heloïse, ‘is us as we really are; and here is my decision. Remain a philosopher and a bachelor, lest of the great Abelard I make a domesticated ass.’

“‘You argue well,’ replied the philosopher. ‘But I shall marry you all the same.’ He was approaching forty at the time, an age when one often discovers that it is possible to come to terms with pure logic, particularly if one happens to be in love with an attractive young lass of sixteen.

“His young lass then turned her attack on to his second argument, namely, the disturbing and confusing effects of fornication on the purely mental processes, and applying the indisputable logic of a syllogism, she refused him her favours.

“That, however, was more than the philosopher could stand, and he took her by assault.

“But Heloïse loved him with a love that was sublime. As her hero could not do without her, she argued, let him use her body—abuse it if you like to put it that way—so that one day, when he was tired of her, he could return to his high destiny as a thinker and a cleric. ‘I think it is lovelier and a greater honour,’ she wrote, ‘to be the mistress of Abelard than the Empress of Augustus.’<sup>1</sup>

“In the ardour of her youth and the youthful years of her admirable century, she was being perfectly sincere. It is probable, too, that Abelard himself realised that she was completely uninterested in everything except the glory of her own self-effacement.

“But in the end Heloïse gave way and consented to marriage. ‘There now remains nothing more that we can do,’ she said with tears in her voice, ‘than to cast ourselves away and to suffer as much as we have loved.’

“Her words were more prophetic than she realised. Abelard had agreed

<sup>1</sup> It was from the convent that the nun Heloïse wrote the following little note in retrospect: “It is true that the title *wife* sounds more holy and more binding, but I have always preferred that of *mistress*, or if you will forgive the words, that of *concubine* or *prostitute*, for the more I prostrate myself, the more I hope to find favour in your eyes and so ensure that I in no way wound the splendour of your glory.”

that the marriage should be kept secret. Uncle Fulbert hastened to tell everyone the glad news. Heloïse denied it. Abelard, to nip tumult in the bud, took Heloïse to the Abbey of Argenteuil and with his own hands dressed her in the habit of a nun.

“Could Canon Fulbert, I wonder, really have believed that Abelard wished to get rid of Heloïse? At his bidding, a number of men broke into the philosopher’s house at night and chastised him.

“There was great consternation when this became known. A crowd of students and clerics rushed to his house, and their loud lamentation filled Abelard with a shame that was harder to bear than his physical sufferings. He took refuge in the cloisters of the Abbey of Saint Denis, where he preached absolute purity to the monks. He preached the same to the Breton monks, whose Abbot he became, and he preached it again to the nuns of the convent of the Paraclete, which he founded and of which Heloïse was Abbess.

“His dream had been to finish his days at her side, as a true friend, a priest and a father, admiring her with all his soul and assisting her with his great knowledge in the execution of her functions as Abbess. But calumny and the thirst for glory, which was not quenched in him, drove him forth again. Wherever he spoke, the students again flocked to hear him.

“Perhaps, too, there had occurred a tragic misunderstanding between them in the Paraclete. He thought that she had found peace and tranquility of mind. But she had become a nun for no other reason than to please him, and for the whole of her life, Heloïse never ceased to long for Abelard.”

### *Pillars Reaching to Heaven*

“The Abbey of Saint Denis, where Abelard had sought refuge, was at the time the scene of quite astonishing activity; a swarm of masons, sculptors and master glaziers were working eagerly under the forceful direction of Suger, the Abbot. In the quarries, other workmen fashioned pillars, and the citizens, gentry and common people alike, harnessed themselves with ropes like beasts of burden and dragged the heavy pillars away. As they passed, other artisans left their own work and ran to help them with the transport of these great masses of stone, hoping thereby to acquire merit in the eyes of God and the Saints. Already a greater mass of stone had been sunk into the foundations than that which would later rise to the tops of the pointed arches, and pillar after pillar took its place, stretching high into the sky. The people of Paris were busy constructing the first basilica in the French style, to which, very stupidly, the name Gothic has been given.

"As regards the financing of the project, the Abbey itself was rich, and everybody contributed according to their means; the woman from the market gave her modest penny, and the merchants made donations in much the same way as a modern Rockefeller endows a new laboratory, while the King. . . Well, the King gave two hundred livres to the building fund of *Notre Dame* in Paris, the construction of which was started twenty years after the completion of Saint Denis.

"On June 11th 1144, the day on which the new basilica was consecrated, a huge and tumultuous crowd was present. When the Bishops emerged in procession to sprinkle the outer walls with Holy water, the officers of the King and even Louis VII himself were forced to make use of their canes to prevent them from being overwhelmed by the surging masses.

"The King's wife, the beautiful Eleanor of Aquitaine, about whom I shall have to say a few words, because she was the cause of many changes, was also present. In 1144 she had just revolutionised fashion and invented love; and she was just about to cause the first Hundred Years War between France and England."

#### *A Revolution in Fashions*

"In the very year in which he came to the throne, 1137, Louis VII contracted a fine marriage. As dowry, his wife brought him the whole of south-western France as far as the Pyrenees. He was seventeen at the time, and she a delightful and very seductive fifteen. She also brought with her some of those jolly customs of the Midi, which quite scandalised Paris.

"At that moment a new fashion had just reached us from the East, and young Eleanor adopted it with enthusiasm. Do not forget that the women had not bothered to change their style of dress for more than two hundred years—they had become so unfeminine. And then suddenly pointed shoes arrived, and the men started allowing their hair and beards to grow and tended them with curling tongs; women's dresses were made with trains, the sleeves were tight-fitting as far as the elbow, and then they widened, broadening out into panniers, which sometimes reached right down to their ankles; skirts became pleated from the hips, but the hips, the waist and the bodice were closely moulded in clinging, delicate material, sometimes goffered or ruched, veiling charms only to give emphasis to their beauty. How could Eleanor have resisted the temptation to adopt and set such a fashion? It was a mode that was a delight to all with a beautiful body—and to others, too, for that matter, who could now improve their appearance by squeezing themselves into a corsage without sleeves, which had not yet acquired the name of corset."

*The Invention of Love*

"As well as grace and seductive beauty, Eleanor introduced another thing that scandalised Paris—respect for womanhood and gracious, romantic love. While the Knights were busy writing the epic of the First Crusade with their blood, the evenings were long and lonely for their ladies left alone in the *châteaux* with their gentle pages and troubadours. This, surely, was a unique opportunity for the adolescent poets to compose and sing stirring and epic lays to the glory of their lords, fighting thus valorously to the sound of trumpet and horn. Actually, however, they did nothing of the kind. The lays they composed were sweet songs of romantic love, dedicated to their Princesses, so near, so dear, and yet so far beyond their reach. 'A fig for all your epics,' they thought. 'To sing has little merit, if the song comes not from the heart itself, and song cannot come but from a heart encompassed tenderly in love,' wrote Bernard de Ventadour.

"To those of us who had been in Syria, there was in this something rather reminiscent of oriental sugariness. And I rather think that our gallant warriors who had returned home had themselves passed on to their wives' gallants a measure of these poetic refinements, in which they nursed nostalgic memories of their days in Saracen lands. Be that as it may, it was in the Duchy of Aquitaine, in the home of the beautiful Eleanor, that romantic poetry was born of the pen of her grandfather, William, Count of Poitiers. From Poitou and Limousin it reached Provence, where Bernard Ventadour—an ex-villein, so named because he had been born in the servants' quarters of the *Château* of Ventadour, but a man of rare and sensitive feeling—sang thus to his chatelaine:

'Ma Dame, je ne vous demande  
Que m'agr er pour serviteur;  
Vous servirai comme Seigneur  
Sans que ma fortune s'amende.  
Je suis votre commandement,  
Humble, docile, gai, courtois.  
Acceptez-moi sous votre loi  
Comme votre fid le amant.'

"How could the Viscountess have helped nurturing tender feelings for such a troubadour? The Viscount kicked him out, and he took his aching heart to the Duchess of Normandy, who was young and beautiful, and had also been good.

"Enchanted with such romantic love, the cultured ladies, with Eleanor at their head, suddenly became aware that they were something more than

a mere dowry chattel. (Alas! Eleanor's dowry was about to depart from us to England; but I'll tell you about that later.) And so they formed themselves into a Court of Justice and a Magistracy of love. They disposed summarily of matrimony, and very soon they had codified love. Would it interest you to hear some of the Articles of their Code?"

"One's never too wise to learn," replied Juliette.

"With your husband's permission," said Chronossus.

"Marriage is no legitimate excuse for an abstention from love.

"He who knows not how to keep a secret is no lover.

"Love always grows—or diminishes.

"There is no savour in the delights of love you lavish without your lover's eager assent.

"In love, when death takes one the other should abstain from love for two years.

"Love will not nest where avarice reigns.

"The easier the prize, the less its value; the harder to gain the greater its delight.

"A true lover is always diffident.

"There is nothing to prevent a woman being loved by two men, or a man being loved by two women."

"I must remember that," observed Juliette.

"These Courts of Justice treated the subject of love very seriously. For instance, on one occasion sixty women assembled at the Court of the Countess of Champagne, Eleanor's daughter. Here are one or two of the problems on which they pronounced judgement:

"A young lady, joined in true love to a knight later married another; has she the right to repulse her former lover and refuse him the bounties to which she has accustomed him?"

"The judgement given by Ermengarde, Viscountess of Narbonne is categorical—"The supervention of the marital tie in no way renders null and void the rights of a previous attachment, unless the lady in question is prepared to renounce love entirely and to declare her intention of so doing."

"Another problem:

"A certain knight had been paying court to a lady, but had been unable to overcome her refusals. In good faith he then sent her some gifts, which the lady accepted with as much grace as alacrity. The severity of her attitude towards the knight did not, however, diminish in any way. The knight now complains that he has been deceived by the false hopes with which his lady's acceptance of the gifts had inspired him.

"One cannot but admire the essentially ethical judgement given by Queen Eleanor and her Tribunal—"A woman must either refuse gifts

offered to her as gages of love, or accept them and give due return, or resign herself in all patience to be relegated to the status of a venal courtesan.

“And finally, a case that was already lost before ever it was submitted:

“Is love possible between a married couple?”

“The Countess of Champagne and her Court gave the following judgement (with a mocking smile)—‘We proclaim it as the opinion of this Court that love cannot extend its privilege to a married couple. Those who truly love grant everything, mutually and freely, unconstrained by any motives of necessity; but those who are married are in duty bound to submit to each other’s will and to refuse nothing, the one to the other. . . .’

“The final paragraph is equally categorical—‘Let this judgement, given with the utmost reserve and in accordance with the opinion expressed by a large number of ladies, be regarded by you as absolute and an unquestionable and constant truth. Given this third day of the Calends of May in the year 1174.’

“The husbands went through a thin time; a gentle zephyr of discreet revolt was blowing among their wives. Marie de France wrote this sad complaint of a woman whose aged husband had kept her shut in a tower for seven years, and who, one lovely morning in spring, sighs:

J’ai souvent entendu conter  
 Que l’on pouvait jadis trouver  
 Aventure en ce pays.  
 Chevaliers trouvaient jeunes filles  
 A leur désir gentes et belles,  
 Et les dames trouvaient amants  
 Beaux et courtois, pieux et vaillants,  
 Que nul, hors elles, ne voyait,  
 Si bien que n’en étaient blâmées,  
 S’il en put jamais être ainsi,  
 Que Dieu, qui a sur tout pouvoir,  
 Fasse que je l’éprouve aussi!

“In the little ballad that follows, the woman uses her most potent weapon, her charm, to take revenge on a husband rendered uncouth by a thousand years of conjugal tyranny:

‘Je suis jolie et souffre sous l’empire  
 De mon mari que mon coeur ne désire.  
 Je vous dirai pourquoi j’en aime un autre,  
 Je suis jolie.  
 C’est que je suis petite, jeune et fraîche,  
 Je suis jolie.

Et devrais bien avoir un bon mari  
 Qui tout le jour me fît jouer et rire.  
 Je suis jolie et souffre sous l'empire  
 De mon mari que mon coeur ne désire.

"But the King and Queen of Love are the pair given to us by Chrétien de Troyes—Tristan and Iseult. A pair so perfect in their spontaneity that writers and troubadours throughout the ages have returned again and again to their story."

*The Hextra-hordinary Humour of the "Goliards"*

"Forgive me! Love, I fear, has already enticed me too far along its roseate path. Alas! these beautiful ladies, their troubadours and their courtly knights were but the *élite*. Very soon we shall find ourselves back among the rude and Rabelaisian fire-eaters. Indeed, it is quite astonishing what we do find in this ebullient, swarming century. Even in literature, side by side with the tender ballads of love, the traditional epics and the first tentative stammerings of the theatre, represented by *Le Mystère d'Adam* and acted in the church courtyards, we see the *bourgeois* drawing up the plans for their first attacks on Eve Eternal, that 'chasm of damnation',<sup>1</sup> and, to the gracious minstrels of love are added those strange minstrels of the Church, the *goliards*.

"Whence they got the name *goliards* I honestly don't know. It is possible that they owe it to Saint Bernard who, in a letter to Pope Innocent III, compared the proud Abelard, scintillating in the shining armour of his brilliant dialectics, to a Philistine, calling him 'this new Goliath'. Abelard's disciples are said to have resented the affront, and then those clowns of lecherous priests apparently went round repeating it in grotesque and garbled form. The fact remains, however, that to these vagabonds and drunkards who paid their way with song we owe a complete literature of bad lads and a quite 'hextra-hordinary' sense of humour—long before Villon or Rabelais appeared on the scene. Full of verve, they demolished everyone and everything with fierce gusto, pouring derision on the Papal Babylon, the concupiscent Canons, woman, chivalry, the *nouveaux riches* and the serfs, with equal venom and scorn. There is hardly a line of their writings that I could quote without making you blush. But I feel that you should realise that, at the same time as *Le Roman de la Rose* and the Gothic

<sup>1</sup> The *bourgeois* fables had already made common cause with the preachers for the purpose of castigating the women who trotted through the streets of Paris "too boldly *décolletées* and all exposed". As for the wives. . . . "In Paradise, between God and Adam there stood but one woman, who did not rest until she had compassed the banishment of her husband from the delights of this Paradise and had condemned Christ to the agony of the Cross."



Cathedrals were flourishing, France was reverberating with the formidable explosions of a loud and robust humour.”

*A Feminine Caprice—A Hundred Years of War*

“To bring love to her Court and subject it to her jurisdiction was great fun. But the seductive Eleanor of Aquitaine was not a woman to be content with mere judiciary pronouncements. She had need of exploits in the field of love that went further than those provided by her troubadour ushers. The King was a husband as pious as he was naïve. ‘Your people,’ he once said laughingly to an Englishman, ‘lack nothing; you have gold and silver, precious stones, silks, all in abundance. We in France have only bread, wine—and contentment.’ Eleanor did not agree with him as regards contentment. ‘I have married a monk,’ she said, ‘not a King.’ And she gave him ample evidence of her views when she accompanied him to the Holy Land on the Crusade preached by Saint Bernard, when she behaved in anything but a saintly fashion. She had favours to lavish on her uncle, Raymond of Poitiers, a regular old rip of fifty, and she fell head over heels in love with a little Saracen slave of twelve. When they returned home, she divorced her husband<sup>1</sup> and married a robust young man with a close-cropped mop of tawny hair and the neck of a bull, named Henry Plantagenet, Count of Anjou, who almost immediately afterwards inherited the throne of England. Thus Eleanor, who as her dowry had brought us a quarter of France, now handed it over, with her heart of gold and our peace of mind, to the English. From this feminine caprice resulted our first war with England, which lasted a hundred years (like the next one, too, but with periods of truce, of course) and to which Saint Louis put an end in 1259.

“In the meanwhile, with a quick bit of feudal sleight of hand Philip Augustus pouched the rest of France—Maine, Anjou, Touraine, Poitou, and Normandy into the bargain. That’s why we used to call him not Philip Augustus, but Philip the Conqueror.

“Between ourselves, this game of shove ha’penny with provinces between one Crown and another left us more or less cold. In the first place, these Angevins who reigned over England were far more French than English; otherwise, as you can well imagine, they would never have gone to live in that island, when they could have lived on the banks of the Loire; and in any case, we did live there and we knew that we were in France.”

<sup>1</sup> In those days to obtain a divorce the couple had to establish that they were cousins or equally closely related. Louis VII and Eleanor only discovered the fact after fifteen years of matrimony.

*That Foxy Peasant, the First King of France*

"Apart from these sensations and a few odd battles here and there. . . ."

"Excuse me," interrupted Juliette. "And the odd battles—did they, too, leave you cold?"

"And how! Cold as death, you may be sure. As I was saying, apart from one sensational last coup towards the end of his life, at Bouvines, Philip Augustus enjoyed one other piece of great good fortune. He reigned for forty-three years, 1180-1223, like his father; he, however, took advantage of this fact to become a real King and the first King of France. He was an energetic man, of full complexion and with bushy hair (until he went bald); a cunning and violent peasant, at a time when to be such a one paid handsome dividends; a real Capet—a lion, and at the same time a fox.

"His father and his grandfather had relied little on the towns. He himself realised that the future lay with the *bourgeois*—that is, with the merchants. He became the resolute champion of the *Communes*, and he created as many of them as he could.

"And the taxes he imposed upon merchandise in transit, on fiefs which changed hands, on the clergy (who prospered as usual) and on the Jews, gave us budgets such as are rarely to be met with. In the financial year 1202-3, these measures produced 197,000 livres of revenue against 95,500 of expenditure, leaving us with a credit balance of over 100,000 livres.

"This in its turn allowed the King to appoint State officials—bailiffs, Inspectors on circuit, charged with the duty of supervising the activities of the local provosts and so on—and, (this was indeed an innovation) to pay them in money. Philip kept his eye on them, too. On one occasion, one of the bailiffs took rather a fancy to the property of a certain knight. The latter, however, was not prepared to sell. Though he himself died very soon, his widow, too, refused to sell. The bailiff thereupon got hold of a couple of navvies, promised them some money and led them to the cemetery where the knight was buried. He opened the tomb, pulled the dead man to his feet and adjured him to sell his property. 'Silence denotes consent,' declared one of his witnesses. 'The transaction has been concluded,' affirmed the other. The bailiff put the purchase money into the dead man's hand, re-closed the tomb, and the next day sent his men to work on the property just as though he really did own it. The widow protested to Philip Augustus. The bailiff produced his two witnesses. But the King, his suspicions aroused, took one of them aside. 'Do you know the Pater Noster?' he asked him. 'Recite it!' While the man murmured the prayer, Philip Augustus broke in every now and then, in a loud voice which could be heard in the gallery, with such interjections as 'That's quite right!' 'Perfectly true!' When the recitation came to an end, the

King said loudly: 'You have not lied to me. You can rely on my clemency.' And then he had the fellow locked in a separate room. He then called the second witness. 'Now listen!' he cried. 'Don't lie to me any more! Your friend has revealed to me everything that happened as truthfully as if he had been reciting the Pater Noster!' The witness, believing that all had been disclosed, confessed to the trick that had been played. The bailiff flung himself at the King's feet. Philip Augustus condemned him to life banishment and gave his property to the widow.

"To become truly King of France Philip Augustus required one thing more—soldiers. So he founded the communal militias. Very soon we shall see them in action.

"But to become a great King as well, he required—in addition to conquests—peasants and artisans eager to work, *bourgeois* full of drive and enterprise, and a bold and courageous caste of knights, in short, a people happy with their lot. This, too, he had. And the happy contentment of his people found expression in the crop of white cathedrals (and innumerable churches) which rose simultaneously in Paris, Chartres, Bourges, and particularly in those towns which had big *Communes*, for these cathedrals were no longer catholic edifices of the monks, but the great French edifices of a people thrusting forward at last towards the light—in such places as Laon, Noyon, Soissons, Sens, Rheims, Beauvais, Le Mans, Troyes, Cambrai and Auxerre."

#### *The Sad Conjugal Story of Philip Augustus*

"Perhaps this great King will appear to be more human if I tell you that in his life he had one great failure. People said that he was a coward. I myself am inclined to think that he suffered from a nervous shock, contracted in Syria."

"What we call a complex," interjected Juliette.

"And what we at the time called the Devil. You know (or perhaps you don't) that he was widely accused of having been seized with panic in Syria when faced with a most frightful epidemic, caused by the corpses of six thousand decapitated prisoners, and of having left Richard Coeur de Lion and his Crusaders in the lurch? Things did not go very much better for him two years later when, at the age of twenty-eight, he married his second wife<sup>1</sup> Ingeburge, the sister of the King of Denmark, on August 14th

<sup>1</sup> He was just fifteen and had recently succeeded to the throne when he married his first wife, Isabelle, in 1180. She was then ten. Four years later he sought to repudiate her, because she had borne him no child. In Senlis, on the day on which the sentence of repudiation was to have been promulgated, Isabelle emerged from the palace dressed as a beggar maid, bare-footed and holding a candle in her hand. She walked through the streets, giving alms to the beggars. The people who adored her, were deeply moved and assembled before the palace, demanding insistently a reprieve for their beloved child-Queen. Philip relented. She subsequently died at the age of nineteen, giving birth to his heir, Louis VIII.

1193. She was eighteen, very beautiful and the perfect picture of a Christian maid, as gentle as she was lovely. During the ceremony, the King was suddenly seen to tremble and turn pale; he had been seized by a sudden and violent aversion to the young Princess. From that moment, he looked with horror upon this so desirable spouse.

"As soon as the ceremony ended, Philip wanted to send Ingeburg back to Denmark, but the Ambassadors who had escorted her refused to take her back. Philip could then see no alternative but to repudiate her. He called an assembly of prelates and Barons in Compiègne and claimed that he could show that Ingeburg was related to him to a degree prohibited by the Church. The assembly listened to his assertion with such reserve that the King agreed to a period of experimentation. Ingeburg was ordered to come to Saint Maur, and there Philip remained closeted alone with her. Very soon, he was seen to depart in a fury, leaving poor Ingeburg faint and trembling. Later, she asserted that on this occasion he had had carnal knowledge of her. But in these matters she appears to have been singularly ignorant.

"Philip obtained the repudiation he sought and locked her up in the Abbey of Cisoing, in the diocese of Tournai, where he left her in wretched penury, but himself retained her dowry. So destitute was she, that she was compelled to dispose of her trousseau and her robes to obtain the necessities of life.

"The Pope quashed the finding of the assembly and ordered Philip to reinstate his wife. In spite of this, Philip continued to search everywhere for another wife, but the scandalised Courts of Europe one and all refused to entertain his proposals. At last he found one, the daughter of a Bavarian nobleman in far away Tyrol. In this way he came to marry Agnes on June 1st 1196. On the same day Ingeburg was plucked from her pious retreat and confined in a gloomy fortress.

"Almost at once Pope Celestin III died and was succeeded by a young and energetic Pontif, Innocent III, who, in the face of Philip's reiterated refusals, excommunicated him and placed an interdict on the country. That meant that all religious ceremonies were stopped, the bells and the organs remained mute, the churches and cemeteries closed, the dead without graves; there were no more communion services, no confession, no extreme unction, no baptisms and no marriages. In short, the people had been called upon to expiate the sins of the King. The latter had to give way.

"He relegated Agnes, who was with child, to the *château* of Poissy and swore that he would never see her again. Ingeburg was conducted to a disused shooting-box at Saint Léger-en-Iveline, in what is now called the forest of Rambouillet. Before a large concourse of nobles, three Bishops

escorted the weeping Danish maiden. Philip stretched out his hand to her, swore that he would never be separated from her again and would treat her with all the respect due to a Queen; and on September 8th 1200 the Papal Legate raised the interdict with which France had been burdened for more than eight months.

"No sooner had he done so, than Philip forced Ingeburg to retire once more to a convent and, before a Council assembled under the presidency of the Legate in Soissons in March 1201, he renewed his demands for a divorce. Although he had suborned the Legate with gifts and had won him over to his side, Philip soon realised that the Council would not give a judgement in his favour. So, one day very early in the morning and without warning anyone, he ordered his horse to be saddled, rode to Ingeburg's convent, called for her, made her mount behind him and galloped off without saying a word.

"Meanwhile poor Agnes, confined in the *château* of Poissy, spent her days weeping and awaiting the outcome of this struggle between Philip and Rome. She died of grief, while giving birth to a child, whom she wished to name Tristan and who only survived his mother by a very short while. The death of Agnes seemed to sharpen Philip's antipathy towards Ingeburg. In defiance of all his oaths, he dismissed her for the third time, and, in the tower of the *château* of Etampes, he imposed upon her a captivity even more arduous than before. From time to time, the King sent treacherous friends to tell her about his odious behaviour, hoping thereby to persuade her to fall short of her wifely duty. In vain. The Danish maid remained steadfast, virginal and faithful in her despair. For twelve years she remained in the tower in Etampes, twelve years during which the Pope negotiated patiently with the King, espousing the cause of the persecuted innocent, but being very careful to avoid any rupture with her persecutor. The moral of this sad conjugal story is. . . ."

"That courteous and romantic love had not yet conquered the Court of the King," interrupted Juliette.

"And the Pope had ceased to reign over France.

"It is to the delicate nerves of the King that we also owe the first metalled roads in Paris, round the courtyard of his Palace in the *Cité*; whenever he went to the window, he could not bear the smell that rose from the muddy paths. As for the road round the Louvre and the circular road he constructed round Paris, encircling the commercial city on the right bank and the Latin Quarter on the left, I don't in the least believe that we owe these to his nervous disposition, for when occasion demanded, he was capable of as much courage as wisdom. No—the plain fact is, he liked constructing nice things."

*Kill Them All—God Will Acknowledge His Own*

"Yes, he was a wise man, in the midst of a people still far too young not to commit follies. The people of the Midi claimed that they were reforming the Christian Church and the habits of the priests. In simple terms, the Cathars were in reality a species of premature Protestants, who professed that perfection lay in the soul and that, when death came, absolution given by a 'perfect' man gave assurance of eternal salvation; they were opponents of sacraments, rites and symbols. We had given them the name of Albigeois, but there were any number of them all over the *Comté* of Toulouse.

"The Pope, having failed to convert them, demanded that Philip should take up arms against them. At the time Philip was very busy dispossessing *Jean sans Terre*<sup>1</sup> of his possessions. He was by no means averse to the Crusade proposed by the Pope, for the Count of Toulouse was the last of the great feudal Lords to maintain a considerable measure of independence; but he thought it would be much more astute on his part to let the feudal barons of the north, who were being greatly goaded by their priests, cut these heretics to pieces for him.

"There followed sixteen years of butchery, 1209–1226, during which a fanatical petty noble from Montfort l'Amaury, Simon of Montfort, particularly distinguished himself. At Béziers, for example, seven thousand men, women and children were massacred on July 21st 1209. The Abbot of Cîteaux had wished to set the ball rolling by making a real example of someone. But it did not end there. Ten years later, the massacre in Marmande, in which the King's son took part, was even more abominable, for it was carried out in cold blood, with premeditated malice, without the excuse of the heat of battle or assault. The garrison had surrendered to Simon de Montfort and the Prince, and Louis of France was holding a council of war to decide the fate of the inhabitants. One of the Bishops stood up and demanded that they should all be put to death as heretics, and at once the hue and cry was raised. Soldiers dashed into the town with drawn swords, and the horrible butchery began. Heads, dismembered bodies, limbs, brains, entrails piled up in the streets as though they had rained down from the sky. Everywhere the ground was red and saturated with blood. Except for the very few who succeeded in remaining hidden, neither man nor woman, neither young nor old, survived. The town was a shambles and in ruins, and fire destroyed what was left of it. By the grace of God, Marmande had been only a little place of five thousand inhabitants."

<sup>1</sup> King John of England, who vainly tried to regain his French possessions, (Maine, Normandy, etc.) and who with his associates, the Emperor of Germany and others, was defeated at the battles of La Roche aux Moines and Bouvines.

*The Children's Crusade*

"Would you care to hear of just one more piece of preposterous folly, before we turn to more serious matters? Although of itself it was a more benign piece of folly, it was perhaps the most extravagant phenomenon of the whole Middle Ages. While the Crusade against the Albigeois was being waged, the Children's Crusade was born.

"In June 1212 a young shepherd of Cloyes near Vendôme, Stephen by name, had a vision. God, in the guise of a poor pilgrim, asked him for a piece of bread and handed him a letter, which commanded him to go forth and conquer the Holy Land and deliver the Holy Sepulchre. A little later, when he was rounding up his sheep in the field, they knelt before him and asked for his blessing. Then, indeed, he doubted no longer that a divine mission had been entrusted to him. He set off at once, ranging the countryside and raising the Crusaders' cry of: 'Lord God! Succour Christianity! Lord God! Give unto us the true Cross!'

"As he performed miracles everywhere he went, other shepherds were quick to join him, and very soon a whole multitude of children, none of them more than about twelve years of age, elected him as the leader of their Crusade. I did not count how many of them there were; but the official records of Laon state that Stephen had some thirty thousand children under his orders. They organised themselves into bands, in spite of the opposition of their parents and the clergy. To those who asked them where they were going they replied: 'We follow the path of God', and the masses, convinced that their innocence and purity would atone for the sins of the world, gave them every support. Wherever they passed, they were given food and money, and people fought and scrambled to secure a hair from little Stephen's head or a scrap of cloth from his garments.

"Philip Augustus, having consulted the dons of the University of Paris, ordered the children to return to their homes. Most of them ignored the order, and from all parts of the country more and more fresh recruits arrived every day; as they passed through Liège, hundreds of hysterical women were convulsed and contorted with ecstasy. Priests, hard-headed businessmen, even groups of women and young girls joined their ranks. Under the leadership of this remarkable infant the great multitude reached Marseilles. Two Corsairs, Hugh Ferri and William of Porquères declared that, for the glory of God, they were prepared to take the young Crusaders to Syria; they procured seven ships, aboard which the children poured pell-mell. Instead of taking them to Syria, however, the two men took them to Alexandria and Bougie; these two merchants of the seas had hit upon the very simple idea of taking the pilgrims and selling them in the slave markets. Many thousands of them, among them four hundred and

twenty priests, were taken in this way to the Court of the Caliph. There they were well treated, for the Caliph, in the guise of a cleric, had been educated in Paris. In 1219, seventeen years later, there were still some seven hundred of them in the service of the Governor of Alexandria."

### *The Birth of the French Nation*

"Was this ebullient century, which began with the epic of the First Crusade, to end, you may well ask, with the inhuman butcheries of the Albigeois and this freakish escapade of a lot of visionary children? It was not. This twelfth century saw the birth of the alliance between the Sovereign and the *bourgeois*. For once in a way history showed that it, too, was capable of writing a good story. The story reaches its climax and conclusion with Philip and the *bourgeois* at the battle of Bouvines in 1214.

"The war with England had been going on all this time. She had recruited Continental allies in the persons of Ferrand, Count of Flanders, and the Emperor of Germany, who was beginning to think that Philip Augustus was getting a bit too big for his boots; and this coalition was further joined by a number of feudal barons, jealous of the Royal power.

"The Count of Boulogne had suggested that two concentric attacks should be made, one via Poitou and the other via Picardy. *John sans Terre* disembarked at La Rochelle with an army of mercenaries and was crushed at Roche-aux-Moines by Philip's son on July 2nd 1214. The Germans and the Brabant and Flemish contingents, together with an English army, had concentrated at Valenciennes. Philip defeated and dispersed them at Bouvines on July 27th.

"The battle was joined in an almost haphazard fashion in the marshy plain to the east of Tournai. The allies were estimated at fifteen hundred Knights and eighty thousand men-at-arms; the French at twenty-five thousand, of whom five hundred were Knights. But the French infantry was made up of men from the Communal Militias, and the cavalry—the cradle of heroes—was composed of minor French nobles. The fighting started at midday and continued in intense heat until nightfall. On this day, the day of our first victory as a nation, the Capetian monarchy was established.

"The return of the Army from Bouvines was one continuous triumphal march. In the villages bells pealed, the organs played and the houses were decorated with flags and flowers. The labourers and the harvesters—it was just harvest-time—slung their scythes across their backs and rushed forward to catch a glimpse of this Ferrand of Flanders who had so terrified them and who was now being led away a captive in chains. In Paris the whole population, with the clergy at their head, came out to greet the King.



And here, too, the churches and houses were decorated with flags and tapestries and the streets were strewn with flowers. The people cheered and danced, the clergy chanted, and for seven whole days the students cast aside their books and made merry. Paris was ablaze with illuminations, which now shed their light on the whole of the thirteenth century and on the whole of Europe."

## The House on the Quay

A.D. 1226-1270—*Reign of Saint Louis*; A.D. 1285-1314—*Reign of Philip The Fair*; The Thirteenth Century—*The Fairs of Champagne become the centre of European business. Invention of bankers' drafts. The textile industry in the north marks the beginning of the working class and the first strikes. The bourgeois become richer and richer, and the aristocracy poorer and poorer. Satire and logic advance hand in hand with the bourgeoisic. Under Philip the Fair, the jurists remain in power; they call together the States General (1302). Fashion becomes extravagant, ostentation tends to replace the sweet courtesy of the Courts of Love of the twelfth century. Scorn the Pope (1303), and burn the Templars (1308-1314)—all with a demagogic cynicism worthy of the modern dictators. Our two most beautiful centuries of faith, love and joyous enterprise end with the reign of a Machiavellian King. The Danse Macabre takes the stage.*

“PARIS is already a very beautiful city.

“Let's pretend we're just on the way back there from Flanders, shall we? Along the triumphal route followed by Philip Augustus on his return from Bouvines, only that we are about half a century behind him, for now we are in the middle of the thirteenth century, and the date is May 1248. We are crossing the Saint Denis plain, but we won't visit the basilica; after all, we saw it being built a little while ago. Behind its ramparts, newly constructed of walls, ten metres high, and flanked by turrets, there is nothing but a forest of steeples and slender spires. But if we go round by that verdant little hill into the meadows filled with marguerites and vines, we shall perhaps be able to get a good view of things from Montmartre.”

*Paris in the Thirteenth Century*

“First and foremost—the *Cité*. Look at it, nestling there like a pearl in the oyster-shell of its ramparts—the King's gardens, his Palace and the

*Sainte Chapelle*, which Saint Louis has just built to house his holy relics. It was opened last month. I can count six, seven . . . eight—eight churches on that small island, and *Notre Dame*, all but complete and blazing in her glory. There is very little space left for the houses of officials and a few shop-keepers. To the north, the *Grand Pont* leads to the commercial quarter with the *Grève* market and *Les Halles*, which Philip Augustus has had constructed on what used to be the old leper settlement on the edge of the town. There the various trades are grouped in separate streets—the iron-mongers, the soap manufacturers, drapers, potters and the hemp market and so on. There, too, the Lombard bankers and the Jewish moneylenders have established their places of business. From the *Porte Saint Denis* and the *Porte Saint Martin* two main thoroughfares six metres wide allow the big waggons to drive down to the *Grand Pont*, elsewhere you can only go round on foot. The Templars, who are very prosperous, have driven through a road, the *Rue du Temple*, to connect their premises with their private harbour, near the *Place de la Grève*. On the left bank, just above the Saint Genevieve hillock there are any number of churches, convents, schools and Seigniorial mansions, surrounded by their gardens and, in some cases even, by small farms; in the same way individual craftsmen—bookbinders, illustrators, parchment makers, public letter writers, clerks and students—are grouped together at the end of the *Petit Pont* round *Saint Séverin*.

“The Seine flows between its low banks, which are green and dotted with bushes, with here and there, light splashes of shingle and sand; there lies the chaplet of little islets which one day will be joined either to the banks of the river or to the *Cité* itself. The Seine overflows its banks frequently, and when it does, it completely covers both these two flat expanses you see behind *Notre Dame*—the *Ile de Notre Dame* and the *Ile aux Vaches*, which in the seventeenth century will be joined together to form the *Ile Saint Louis*. Those lighters and barges which are incessantly and busily hurrying to and fro and which are being hauled up on the beach belong to the powerful Water Vendors’ Company, whose Grand Master has recently been appointed Provost of the city, and whose heraldic barque will soon become part of the coat of arms of the city of Paris—a happy symbol for our city, sailing steadily on through the centuries.

“As you can see, it is an enormous city. We have nearly two hundred thousand inhabitants and we have already outstripped Venice, the foremost city of the West. Shall we go down? I’d like to introduce you to good King Louis.”

*From the Vincennes Zoo to the Apartments of King Louis*

“No luck! He’s not there under his usual oak tree in the *Bois de Vincennes*.

As a matter of fact, however, there's something much more curious in the same *Bois*—a zoo. Philip Augustus enclosed the *Bois* with a wall—he had a perfect mania for walls, that man—and the King of England sent him a complete menagerie.”

“I protest,” said Juliette. “If Saint Louis isn't seated under a tree, then he's no longer Saint Louis!”

“All right—have it your own way,” replied Chronossus. “Anyway, you're quite right and he is, after all, a most accommodating man. He calls himself ‘the fount of equity’ and his greatest hour of triumph occurred when the King of England appealed to him to act as arbiter. So—there he is, sitting under a tree, but a tree in his own garden in the *Cité*. In front of him a carpet has been spread, and nobles, *bourgeois* and serfs alike are putting their problems before him. Don't you think that with his tall and slender figure, his clear skin, blond hair and blue eyes he looks everything that a Knight should be? Even so, he's very simply dressed, isn't he, in that quiet robe and surcoat of spun wool? That doesn't mean, however, that he can't carry a crimson cloak trimmed with ermine on those occasions when simplicity might shock or cause disappointment; but he leans more and more towards simplicity, and that does not please his wife Marguerite, who would like to see him more ornately dressed and who herself is very fond of an elegant *toilette*. ‘Madame,’ he said, when once she raised the question, ‘you would like to see me more richly dressed. So be it! I wish to be agreeable to you, for the conjugal law requires that a husband should be pleasing in his wife's eyes; but it also ordains that a wife shall be pleasing to her husband. I, then, will go about better and you more simply dressed. I will wear your clothes and you shall wear mine.’

“As a matter of fact, not a few Parisiennes shared Marguerite's predilection for elegant attire, and, since the cowl does not make the monk, one day at church Marguerite gave the kiss of peace to a most elegant young madam, whose habits, it was subsequently learned with regret, were altogether far too amiable! For in those days the profession made a great deal of money, and these ladies all wore furs of ermine and girdles of gold. ‘A good name is more precious than a golden girdle,’ declared Saint Louis, and he forbade them to parade in this elegant attire. Even so, to judge the virtue of a woman by her appearance still remained as hazardous an undertaking as ever.

“Saint Louis did not content himself with that alone, but also ordered the closing of those houses to which the Law sometimes turns a blind eye. These houses were situated outside Philip Augustus' city wall—out in the country, one might almost say—and for the information of their clientele they sported a sprig of laurel hung over the door. When the houses were

closed down, the professional beauties found themselves out on the pavement. Some time later someone composed a ditty on the subject and the children in their innocence all used to sing it:

‘Nous n’irons plus au bois,  
Les lauriers sont coupés.  
La belle que voilà  
Ira les ramasser.’

“Don’t let this give you a false impression, however. For there’s nothing of the lugubrious bigot about our King, and he enjoys a good joke as much as anyone. He is well aware, for instance, that lots of the nobles call him Frater Louis, and he thinks that’s very funny. But he and his Marguerite have been through some hard times together. And as for his mother, Blanche of Castille—she’s just too frightful for words! When the King got married fourteen years ago he was just twenty. He was born in 1214, the year of the battle of Bouvines and a decidedly lucky year. Marguerite was thirteen. They were a wholly delightful young couple and they adored each other like a pair of turtle doves. But the Queen Mother had no sympathy for nonsense of that sort. She forbade them to . . . er . . . see each other for six years! That, however, did not prevent them from making love; but it was rather a nuisance for them, and they were forced to organise things in a most complicated fashion. The place they found to be most convenient was the *château* of Pontoise, where their rooms were situated one above the other and were joined by a little staircase, which they used as a secret rendezvous. While the young lovers kept their tryst, their ushers used to keep watch. If the Queen Mother came towards one or the other of the rooms, they used to bang on the doors to give warning of her approach, and then each would scuttle back and tumble into bed. And notwithstanding all this, they succeeded in raising a family of eleven.

“The jealousy of this mother-in-law was quite irrational. She had no cause whatever to worry about the over-indulgence of exuberant youth, for deeply in love though he was, Louis was well able to control the demon of the flesh. When Queen Blanche at last gave her son permission to exercise his marital rights, he passed the first three nights spent with his beloved Marguerite—and this I had from his confessor himself—in prayer.

“Since the giving of the maternal sanction, however, Louis has been able to sleep with his wife as often as he likes—or nearly so, anyway.”

“Now what?” asked Juliette sharply. “What do you mean by your ‘nearly so, anyway?’”

“All I mean is that he abstains during Advent and the forty days of Lent

and on the eve of every Feast Day; and, of course, all Fridays and Saturdays are out of the question.

"He sleeps on a bed of planks. He has himself called at midnight in order to be in good time for Matins.

"Apart from these little foibles, he is quite a cheery sportsman. He occasionally loses his temper, but not more often than most people, and like most people he delights in hitting people he doesn't like a nasty crack; but he also knows how to restrain the impulse, except perhaps when it is a question of heretics, Jews of Infidels.

"As regards the Jews, he has been reasonably moderate. He has contented himself with ordering that they must wear a badge, a yellow rosette, sewn on their chests and backs. That means that they are easily recognisable, and that's a good thing."

"What!" cried Juliette. "You assert that our good Saint Louis, like Hitler. . . ."

"You're quite right—he is good; but he is only adhering to the ideas of his time; and the ideas of his time can be summed up in one sentence: 'No salvation outside the Church.' Surely you don't think that the perpetrators of all these massacres of which I have been telling you were anything but men of absolute good faith and clear conscience? Intolerance has killed more people than war. And one must conform to the ideas of the age in which one lives. And now—have I your permission to get back into my thirteenth-century skin?"

"We suffer from another plague, apart from the Jews—the lepers. Saint Louis, at the moment, looks after them well; but later, when there are plenty more, we shall burn a large number of them. Purely a question of hygiene."

#### *Improvement in the Police Force*

"As regards the heretics—well, there they've really invented something! It's called the Inquisition. We ourselves thought that after the great numbers we had killed, there couldn't be any more Albigeois left alive. We were quite wrong. New ones were always being born, but they were isolated and scattered here, there and everywhere in such a manner, that any organised punitive expedition against them was not possible and the only way to deal with them was by means of raids by special Commando Inquisitors. If you have a good memory for facts, you'll probably tell me that it was Robert the Pious who inaugurated this system. So he did; but only on a very, very small scale. And his Tribunal of Bishops was a very flabby, ineffectual affair. In short, persecution had become very slack indeed. Gregory IX, however, realised that the only way to get results was to

create a Corps of specialists. These he recruited from among the Order of monks over which he exercised the greatest control—the Dominicans. The nature of their mission demanded that they should be men of particular clarity of mind, completely detached and disinterested. The Inquisitor is an impartial spiritual father, whose sole object is the salvation of souls. He is forbidden to have recourse to the crude and barbarous methods of trial by ordeal—fire, boiling water, crucifixion and the like—but must work through the medium of investigation, sworn evidence and interrogation—in fact on the basic principles of modern justice, complete with its narks, noses and informers; only even more so, for, in view of his spiritual and infallible status, nothing and no one is allowed to stand in the way of the Inquisitor. The essential characteristic features of the Inquisition, then, are its arbitrary despotism and its secrecy—secret denunciations, secret enquiries, invisible police, and when it gets an individual in its clutches, it keeps absolutely secret the nature of the charges made against him. This greatly facilitates the extraction of confessions—helped, of course, by the application of a little torture. All this is completely new; and the Church has always disapproved of torture.

“These Inquisitors, to be sure, are not the agents of the King, but of the Pope. But, since the canons of the Church forbid the passing of a sentence of death—*Ecclesia abhorret a sanguine*—it is our good King who condemns and burns the heretics and confiscates their goods on the Church’s behalf. In fact, he is nothing more nor less than the Church’s executioner.<sup>1</sup>

“At this very moment there is a famous Inquisitor in the Midi, Brother Bernard of Caux, who is known as ‘The Hammer of the Heretics’. We had an even better one in the north, the Dominican Robert, who, incidentally, was himself a renegade Cathar and who for that reason has been given the name of Robert the Blackguard. For six years, from 1233 to 1239, he ranged far and wide through Nivernais, Picardy, Flanders and Champagne, piling up his score of people burnt or buried alive. On May 22nd 1239 he caused one hundred and eighty-three people to be burnt at one and the same time in the *auto-da-fé* at Mont-Aimé, in Champagne. Then it was realised that he was mad and would have to be shut up. His disappearance was no loss to the heretics; Robert had plenty of successors.”

#### *A Thousand Million Peaceable Frenchmen*

“Won’t you have anything but horrors to tell us, throughout the whole long course of history?” asked Juliette.

“Of course not!” replied Chronossus. “If you make allowance for the

<sup>1</sup> Of all the western Kings, ours alone was pious enough to undertake this task. (Later, Spain and Portugal made up for lost time.)

effervescence of youthfulness, you find that the thirteenth century is an age of gentleness and love. But in it, happiness and the simple kindliness of life often go unnoticed. Fewer men have died at the stake and in battle than in their beds; from the time of Vercingetorix to the days of General de Gaulle there have been about a thousand million of them. And it is true to say that the Church has helped them to surrender their souls to God with a peaceful mind. But it is not easy to strike an impartial balance. There is no more blood in the history of France than in that of any other country. But we are the oldest nation in Europe, and a nation that is loved for its mind; consequently, the blood shows up more. The Church has given life to far more men than she has caused to die. But she is the heir to Jesus Christ; consequently, it is the spilled blood that catches the eye."

"And makes us see red!" added Juliette.

"For us, the French nation of the thirteenth century, wrapped in the intransigent faith of our adolescence, it is perfectly natural to kill a heretic or an infidel. We are still in the year 1248. Even so, this very reasonable King of ours is prone to fly off the handle a bit when the Faith is at stake. We take a dim view, for instance, of this Crusade he is now so busily organising. Suppose he gets taken prisoner out there? Or catches the plague? Such things do happen, you know. But his mind's made up and that's that."

### *The Pedlars of Piety*

"Do you know that he has bought Christ's crown of thorns for twenty thousand livres? Actually, we've got two others already; one a gift to Saint Denis from Charles the Bald and the other an offering from Saint Germain to his own Abbey. That, however, was of no account. Louis was determined to have it . . . just in case . . . and so he bought it. Someone has worked out that all the thorns sold as sacred relics, if put together would make a crown twelve feet in diameter. In addition, last year he bought a fragment of the Cross, the purple robe of our Lord, the reed they thrust into His hand as a sceptre, a fragment of His winding-sheet and the cloth which He used when He washed the feet of His Apostles.

"He's a little reactionary in some ways, is this good King of ours. Crusades are no longer fashionable, and you will see that there's an unhappy ending in store. Just think how easy it would be for him, with the means at his disposal, to send someone else in his place! That is what is happening every day now with the pilgrimages. The rich sinners hire professional pilgrims and send them to do penance for them; and there's no unemployment in that profession let me tell you. But our good King, who is rich, who can borrow as much money as he likes from the Lombard bankers, will have none of it. Nothing else will satisfy him, but



to go in person. Saint Louis has really only one fault—he is too pious.

“For the rest, he has all the right ideas. He is for peace at home and asserts that Christians should not fight among themselves; and the extraordinary thing is that we do actually live in peace—except, of course, for that old quarrel with England, which has not yet been settled.<sup>1</sup> There’s not the sign of an ‘incident’ anywhere on the horizon. I’m almost inclined to risk it and say that we are happy. Look at those people in the street! Don’t they look happy—really happy?”

### *In the Streets of Paris*

“They push and shove a good deal, as you can see, and there’s always a jam where two roads meet; and, in the smaller streets, in which wheeled traffic is prohibited, the things you have to beware of are the horsemen and the peasants’ donkeys with their bulging panniers of fruit and vegetables. Wares for sale are displayed on the shop shutters, which have been taken down and turned into stalls; in the back of the shops you can see the people hard at work. They work eight hours a day in winter and sixteen in summer, and it is the sun which regulates their hours of labour. There are no holidays with pay, but there are eighty days in each year on which no work is done, and the Church, to curb the ardour of the employers, decrees that the Sabbath rest shall begin on Saturday afternoon—this is the Medieval weekend, later taken over by the English.

“Those buildings you see with the high walls almost devoid of windows, between the shops, are the residences of the nobles or the *bourgeois*, and the entrances to them are through their own gardens. They take up a great deal of room, to say nothing of the farms that are attached to most of them. Listen! Can you hear the cows lowing and the hens cackling? The lesser fry among the *bourgeois* and the working people themselves crowd into a thousand little nooks and crannies. At night, the silent streets are lighted only by the candles burning in front of the statues of Saints ensconced in niches all along the street. The streets are not much lighter by day. But what a hustle and hubbub fills them! Beware particularly of the students, almost as numerous as the inhabitants themselves; they think they can do exactly as they like, because they are not subject to the authority of the provost of the market, but solely to the authority of the university. On the left bank, they are in their element, these rowdy Burgundians, avaricious Lombards, gluttonous Flamands, hard-drinking Germans and flirtatious

<sup>1</sup> Saint Louis is about to settle it (very provisionally) in 1259 by voluntarily restoring to England part of the conquests made by Philip Augustus in Guyenne; in return, Henry III of England undertook to pay homage for his French possessions. This magnanimous gesture by the French King scandalised the country. The people of Guyenne were so affronted that they decided never again to give any of their children the name of Louis.

Frenchmen; they violate at one and the same time both the laws of hospitality and the women, and then they have the temerity to complain because people lease rotten rooms at high prices to those of them who have not been fortunate enough to find accommodation in the colleges themselves.<sup>1</sup>

“That fellow hunched against the buttress built to protect the walls from the wheel-hubs of the waggons is a minstrel. The loafers are cracking their sides with laughter at his sallies. He’s jeering at the minstrels for being too fond of their comforts and not wanting to go to the Crusade. His audience don’t realise that he’s a professional agitator, paid to make propaganda of this kind. He’s shouting his head off, but even so, his voice is being drowned by the cries of itinerant pedlars, selling honey, hats, candles, fish, game, books, hymn sheets and second-hand clothing. Listen to the street cries of the hawkers—the tinker: ‘Give me your pewter to mend!’ The wine-seller: ‘Good wine and strong at thirty-two, sixteen, twelve, eight, six!’ (he means pence). The cheese man: ‘Lovely cheese from Champagne, beautiful Brie!’ The milkman: ‘Here you are, dearie, have some lovely milk!’ Great cheers greet a newly-wed bride as she steps out of the church dressed in a red robe, her long hair hanging down her back to testify that she is a virgin. Mingling with the vivid and colourful motley of the crowd, in which red, blue and yellow dominate, are the black, white and grey robes of innumerable monks and nuns. But just look at that truly ravishing young man, daintily tripping through the dust on the tips of his toes! He would be awfully annoyed if his heels should happen to touch the ground; his hair has been curled around his ears with tongs, his neck smoothed with pumice stone, his eyebrows have been plucked, and his face has been bathed in milk and tinted with cosmetics. He is nibbling perfumed pastilles, talks with a tremendous simper and casts truly devastating glances at all the pretty girls. This incredible creature does not belong to the nobility; he’s the ‘Daddy’s darling’ of some wealthy *nouveau riche*.

“And that elegant young woman over there, coming along with a jaunty sway of the hips—she’s the wife of a draper. I wonder if it’s because she fears the dust that she holds her cloak thus high and open with both hands, making play with its folds like a strutting peacock with its plumage? Or could it be that she wants us to admire its lovely grey lining, and her dress shot with silver gilt which so prettily outlines her figure and the rounded suggestion of her breast.<sup>2</sup> Can you wonder that all the loungers

<sup>1</sup> In about ten years’ time, Robert de Sorbon will found the college called after him, which originally housed sixteen poor Bachelors of Art.

<sup>2</sup> In these days worn very slender. Fifty years later they were blown up quite a lot.

stare at her? She takes up so much room in the narrow street, that everybody steps aside to let her pass—everyone, that is, except the pigs. The pigs in the Paris streets are as insensible to charm as they are lacking in respect. One of them, you will remember, caused the death of Louis VII's son by getting tangled up with the legs of his horse. On the other hand, they do devour all the unmentionable refuse in the streets, and they are on the books of the Municipal Highway Authority.

“Well—there goes our lovely blonde. Have you noticed, by the way, that they are all blondes, with large chignons, not always their own, in spite of the preachers, who allow dyeing of the hair but fulminate against the wearing of a postiche. If you like, we'll follow her trail, for her amber perfume overpowers all the other odours of the street, powerful though they are. The only thing is, she will probably lead us to one of the Public Baths, and there I should rather hesitate to invite you to step in.”

“Why? I've got a perfect right to have a wash, haven't I?”

“Of course, but. . . . Oh! I grant you she seems most modest and proper with her eyes demurely cast down. But I rather fancy that our incredible young fop and our lovely lady made a quick assignation as they passed, to meet at the hot baths. There are now twenty-six of them in Paris, each with most spacious premises. It's no use the King forbidding men and women to visit the baths on the same day. As you so justly remarked, everyone has a right to have a bath; and equally everyone has also the right to make a mistake in the day of the week. And, as we are not as prudish as you are, and don't in the least mind meeting in the same bath, there are some pretty sights to be seen in these Parisian establishments.”

### *A Fair in Champagne*

“And what about the thirteenth century husband? What has he been doing all this time? Like his opposite number of the twentieth century, he has been busy earning the money for the family's daily bread. The husband of the lovely lady we've just been watching is at the moment away at the Drapers' Fair at Provins, one of the most important Fairs in Champagne. You're probably thinking that he, too, is taking advantage of the fact to have a good time. But the fact is that these Fairs in Champagne are the most important events in the lives of the businessmen; they are held in summer and in winter, the Hot Fair and the Cold Fair. The one at present in progress opened on the Tuesday after Ascension. Oh, yes! We reckon all our dates in terms of Feast Days. We measure time by means of a candle, we divide the day into twelve hours, with the result that the summer hour is about twice as long as the winter one; and, unless there is some witness

to tell us about it, we're not at all sure about the date of our birth; in short, we don't know how to count anything—except money.<sup>1</sup>

"These Fairs, however, have given rise to something new in the way of money. As all the merchants meet there, they have an arrangement whereby they pay each other with scraps of parchment, drafts which are endorsed by the banks and which are then used as currency between them.

"Since the revival of the Mediterranean trade, Champagne, on the Flemish trade route, has ousted Marseilles as the chief commercial centre of Europe and the scene of big business deals. The Fair lasts from eight to twelve days, during which cloth from Flanders, Walloon copper goods and Scandinavian fish are bought and sold, and from the south come the spices—pepper, a seasoning so greatly appreciated that it is accepted in lieu of money, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, cumin, aniseed, all the things necessary for our highly seasoned cuisine. The Flemings buy ground scarlet and indigo from Baghdad and Cyprus for their dyes. Cattle, grain, wines and salt are in abundance at the Fair. In fact it is a real Fair, with taverns where an exception is made and dice may be played, where there are rope-dancers, games of bowls, quoits and skittles, and dances, dances everywhere to the music of bag-pipe, fife and flute.

"At the Pentecost Fair knights are dubbed and are given a chance to break a lance in the tournaments. But in this huge commercial concourse knights are becoming rarer and rarer. When one's revenues from the farms don't keep pace with the cost of living, one has to give up chivalry and go out and work. In many parishes which in the old days boasted of as many as fifty or sixty knights, there are now only one or two. The great nobles have put up a better fight than the knights against the rising tide of the *bourgeoisie*."

### *Strikes and Agricultural Troubles*

"But they are not the only ones who are putting up a fight. The working classes, too, are showing signs of resistance. Previously, we had but two social classes—the nobles and the villeins. Now, in the towns, we have a

<sup>1</sup> Our monetary system of those days has been preserved by the British. One livre (pound) twenty sous (shillings). One sou twelve deniers (pence). Livres, sous, deniers £ s. d. In the thirteenth century a pig was worth 14 sous, a sheep 6. A mason earned 10 sous a week. From the time that Mohamed cut off our sources of supply, money had ceased to be of gold, silver being used instead; by the thirteenth century the deniers had become quite black, owing to the amount of copper that had been used in minting them. Under the early Capetians, there were three hundred vassals who minted their own currency; now (1250) there were only thirty, but even that means that there are a whole heap of different coinages circulating, and the wise man rings a coin and weighs it before accepting it. The King, however, has one great advantage over all others—he is the only one who does not risk being flung into boiling oil for issuing dud money.

new species of class distinction—the ‘Haves’ and the ‘Have-Nots’. All the business of municipal administration is in the hands of ‘rich men’, and there have already been disturbances in Abbeville and Beauvais, in Douai, Brive and Figeac. These were swiftly followed by a trade dispute in Provins itself, where the municipal authorities tried to add an hour to the working day. There ensued a riot in which the Mayor was killed, but against which terrible reprisals were taken. The skilled artisans are protected by their Guilds (they are not yet any Trade Unions), but the unskilled labourer is defenceless. I think one can say that in the north the cloth trade has developed into a great industry—widely scattered, admittedly, and made up of a large number of small concerns, but the whole concentrated in the hands of a few big businessmen.”

### *The Shepherd Boys*

“Side by side with the yeoman peasants, (now free men and prosperous), there crouched and suffered an obscure and inarticulate class, which every now and then exploded in wrath. Into the beautiful setting of our thirteenth century the shepherds emerged like an eruption from the depths of the earth.

“Three years have now passed since we were wandering about the streets of Paris. In the meanwhile, the King has gone off on his Crusade, has been taken prisoner and is being held captive in Egypt. When, about Easter 1251, news of the King’s predicament reached the north, public indignation was great and was directed against the clergy, who had remained comfortably at home and who were doing nothing about it. Bands of wretched and miserable men, women and children started wandering from village to village, enlisting recruits to go and deliver the King and capture Jerusalem. In a very short time there were hordes of them, and from nowhere in particular a leader popped up, whom they called ‘The Master of Hungary’. From Brabant, Hainault, Flanders and Picardy a vast concourse of shepherd lads took the road and, swelled *en route* by a number of vagabonds, thieves and questionable young women, were within a few weeks at the gates of Paris itself. They represented a vast anti-clerical movement. When approached by monks to give a contribution to charity, they ground their teeth and gave their pence to any beggar at hand, saying with a scowl: ‘Take this in the name of Mahomed, who is more powerful than Christ.’

“This pastoral mob was at first given a cordial reception. Even the *bourgeois* were quite pleased to see them badgering the clergy. In Amiens, for example, it was the *bourgeois* who fed them and replenished their stores. By the time they reached Paris, there were tens of thousands of them,

armed and waving their banners, and they at once set about killing the priests and throwing them into the river. The Regent, Queen Blanche, did nothing. Intoxicated by their success, they made a triumphant entry into Orleans on June 11th and put to death all the priests of the University. Everywhere they went, the *bourgeois* opened their gates and towns to them. The Franciscans and the Dominicans, the specialists of the Inquisition, were the objects of their particular fury and were dragged half naked into the streets and slaughtered.

"At last the Queen was persuaded to intervene; nor did her intervention present more difficulty, for as time went on, these pastoral hordes began to disintergrate with increasing speed. Then they in their turn were pursued, captured and hanged—as far afield as Aigues, Mortes, Bordeaux and England itself."

### *The House on the Quay*

"I think I ought to say that, normally, life in Paris is very pleasant for a pretty woman."

"I suppose," said Juliette, "that our particular one has already come out of the baths some time ago?"

"Yes. She came out sixty-three years ago," replied Chronossus. "We are now back in Paris, but in the Paris of 1314."

"I must say, with you the time passes very quickly," said Juliette.

"Kind of you to say so."

"It'll be a bit of a shock to see her again, though. It's a mistake for anyone to retrace their steps."

"Her steps re-echo no more," replied Chronossus. "But her granddaughter will receive us. The haberdashery has prospered; its heiress has married a noble. He is a lad of good family, and all his relatives took part, of course, in the Crusades. He himself, however, tired of sitting idle and watching the revenues from his estates remain fixed and stable, while the merchants waxed ever fatter and more prosperous, soon realised that the snob in every haberdasher was worth its weight in gold; and so he has ensconced himself firmly in the bosom of a *bourgeois* family.

"His father-in-law has just built a house for him next door to the Augustine convent and opposite the King's Palace. They run up buildings very quickly these days. The ground floor is constructed of stone, and the upper storeys of wood and *pisé*; but the skeleton structure of beams and joists is assembled at ground level and then hoisted in one solid block by means of hand winches; the *pisé* and decoration is then added *in situ*. This method is the latest thing in building technique. However, the fact that the house is new is neither here nor there; the important thing is that it is on

the quay. Exactly! I see you have grasped my point. You know as well as I do how *chic* it is nowadays—by which I mean the twentieth century—to live on a quay. Well, until not more than two hundred years ago, where we now are was called *Le Chemin de la Seine*, and last year—yes in 1313—the first quay in Paris was built, *Le Quai des Augustins*. And the first house to be constructed on the first of the Parisian quays was that of our *bourgeoise* Countess. You see, I am taking you to meet people who are in the vanguard of the leaders of fashion.

“Shall we go in? It’s really quite modern and very simple, just the place for a young couple who own a *château* and are waiting till they inherit the residence of papa-in-law, just at the back, in the *Rue Pavée*.<sup>1</sup> The young people’s house, incidentally, is built on a plot of land that is really the bottom end of father-in-law’s garden, for building sites are very hard to find in Paris. The ground floor is occupied by the servants and the domestic arrangements, so we’ll go straight up to the first floor, the living quarters and the handsomest floor in the house. There you are—didn’t I tell you that this young couple were in the vanguard of the latest fashion? They actually have a separate dining-room, with stools for a banquet and with high-backed chairs for the master and mistress of the house. The table, you see, is laid—that is, the platters are already on the table with their covers designed to protect them against poison. We are haunted by the nightmare of poison, you know.

“Take a look at that sideboard over there against the wall, on which are massed the resplendent and massive silver ewers, goblets and salvers that testify to the prosperity of the household. Primroses and violets, the first flowers of the season, are strewn on the table-cloth. The date, remember, is March 18th 1314, and the house that of a most cultured and up-to-date young hostess. You see that gilded little bird-cage hung from one of the beams of the ceiling? It’s not a real bird, of course, but a sachet filled with perfumed powder, cunningly shaped and dressed with feathers to look like a bird; we shall be positively flooded with perfumes of every kind, as you will see if you examine all those gold and silver ornaments dotted about the room, which we call pomanders. Now, if you will follow me—but please do not make more noise than is seemly for a young lady of the twentieth century taking a promenade in the thirteenth<sup>2</sup>—you might startle Patricia. Yes! that is her name. I told you her parents were snobs.

“Let’s open the door very gently. There! The huge bed, big enough for four and spread with blue blankets—we are very fond of coloured blankets

<sup>1</sup> One of the first paved streets in Paris. Its name now is *Rue Séguier*.

<sup>2</sup> The thirteenth was late in finishing. It did not end until the death of the King in 1314. Just as the nineteenth was extended to 1914.

—a carved chest, a dressing-table, a whole heap of poufs and oriental rugs of the latest design and . . . Patricia herself! Isn't she delightful? And so slender and tiny! Just a moment while I put on my glasses, a recent invention and a most welcome aid to clear vision. At the moment she is rather in despair, because current fashion decrees a full and plump figure. My own opinion, for what it is worth and judging from the glimpse afforded by the slit in her chemise, is that she has nothing to worry about at all. Rather cunning, don't you think, that slit down the whole chemise, with its retaining lattice-work of thread! It's getting a little dark. I do wish her maid would light a few candles. Ah! splendid! Look! that's just what she is doing! And now begins the *toilette*.

"The maid slips off her mistress' chemise—she really is very lovely, isn't she—and dusts her body with saffron. We are very fond of blonde-tinted hair and a golden skin. Now the maid binds a sash tightly round her torso to take in her waist, and places two tiny little padded cushions cunningly set to lift the breasts; and now, here comes the chemise back again, a garment of delicate pleated linen. Nowadays everyone wears a chemise even the *petit bourgeois*—by day, that is of course; for to keep your chemise on at night would be an insult to the one with whom you share your couch. Finally, here comes the dress itself. Aha! I thought that would surprise you! Fashion demands that it should be parti-coloured. The left half is yellow and the right is of that greenish-blue which we call *perse*, those scrolls on the left shoulder are the armourial bearings of our new Countess, embroidered in silver gilt thread. The dress is cut as deeply in front as her underwear will allow and also slit down the side, so that when Patricia gracefully lifts her train she reveals her leg. She has no nylons, but wears woven hose; those garters that keep them up are encrusted with real jewels and with golden tags that hang down beside the knee. I should have been very disappointed if we had not seen them—both the jewels and the lovely leg. Her blonde tresses are wound to form shells about her ears, she has put dark pigment on her lashes and eyebrows, rouge on her lips and cheeks. Patricia is now ready to dine, and the dinner horn can be sounded. Metaphorically, of course; the horn is only really sounded in the *châteaux*; here it is enough to warn the master that it's time to wash his hands and come to dinner.

"His hose, too, are parti-coloured, with the left leg scarlet and the right a delicate peach, as is also his doublet, which is loose-fitting and reaches to his knees. As a sash, from which a purse could be hung, is no longer worn, the Parisian *haute couture*, creative as ever, has invented for men and women alike little lateral slits which open into tiny sacks sewn into the inside of the garment; we might call them pockets, mightn't we?



"While they attack the *hors d'oeuvre*—or rather, the salad—served in a common porringer. . . ."

"Never mind the salad," said Juliette. "But surely they could afford to have two porringers?"

"To share a porringer with someone is much nicer. We are very fond of affectionate proximity. We sleep naked with our friends as with our wives, husbands and wives bathe together in the same tub and receive their friends while doing so, we eat out of the same dish—in fact, we love intimacy in all things in life. You'll find it more interesting to listen to what Patricia is saying.

"Any more news about the scandal of the King's daughters-in-law?" Patricia asked.

"No—nothing," replied Gontran. "Philip and Gautier d'Aunay have not yet confessed to their double adultery."

"A chivalrous couple—those two!"

"Er, yes. Of course they haven't been . . . interrogated yet."

"People are saying that it serves Philip the Fair right and that the Capets will never recover from the blow. The three wives of all three of the King's sons all being unfaithful to their husbands at one and the same time! Well—they say ridicule kills. But what a story!"

"What story?" asked Juliette. "I'm awfully interested to hear their conversation, but I'm bound to say, *cher Mousieur* Chronossus, that I simply don't know what they're talking about."

### *The Scandal of the King's Daughters-in-Law*

"It's all quite straightforward," replied Chronossus. "The three sons of Philip the Fair married three Burgundian Princesses, Marguerite, Jeanne and Blanche. The latter have all three been thrown into prison, as well as the lovers of two of them, the two d'Aunay brothers. So you see it's purely a family affair. But they haven't yet found a lover for Jeanne—perhaps because there aren't enough brothers in the d'Aunay family. Anyway, her case is pending; but her two sisters and the two brothers, I fear, are in real trouble.<sup>1</sup> The sisters were denounced by their sister-in-law, Isabelle, the King's daughter who married the King of England. Last year, just after she had given birth to that Edward who later, as Edward III, was to lay claim to the French throne, she accompanied her husband, Edward II, on his visit to France to pay homage for his Duchy of Guyenne. There had

<sup>1</sup> One month after this conversation, the two knights, after an interrogation that would have opened the lips of the most gallant and honourable of men, confessed that they had been having intimate relations with the King's daughters for the last three years. They were therefore flayed alive in the *Place de Martrais* in Pontoise, quartered, castrated, decapitated and hung on the public gallows.

been a series of magnificent fêtes, at which the French Princesses had had the misfortune to outshine the beauty of the Queen of England. The latter went straight to her father, Philip the Fair, and denounced them as adulteresses. He had them watched for a whole year before he decided to throw them into prison. His hesitation is understandable, for his sons are attractive and handsome fellows.

"But listen—I think our knight is about to speak.

"'It's God's judgement on him,' said Gontran. 'Philip has done everything he possibly can to vilify the nobles, and he is insisting on governing through these obscure lawyer fellows from the Midi, spouting about "Roman Law" and "The State" and "Fiscal Law"—whatever they all may mean; and in the meanwhile our decent feudal society is being transformed into a rabble of scribbling notaries. He has issued a heap of counterfeit money, he makes the nobles pay poll tax, with the result that nowadays you find any number of knights reduced to—er—'

"... To marrying into the *bourgeoisie*?' interposed Patricia gently.

"'Certainly not! You know very well I didn't mean that! No, reduced to the status of professionals. Do you know that William is now winning on an average about twelve horses per tournament? He goes from one tourney to another, followed by a clerk, who keeps tally of his captives. Last year, between Easter and Pentecost, he captured one hundred and three knights, to say nothing of their horses and equipment, in fair and straightforward fight. All strictly according to the rules, no doubt; but very profitable, all the same, for he won't release them till they've paid a good ransom. So much for the noble amateurism of chivalry!'"

"He must be almost as good as Sugar Ray Robinson," observed Juliette.

"Sh-h!" warned Chronossus. "Let our young Middle Ages couple do the talking. But what's that?"

"'What's happening?' cried Patricia. 'Look at the lights on the windows! Has the Palace caught fire?'"

"'Let's go and see,' said Gontran. 'Hi! there! Open one of the windows.'"

"The shouts of an excited crowd surged into the room. A little way away to the left a pyre burst suddenly into flame on the *Ile aux Juifs*, which almost touches the royal gardens in the *Cité*.

"'Listen!' said Gontran.

"'There are two of them at the stake,' cried Patricia. 'Heavens! I'm sure it must be the Princesses' lovers!'"

"'I very much fear it is not,' replied Gontran, 'This afternoon, before the portals of *Notre Dame*, the Cardinals sentenced the Grand Master of the Knights Templar and his Preceptor for Normandy to life imprisonment. They were offered liberty in return for their confessions. And now, I

suppose, they're being burnt at the stake. Our King seems to be quite determined to finish his reign in a blaze of infamy.'

"I don't know about you," retorted Patricia. 'But if you think he made a good beginning, when he forbade young women to have more than one new frock a year. . . .'

"Please!" interrupted Gontran sharply. 'Don't let's talk about finery when the Grand Master of the Templars is dying in agony.'

"I'm sorry," said Patricia. 'But I'm not terribly keen on these Templars all the same. It seems that they practise sorcery, and, after all. . . . Oh! Look! Isn't that lovely! The flames are lighting up the whole of *Notre Dame* and the façade is bathed in a rosy glow! I do wish they'd flood-light it every evening!'

"With heretics?" asked Gontran dryly."

"How else?" said Juliette. "They hadn't got electricity, had they?"

#### *A Modern Trial—The Templars*

"I rather feared that you hadn't much pity to spare for the Templars," said Chronossus. "And I fear that the calumnies spread by Philip the Fair's judges have been very long-lived. Has it ever struck you that the case against the Templars is a frighteningly faithful pre-view of the political purges of this twentieth century of ours?"

"Philip the Fair was anxious to have a strong State; but a strong State costs a great deal, he was always short of money, and the extremely rich Templars were always ready to act as his bankers—till he thought it would be a much better idea to confiscate the vast wealth of the Order.

"These warrior monks in their white uniforms with a red cross on the shoulder, raised for the defence of the Holy Sepulchre, were a power in the land, an aristocracy of power, and a very secret aristocracy at that, for many of the Templars themselves did not know all the Statutes of their Order. The masses credited them with devilish practices. Nogaret, the King's legal maid-of-all-work, started an agitator's campaign against them, holding mass meetings and accusing them of everything in general and of heresy in particular, and representing the King as the Defender of 'that incomparable treasure, that most precious pearl—the Catholic Faith'. And on October 13th 1307, at exactly the same hour, all the Templars all over France were arrested and charged with heresy. That meant that they were liable to trial by the Inquisition; and no man in his wildest dreams could have imagined a better instrument for the extraction of confessions. In a whole series of interminable trials in which they were tortured the Templars confessed to everything and anything. Sometimes they retracted in Court the confessions made in agony. But Nogaret was on the alert for that. On May 12th 1310 fifty-four Knights Templar who

had repudiated their confessions were forthwith burnt, as religious renegades, at the stake in front of the *Porte Saint Antoine*. An eye-witness has this admirably subtle and ironic comment to make: 'They suffered with a calm staunchness that placed their immortal souls in mortal peril of eternal damnation, for it induced ignorant people to believe that they must have been innocent.' As regards the Grand Master himself, Jacques de Molay, after seven years in prison. . . . But let's listen, rather, to Patricia and Gontran on the subject.

"Gontran turned from the window where he had stood watching the flames. 'They had promised him his liberty,' he said to his wife. 'This afternoon, when he was dragged into the courtyard of *Notre Dame* and heard the sentence of life imprisonment passed on him, his anger flared greater than any sense of fear or despair. "We are not guilty of the things of which we have been accused," he cried. "But we are guilty of having basely betrayed the Order in order to save our lives. The Order is pure and saintly, the accusations are absurd, and the confessions are lies." Then the crowd made a great demonstration and demanded that he be put to death; and, as you can see, they haven't wasted much time about it.'

"'Poor Molay!' sighed Patricia. 'After all, they don't do anything worse than what is done during the *Fête of the Madmen*—that's true, isn't it? And if you are allowed to dress up a donkey as a Bishop, I don't see why you shouldn't be allowed to worship a cat. So—why should the Templars be castigated. . . ."

But Juliette was holding up both her hands. "Stop!" she cried. "For goodness' sake make her stop! I don't understand a word she's saying. Have we suddenly fallen on to another planet or are we still in France in this year of grace 1314? What is all this about a cat? And a donkey?"

"All right," said Chronossus. "Let us leave the young couple at the window . . . and don't worry about the Templars' cat—that was just one of the many cock and bull stories of which Philip the Fair made use as an excuse to expropriate their possessions.<sup>1</sup> But the donkey—that's a very different story, and a very serious one."

### *The Fête of the Madmen*

"The things of which I am about to tell you sound all but incredible. But—I have my witnesses, the Bishops themselves who described them in

<sup>1</sup> The Pope, Philip the Fair and Nogaret went to their graves close upon the heels of the Grand Master of the Templars, and popular imagination carried on the good work. Molay, it was said, arraigned them "before the Tribunal of God". Forty of the Templars had succeeded in making their way to England. When the secret societies of the Rosicrucians and later, in the eighteenth century, of Freemasons were born, these Templars were credited with the paternity of them. And when Louis XVI's head fell . . . but we will speak of that when we get there.

order to condemn them. You've never taken part in a Carnival? Well—try and imagine one, but one held in a church, in one of those handsome new cathedrals which, remember, were the People's Palace, the Town Hall and the local Festival Hall all rolled into one. If you can picture to yourself a people who all the year round lived in respectful dread of a terrible spiritual power . . . you will appreciate that sometimes they feel an urgent need to burst the bond.

"The donkey of which Patricia was speaking was introduced with great pomp and ceremony into the choir of the cathedral of Sens by the Archbishop of the Madmen. In Paris, it was a fox, dressed in a surplice and crowned with a tiara, which took its place among the clergy; to liven up the proceedings, people used to put a few chickens down within its reach. These the fox would quite unconcernedly devour in public to the vast astonishment of the crowd. This part always made Philip the Fair laugh more uproariously than anyone else, for he insisted that the gluttonous fox was the personification of the Pope.

"January 1st was a day of general rejoicing. The Fête of the Madmen is also called the Fête of the Innocents or the Fête of the 'Drunken Deacons', for even the priests attended church in carnival garb, some wearing grimacing masks, others dressed up as women, and all getting drunk at the altar steps under the very nose of the officiating clergyman. After Mass, the people sang obscene songs . . . 'running, jumping and dancing about the church with such immodesty that some were not ashamed to lend themselves to all kinds of indecencies and even to divest themselves of all their clothing; then they would drive round the streets in tip-carts filled with the most disgusting garbage, which they flung with great gusto at the passers-by. They would stop and adopt obscene postures. . . . In short, a scene of desolation and abomination.'

"In Rheims, on the Wednesday of Holy Week, the clergy went to Saint Rémy to set up the Stations of the Cross. The Canons, preceded by the Cross, marched in file, each one of them trailing a herring behind him attached to a piece of ribbon; each one then tried to stamp on the herring of the man in front of him and at the same time to prevent his own herring from being stamped on by the man behind. This herring steeplechase demanded a great deal of contemplative skill.

"I don't know what you feel about all this, but young Patricia thought that these festivities were great fun. She was, perhaps, rather a little simpleton and in reality rather uncouth and uneducated; we did not consider it a good thing that women should be able to read and write, as that would have enabled them to receive *billets doux*. Now—shall we go back and listen to their further conversation?

"'After all,' said Patricia, 'Why should the poor Templars be burnt, when the priests themselves dress up and take part in the carnival?'"

"'Darling,' interrupted Gontran, 'you don't know what you're talking about!'"

"'Well, I do know that they burnt Marguerite Poretta four years ago, simply because she declared that she was pure in soul. There's neither rhyme nor reason in their burnings, and they're quite mad!'"

"'But the Council of Vienne, you know, condemned the mistakes the next year,'"

"'What mistakes?' asked Patricia.

"'Don't you know?'"

"'No. I—er. . . .'"

"'Then you needn't think your husband is going to tell you about them.'"

Juliette waited expectantly; but Chronossus had assumed a look of rather far away detachment.

"'You are not my husband,'" said Juliette at last. "Can I count on you, *cher Monsieur* Chronossus, to explain it all to me?'"

"'Do you really want me to?'"

"'I absolutely insist on it!'"

### *The Adamites*

"'Prodicus,'" began Chronossus, "or it may well have been Carpocrates in the second century founded this sect which was condemned by Saint Augustine. Then Tertullian. . . .'"

"'Stop beating about the bush!'" said Juliette. "What did these Adamites do?'"

"'Hm . . . there were a fair number of them, you know. In the twelfth century three thousand Adamites formed a colony in Antwerp. And in Dauphine and Savoy they had cousins who called themselves *Turlupins*.'"

"'And what did they do?'"

"'They made *turlupinades*!'"

"'And what,'" continued Juliette inexorably, "do you mean by a *turlupinade*?'"

"'A joke, an exhibition in pretty poor taste. These heretics, you see, asserted that our Lord, by taking upon Himself the sins of the world, had restored them to the state of absolute and innate purity of Adam and Eve; that, exalted by their love of God, they could without fear give full play to the appetites of . . . of . . . of the soul; that modesty, therefore, was nothing but a sign of corruption. And so, in accordance with the logic of their tenets, men and women used to take off their clothes when they

entered the temple—any ordinary house, incidentally, was considered suitable as a rendezvous for this paradise on earth. There they prayed and listened to lessons from the Holy Scriptures.”

“Really?” said Juliette.

“And when the senior member of the community pronounced the words from Genesis: ‘Increase and multiply!’ they—er—they proceeded to do so.<sup>1</sup> Marriage, they asserted, was inadmissible as an institution, since it was the punishment placed upon Adam after he had sinned; and they regarded the common use of women as the privilege granted to them by their purity.”<sup>2</sup>

*Good Manners . . .*

“Now I understand,” said Juliette. “And I quite understand why Gontran did not want to put any such ideas into his young wife’s head. Are they still at the window, watching Molay burn?”

“At the moment they are engaged in delicately eating meat with the tips of their fingers.”

“Why?”

“Because they hadn’t yet got forks, and because good manners ruled that only the finger-tips may become greasy when eating.”

“No—I mean—Is Molay dead?”

“Molay is dead, but still burning, and the joint is getting cold. You ought to watch how these well-mannered people eat. They have put their meat on thick slices of bread, which serve as plates; there are no napkins, but they have finger-bowls in which to rinse their fingers. Nor are there any goblets on the table; but the servants are there to hand you one when you are thirsty. You’ll see that they pour the first few drops from each bottle into a separate goblet. This is because we ‘cork’ our bottles with a thin film of oil, which remains on the surface and, of course, the servants wouldn’t give you oil to drink! I don’t know whether you can quite follow what Gontran is now saying—he’s talking with his mouth rather stuffed with food!”

*. . . and Bad Manners*

“That the King should have taken Boniface VIII down a peg or two is all to the good,” said Gontran. “The way the fellow had been behaving you would think it was he who was King of France. But the manners displayed over the whole business are disastrous. The Pope was quite

<sup>1</sup> In certain contemporary sects of a similar nature, they now content themselves with looking at each other (provided, of course, that they find each other easy to look at).

<sup>2</sup> There were still some Adamites in the nineteenth century in Bohemia and, particularly, in the Canton of Berne. Some are also to be found now in the Bois de Boulogne.

justified in inviting Louis to come to Rome to clear himself of the charge of issuing counterfeit money. But just because two million pilgrims went to Rome for the secular jubilee in 1300, the Pope has no right to give himself the airs of an Emperor. It's rank bad form. And the King is guilty of equally bad form in calling a meeting of clergy, nobility and *bourgeoisie* in *Notre Dame*, simply so that they should pass resolutions encouraging him to resist. I know it wasn't his own original idea.<sup>1</sup> Forgive me, my dear, if I say, with all due respect to your father, that it's damn dangerous to let the *bourgeoisie* meddle in the affairs of the Kingdom. They're getting more and more to the top all the time, those fellows, and. . .'

"'As well you know to your cost!' intervened the draper's daughter tranquilly.

"'Exactly. After all, who killed my father twelve years ago in that shameful defeat at Courtrai? *Bourgeois*, Flemish infantry!<sup>2</sup> Things have certainly gone to the dogs since the days of Saint Louis. He was inspired by God, they used to say, and was therefore absolved from any need to consult any assembly. Now Philip the Fair is inspired by these rascally lawyers. I can quite understand that he should feel it necessary to appeal to the people, to have the loafers harangued by his impertinent agents, and to issue ignominious pamphlets. Personally, I don't care a damn if they arrest the Pope in Anagni, and they are perfectly at liberty to transfer the Papacy to Avignon for all I care! But the King shouldn't act through the medium of these crafty jurists and by means of sophisms and political calumnies. The end justifies the means, that's the King's whole policy in a nutshell.

"'At this rate, I'm prepared to bet that we'll have a revolution in Paris within fifty years!'

"'Revolution! What a queer word!' exclaimed Patricia. 'Do you mean one of those revolts, when the King's men go and catch and hang a few disorderly people?'

"'I mean,' replied the Count sourly, 'when the whole bag of tricks goes to hell!'

"'Come, come! You're being a little pessimistic, aren't you, throwing

<sup>1</sup> It is generally admitted that the convention of 1302 was the first meeting of the Estates General. There had been others. But the demagogues of Philip the Fair made more spectacular use of them.

<sup>2</sup> In this action, the French chivalry considered it beneath its dignity to enlist the aid of the ten thousand cross-bowmen of the army and wished to retain for itself the honour of cleaving asunder the Flemish infantry. The result was an unprecedented disaster. Four years before this, the English chivalry, having made judicious use of the assistance of the English archers, had crushed the Scottish infantry. These two battles presaged the disasters that were to overtake us in the Hundred Years War. Fifty years later the English had forgotten, and the French had learnt—nothing.



in the sponge like that!' said Patricia. 'Our King is now more powerful than he has ever been. We ourselves don't like him over much, because he insists on the nobility paying poll tax. But to the people, surely, he is the man who has put the finishing touch to the work of Saint Louis and has made France the premier Kingdom of the West. I think too, that we've more than got our own back for that defeat at Courtrai you were talking about, and the people aren't like you, you know—they worship Philip as the Elect of God. You ought to chat a little more with the servants. Did you see how many scrofulous people he touched last Christmas? A strange thing to do, don't you think—for a cautious lawyer!'

"Tell them to shut the window. It's pitch black night outside.'

"Yes. . . . The Grand Master of the Templars has finished burning.' "

### *The Night Begins to Fall*

"Poor Patricia! Poor Gontran!" sighed Chronossus. "The darkness of night had indeed descended on them, a night that was to last for more than a hundred years. Philip Augustus the Peasant knit the Kingdom together again, Saint Louis the Just carried it onward to the zenith of its regal dignity and Philip has settled the monarchy firmly in the middle of a State.

"The serfs freed from bondage, a rich and prosperous *bourgeoisie*, the feudal lords bereft of most of their power, the birth of industry, romantic poetry, the satire of the fables, the mysticism of Saint Bernard, the logic of Abelard and Saint Thomas, the blossoming forth of woman and the cathedrals . . . how full of treasure these twelfth and thirteenth centuries have been! Nor does there appear to be any reason why their richness should not survive and endure.

"But—Philip the Fair had but a few more months to live. It looked almost as though the good fortune that had always attended the Capetians had suddenly decided to desert them—and with them, to desert France as well. The death, one after the other and without heirs, of those three sons whose marital troubles had been so distressing delivered France into the hands of the exploiters of the baby who was born just before his mother exploded the scandal of the King's daughters-in-law. In 1328, Edward III, grandson of Philip the Fair, saw the opportunity of staking his claim to the French crown. But if his mother had not caused her three sisters-in-law to be cast into prison, might not one of them perhaps have produced an heir?<sup>1</sup>

"A whim of Eleanor's had caused the first Hundred Years War. It looked as though Isabelle's jealousy might well be going to cause a second."

<sup>1</sup> Not, perhaps, one hundred per cent legitimate. But it was reasonable to have the fruit of forbidden love on the throne rather than wage a hundred years of war.

## The Lugubrious Dance

A.D. 1315-1317—*Famine devastates Europe*; A.D. 1328—*The last of Philip the Fair's sons dies without direct heir. Edward III of England claims the throne of France*; THE HUNDRED YEARS WAR. Reverses: A.D. 1346—*Defeat of Crécy*; *The Black Death*; A.D. 1356—*Defeat of Poitiers. Etienne Marcel's revolt in Paris*; A.D. 1360—*Treaty of Bretigny. One third of France ceded to the English*. Successes: A.D. 1364-1380—*Reign of Charles V. Du Guesclin reconquers the territory ceded to the English*. Reverses: A.D. 1415—*Defeat of Agincourt*; A.D. 1420—*Treaty of Troyes. King of England takes the crown of France*; Successes: A.D. 1429—*Joan of Arc relieves Orleans*; A.D. 1453—*End of the Hundred Years War. The English retain possession of Calais only. Charles VII (1422-1461). Permanent taxes, permanent army (Royal Light Infantry and Royal Artillery)*; THE ADVENT OF A NEW WORLD. Political: A.D. 1453—*Capture of Constantinople by the Turks*; A.D. 1461-1483—*Louis XI crushes the feudal lords and comes into certain inheritances, Bourgogne, Picardy, Anjou, Maine, Provence (and France-Comté, Artois and Rousillon—but not for long)*; A.D. 1491—*Anne of Beaujeu, Regent, marries her brother (Charles VIII) to Anne of Brittany*; Social: A.D. 1450—*Gutenberg prints the first book (the Bible)*; A.D. 1492—*Colombus discovers America*; A.D. 1494—*Charles VIII goes off to Italy to fetch the Renaissance*.

"I HAVE told you about a great number of events of various kinds which occurred during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and I should be very sorry if my recitation had prevented you from perceiving the happiness that existed in life. No—happiness is perhaps not the right word; it was something less peaceful and more noble—the bursting eagerness and ferocity of adolescence, the graciousness and the brutality, the sublime and the ridiculous, in short, the explosive fervour that shone throughout

these two centuries. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, on the threshold of which we now stand, have as their tragic symbol the *danse macabre*, that fresco painted in 1424 in the cemetery *des Innocents* in Paris, in which thirty figures representing all walks of life—Pope, Emperor, King, Prelate, monk, peasant and knight—are led in the dance by a group of grimacing skeletons. You will see how, when our misfortunes were at their very worst, certain sections of our community indulged in a brittle and glittering orgy of frenzied gaiety; but you will also see how the devastation caused by wars, roving bands of bandits, epidemics and famines were followed by a most astonishing resurrection.

“It all began with a terrible famine which, from 1315 to 1317, laid waste the whole of Europe. You will get some idea of things when I tell you that in Ypres, a town of twenty thousand inhabitants, two thousand seven hundred and ninety-four people died between the months of May and October 1317.

“But by the time the King of England’s armies disembarked in Normandy in 1346, they found: ‘a luxurious countryside, fertile and abounding in all things, the granaries full of corn, the houses full of costly and beautiful things, a rich *bourgeoisie*, carriages, waggons, horses, pigs, lambs, sheep and the finest cattle in the whole world, all reared in this country’.

“This was the year of the disaster of Crécy, and, during the three years that followed, the Black Death—cholera—the most terrible epidemic in the whole of our history, mowed down one third of the whole population of Europe. For us, it was swiftly followed by yet another defeat at Poitiers in 1356, and in 1358 Etienne Marcel’s revolution in Paris was accompanied by the *Jacquerie* rising—the revolt of the peasants of the *Ile de France*. Then it was that the country was plunged into the deepest pit of its misfortunes. ‘The Kingdom, nerveless, on the point of death and, as it were, heedless of its fate, lay like a corpse. Gangrene had taken hold of it, worms—the brigands of England and Navarre—abounded in it. All this putrefaction isolated and detached one from the other the limbs of the poor corpse. The highways were transformed into cut-throat alleys, the countryside into a battlefield, war everywhere, all the time, and none knew who was friend and who was foe.’ (Michelet)

“Charles V, Du Guesclin and the people all worked hard, gathering up the fragments and slowly climbing up out of the abyss. Sixty years later the English disembarked once again in ‘a smiling and fertile land, full of resources, with rich cities, magnificent towns, *châteaux* without number, more than eighty provinces abundantly populated, more than a thousand prosperous monasteries and more than ninety thousand parishes’.

“Then came the third disaster, the Hundred Years war—Agincourt.

In 1415, there was civil war between the Armagnacs and the Burgundians, the kingdom was delivered into the hands of the English, and poor powerless Dauphin (repudiated by his mother) was forced to retreat to the derisory confines of Bourges. Take the picture painted by Michelet and multiply it by two and you will have some idea of the state of affairs.

"And then, in 1429, came Joan of Arc.

"The way ahead was steep and long, and it continued to be so right up to the time of Louis XI and his eldest daughter, Anne de Beaujeu. How is that for a general outline of the two centuries?"

"Good enough," replied Juliette. "Now get down to the details."

### *The Carpet-bag Travellers*

"The carpet-bag, for example? The one that was the cause of the imperialist Hundred Years War?"

"One moment," said Juliette. "You told me that that was due to a dearth of heirs, thanks to Isabelle's jealousy. You must make up your mind between the King's daughter and your carpet-bag."

"Yes and no," replied Chronossus. "When the last of Philip the Fair's three sons died without heir, Edward III of England was only sixteen. He paid homage for his province of Guyenne to his cousin, Philip of Valois, but it was only lip-service and everybody knew that trouble was brewing. Edward III waited for nine years and then, in 1337, he took the title of King of France; that, of course, didn't mean a thing so long as he did not decide to go to war about it. But the merchants were at his elbow to make him decide to do so.

"The English hung on to Guyenne in those days as they hung on to India yesterday. They obtained wine from Bordeaux, linen from the Cévennes, pigments from Toulouse which they required for the dyes that they then sold, together with their own linen, to Flanders, the great industrial country of the epoch.

"Only—the Flemish were allies of the King of France. The English ceased therefore to send them linen, and the consequent unemployment in Flanders caused widespread misery. The Flemish would gladly have thrown us overboard in favour of the English, but the Pope had made them promise that they would pay two million florins if they committed this breach—for breach it was, since the King of France was also their sovereign.

"A rich and astute merchant of Ghent, Jacob van Artevelde, found a way of arranging matters. He persuaded King Edward—without much difficulty, incidentally—to add to his own coat of arms the fleur-de-lis of France thus enabling the Flemish to regard him as the King of France. This was no sooner suggested than done—in 1340.

"In this way a commercial treaty was concluded—by the simple transfer of the fleur-de-lis. And the English knights who went off to the Hundred Years War were in reality the commercial travellers of the merchants of London and Ghent.

"In the rich and flourishing Duchy of Normandy they pillaged and plundered handsomely. They filled their ships with cloth, ornaments, gold and silver vessels from Caen, from Saint-Lô and from Louviers; the whole of England was gorged with the booty they stole from us, and there was not a woman in the country who did not wear some ornament, possess some bits of fine linen or some handsome goblet that had come from France. Three hundred years earlier, the Normans under William the Conqueror had carried out a similar household removal operation, but in the reverse direction.

"We ourselves had a King who was most elegant, most chivalrous and a frightful stickler for the rules, and who felt very strongly that the English were not playing the game. And his knights were of the same opinion."

"And you, the wily Monsieur Chronossus, what was your opinion at the time?" asked Juliette, "I ask, because sometimes you admire and more often you mock, and I don't know whether I'm standing on my head or my heels."

"Whichever it is, you would still be taking part in the *danse macabre*," replied Chronossus. "For myself, in the full and youthful vigour of my twenty-four centuries, I was at the time an ebullient knight through and through; but when I look back now, I find I was such an ass, that I feel bound. . . ."

"Don't worry," cut in Juliette with a gentle smile. "We know each other far too well for me ever to take you for a stupid man."

"I expected no less from your indulgence," replied Chronossus. So, provisionally, I will now talk to you with the voice of a gallant knight about Crécy and Poitiers, Agincourt and all the other de-bagging incidents."

### *Hurry Up! Kill this Riff-raff!*

"If you want my honest opinion, Philip VI is a real French sportsman, and that King of England is a queer sort of bounder. Once his raid on Normandy had succeeded, he was most anxious to slip away northwards and take shelter with his Flemish friends. We, on the other hand, were equally anxious to teach him a lesson. We had cut the bridges over the Seine, and Philip challenged him to battle. 'I shall pass via Montfort l'Armoury,' replied Edward, and off we went to wait for him there. The bounder then seized the opportunity and crossed the Seine at Poissy. We

chased after him and caught up with him entrenched in a strong position at Crécy. We held our eve of battle revelry in Abbeville laughing and regaling each other with stories of great feats of arms. The next day—it was Saturday August 26th 1346—we marched off to Crécy. After the previous evening's carousel we had, of course, got up a little late. It's a long way from Abbeville to Crécy, and it was a very hot day. When at last we came in sight of the English, the day was already well advanced, we were all boiling hot in our heavy armour and a thunder storm was threatening. The King and some of the great Barons were of the opinion that we ought to postpone giving battle, but the leading waves of our knights were already vying with each other and advancing on the enemy. Philip himself felt his blood course hotly through his veins at the sight and gave the Genoese crossbow men the order to open fire. At that moment the storm burst and it looked as though the end of the world were at hand. When the rain ceased its reflection on our armour blinded us; the strings of the crossbows were completely slack, but those of the English Gaelic archers had, by some miracle, remained completely taut, and they shot so many of their feathered arrows at us, that we might have been in a snow-storm. They had another new weapon, the bombard, which made a great deal of noise and smoke, but did little damage. Our Genoese bowmen leapt to their feet, turned their backsides to the hail of arrows and prepared to bolt for it. We were furious, and the King gave the order: 'Hurry up! Kill this riff-raff which needlessly impedes our path!' We rode over the bodies of our own people and then . . . our horses plunged headlong into ditches which had been dug by the English! On their side, the foremost ranks of the English men-at-arms took full advantage of the ensuing chaos, the archers shot as fast as they could, the pikemen penetrated deep into our midst and butchered the knights wholesale.

"The battle raged on long after daylight had waned. We launched fifteen assaults on the enemy position—in vain. Then it became a case of *saue qui peut* for all—for all, that is, except fifteen hundred knights and two thousand men-at-arms who stood their ground. Among the dead were princes and knights of great renown, including the King's brother and King John of Bohemia, a gallant gentleman, who had insisted in taking part in the combat, though he was blind. He tied his horse to the bridles of two of his knights, and he dealt lusty blows to left and right, on friend and foe alike, blindly, like the rest of us."

*Open! In the Name of the Luckless King of France!*

"Our King had had two horses killed under him and had been wounded in the face by an arrow. At dusk he tried to hurl himself into the thron

of the enemy, determined to die fighting; but two of his nobles managed to restrain him. With a small escort of forty or so men-at-arms we followed him through the woods to the *château* of Labraye. The drawbridge was raised and the portcullis was down, for it was quite dark when we got there. Hearing shouts, the owner came out on to the battlements and asked who was prowling about at that time of night? The King replied: 'Open, Sir! Open in the name of the luckless King of France!' He rested there till midnight, drank a draught of wine and then galloped across country through the night until he reached Amiens.

"Edward III had won a great victory, but he had gained nothing. Marching in short stages and burning the towns and villages as he went, he advanced to Calais, which was the prize that he hoped Crécy would give him, and at once laid siege to the town. A year later, Calais was still holding out.

"In July Philip VI advanced to relieve the gallant town. But the English were far too strongly entrenched for us to be able to attack them. Our King therefore suggested to Edward that he should sally forth into the open country and give battle in the royal manner. This the mean fellow refused to do. And the King returned, deeply depressed, the way he had come."

### *The Burghers of Calais*

"The inhabitants of Calais then had no alternative but to surrender. Edward III would have preferred to see them all die. Finally, he contented himself with demanding that 'six of the most notable burghers of Calais shall come hither, bare-footed and in their shifts, with a halter round their necks and the keys of the town and the *château* in their hands. On these I shall do my will, and on the rest of the men of the town I will have mercy'.

"Jean de Vienne, the bearer of the flag of truce, brought back these conditions to the people, who had been summoned to the Town Hall by the ringing of bells. Long and loud were their lamentations when conditions were made known to them. Then Eustache de St Pierre, the richest burgher in Calais, rose and offered himself as one of the hostages. A second swiftly stepped forward, and then four more of the town's most prominent citizens followed his example. On August 4th, Jean de Vienne, deeply moved, handed the keys to the six men, 'barefooted and in their shifts', and the cortège set forth, accompanied by the weeping populace. As they emerged from the city walls, the six turned. 'Adieu, good people!' they cried. 'Pray for us!'

"When they were led before him, the King of England stood motionless and unmoved, for his heart was so hard and he was so bitter in his

wrath that he could not speak. Then, his first words were an order, in English, to the guard commander, to cut off their heads. To the pleas of the burghers he vouchsafed no reply. His Barons, too, interceded in vain, and the executions were about to take place, when the Queen, even though she was 'very heavy with child', threw herself in tears at the King's feet and pleaded with him to spare the lives of the six hostages. At last Edward relented. The Queen then led the burghers away and saw to it that they were well looked after.

"The town was at once thrown open, and provisions were sent in to the inhabitants. They had none of them eaten their fill for a very long time; three hundred died of indigestion. The remainder were then expelled to make room for settlers brought over from England."

#### *A King Who Paid with His Own Person*

"The same year saw the arrival of the Black Death, which in three years reduced our population to one third of its former total. In Paris for many weeks on end there were a thousand deaths a day. Six years after the Black Death, it was the Black Prince, the son of Edward III, whom we had the misfortune to meet at Poitiers (1356). There things went just as deplorably as they had done at Crécy, and there is no point in repeating the story of our gallant and futile endeavours."

"I know all about that," said Juliette. "That's when John the Good sacrificed himself, fighting like a lion, on foot, and with his young son at his side. 'Beware—right, father!' 'Father—watch your left!' and so on."

"A most comforting picture," said Chronossus. "But the real pity is that this valiant youngster was not killed. We called him Philip the Bold; Philip the Dastard would have been more appropriate. From him there came later a whole series of Dukes of Burgundy (John the Fearless, Philip the Good, Charles the Bold) who were just as disastrous from our point of view as the English themselves. We shall meet them all as we go along.

"As for our good King, John the Good, I think he was even crazier than his predecessor. While a prisoner in London, he offered half his kingdom in exchange for his liberty. I think the fellow really did believe that France was his own personal property. But while the King danced and sang carols in his gilded cage, we ourselves had had enough of it, and the Dauphin had a very hard time in Paris."<sup>1</sup>

#### *Sire, be not Dismayed by What You See!*

"He had left the field at Poitiers and made good his escape on the express

<sup>1</sup> We had just purchased Dauphiné, together with the right for the heir to the throne to call himself Dauphin.



orders of the King; but he was accused of having treacherously fled, with a number of knights, who, I must admit, did flee. The people did not like us knights at all. They said that all we were any good at was passing our nights in gaming and revelries; the *bourgeois* were fed up with being scorned by a bunch of inept and incapable braggarts, and the money was fleeing as quickly as the knights themselves had fled from Poitiers. In five years it had lost nine-tenths of its value.

"The Provost of the merchants, Etienne Marcel, took things in hand. He was a Master Draper and one of the richest men in the city. The whole population, *bourgeois* and working classes alike, were solidly behind him. He ordered them to stop work, he organised meetings and harangued the people in the taverns and squares; he urged them to arm, to man the walls; he closed the gates of the city and at night stretched chains across the streets, while the Estates General in assembly compelled the Dauphin to listen to the four verities of Royalty—like Louis XVI. The people were very pleased with all this, and. . . ."

"And you?" asked Juliette.

"Me? Oh! I was at the baths!"

"Paris in revolt—and you go to the baths?"

"The steam baths, of course. We people of the Middle Ages loved a steam bath. It acted as a corrective to all the spiced venison we'd eaten, and it warmed you up wonderfully. Don't forget all this occurred in mid-winter—February 22nd 1358, to be exact. The bath attendant was throwing water on the super-heated stones, and we were strolling about naked, groping our way peacefully through the steaming mist, when a newcomer—*bourgeois* or knight, in his birthday suit we could not tell—came marching in very importantly.

" 'We have just carried out a *coup d'état*, ' he cried.

" 'Aha!' I thought. 'A *bourgeois*, then.'

" 'Such as I am,' he continued, 'I have come here straight from the Palace. The Dauphin was lying on his ceremonial couch in the Gala Hall. . . .'

" 'Since when,' I enquired coldly, 'has the Dauphin been in the habit of receiving the plebs?'

"The *bourgeois* eyed me with equal frigidity. 'Since Crécy, and Poitiers,' he spat at me. 'Go and see for yourself. Anyway, the Dauphin did not receive us; we forced the doors. Behind us were three thousand men—armed. The Provost approached the Dauphin. "Sire," he said, most courteously. "Be not dismayed by the things you see; they are things that must be." We then hurled ourselves on the two Marshals—the Marshal of Champagne and the Marshal of Normandy. The former fell dead at the

Prince's feet, bespattering him with his blood; but the latter we had to chase from room to room before we succeeded in cutting him down. You should have seen the Dauphin. He was on his knees, begging Marcel to save his life. "Sire," the latter told him, "you have no cause to fear." And do you know what he did then? He took the Dauphin's hat and put it on his own head, and put his hat on the Dauphin.'

"What! the red and blue, the colours of the revolution on the head of our gracious Dauphin!" cried the bath attendant, as though he could not believe his ears.

"Ho! that's nothing! Give us a few more days, and there won't be a King any more!"

"No King? But what will happen to us all without a King?"

"Listen carefully, fellow! We shall all become republicans."

"And what's a republican, may I ask?"

"A republic, you ignorant dolt, is when the merchants rule, as they do in Venice, or the bankers, as in Florence, or, if it comes to that, when the haberdashers rule in the *Communes* of our Flemish friends. Now do you understand?"

"This was more than I could stand. I would gladly have cracked this damn tradesman's head.

"Rot!" I said sharply. 'France could never live as a republic.' Then I stopped. What was the use? I was only a knight, without arms or armour, and to try and fight naked is simply not done. I turned away. 'Send the masseuse,' I ordered, 'Perhaps her ministrations will calm my nerves again.'

"While the girl was gently massaging me, I could hear them still chattering away.

"This will prove to you that we are for the people,' the *bourgeois* was saying. 'Not only have we taxed the nobles on the first five thousand livres of their incomes, but we have also taxed ourselves on the first thousand. More than that we can't do, of course; the burden would become too great. But on our thousand we pay twenty-two in taxes, while you people, only pay one on your ten.'

"And suppose you earn more than a thousand?"

"Well—you surely don't expect us to pay any more, do you? You must be reasonable. Just look at the step forward we've already taken! In future everybody will be taxed, everybody—except the very rich.'

"Damn decent of you!" retorted the bath boy.

"A scale of taxation that diminishes in ratio as the income increases is the only sound principle. Fetch the barber.'

"O.K.," said the boy. 'Shave—or blood-letting?'"

### *The Jacquerie*

"The Dauphin, well and truly dismayed by what he had seen, fled from Paris and sought refuge and support in the provinces, where the people were less heatedly enthusiastic about these new ideas. And almost at once, the *Jacquerie*, the peasants' revolt, broke out.

"Famine, the Black Death, war after war—the peasants could stand no more. The uneasy periods of truce had been just as burdensome as the wars themselves. Bands of soldiers, not on duty but equally, not unarmed, ravaged the countryside. The nobles were unable to protect their peasantry from these bands. Villages tried to help themselves by digging trenches round their churches and transforming them into fortresses. Sentries were posted at night, and whenever the alarm was given, the peasants hastened to take shelter in the church. But as fortresses, these improvised strongholds were laughable. The peasants then took to fleeing to the woods, to the quarries and caves, or aboard boats moored in mid-stream in the rivers—anywhere, in fact, where they hoped they might stand some chance of escaping from the clutches of these marauding bandits. They bitterly blamed the nobles who had failed so signally to protect them; and there were some nobles even who, as in the good old days of nascent feudalism, themselves took command of a brigand band and led it to pillage the peasants outside their own territory. Nor had the peasants any cause to rejoice if their lords were taken prisoner by the English—they still had to pay his ransom. 'The sufferings of the peasant', wrote Michelet, 'passed all bounds; everybody beat him as though he were some wild beast that had been brought down in the chase; and like a wild beast, he rose and bit his tormentors.'

"The revolt spread like wildfire through the countryside to the north of Paris. It lasted only ten days, from May 31st to June 10th 1358, but during those ten days the *Jacques*—the peasants—pillaged the *châteaux* and slaughtered everyone on whom they could lay their hands. There followed a fortnight of most atrocious reprisal, led by Charles the Bad, the Dauphin's brother-in-law and enemy, and by June 20th no fewer than twenty thousand peasants had been slaughtered."

### *The Death of a Moderate Revolutionary*

"Etienne Marcel, a moderate revolutionary, who had deplored the excesses committed by the peasants as much as the terrible reprisals taken against them, was now being besieged by the Dauphin, and his only hope of succour was help from the English. The Parisians, who had supported him through thick and thin for two years, now turned against him. They accused him of treason. 'Death to the Englishman!' they screamed. And

they put him to death. 'What I have been doing,' he had said, 'I have been doing for our good—for your good and mine.' He had spoken the truth. Etienne Marcel, was a great and progressive man; I admit he imposed taxes on the smaller income groups and exempted the really rich; but it was the rule of the times that it must be the poor that pay.

"The Dauphin had had a real fright; when he became Charles V he constructed an enormous bastion flanked by eight towers—the Bastille—the fruit of the first revolution in Paris, which a second revolution was destined to destroy.

"Charles V was a great King. He has been compared to Louis XIV, because they both came to the throne in the midst of wild disorders in Paris. But he did far more and did it far better than the *Roi Soleil*. He assumed the crown of France when the country was at its lowest ebb; and he raised it to peace and prosperity. Under him we lived in an even tenor which made no history and which continued without a cloud on the horizon until the disaster of Agincourt. So, let us take a breather and a look at men and women, children and kittens."

#### *A Village of Two Hundred Thousand Inhabitants*

"Paris has been growing rapidly. Charles V constructed a new walled enclosure on the right bank. It described a semi-circle from the site of the *Palais Royal* to that of the Saint Martin canal, embracing the *grands boulevards*, a number of abbeys, fields and the Temple fortress; the Louvre stronghold was now situated within the walls. Charles V was adding two wings to it, intending to make it his principal palace; in the meanwhile, since he had unhappy memories of the *Palais de la Cité*, he took up his residence in the *Hôtel Saint Paul*.

"When the season was propitious, we used to bathe in the Seine—naked, of course, for we were all for hygiene and the joys of nature. The bridges, studded with small shops, were the scene of great animation. The *Pont au Change* was the Bankers' quarter. At the gate of the *Petit Pont* one had to pay a toll to get into the *Cité*. All round the city were clustered villages, like the hamlet of Saint Lazare and the small farms of Saint-Germain-des Prés. Paris itself still retained many of the familiar characteristics of a village; both the grain harvest and the grape harvest were brought into the city; the mills on the bridges ground the Parisians' flour, and many houses possessed a granary, with dormer windows and a hen-coop. The streets had the familiar smell of stable and farmyard, and the lowing of cattle, the neighing of horses and the cackle of hens mingled with the cries of the street vendors and the innumerable carillons of the churches and monasteries."

*New Fashions*

"Fashion had at last really become fashion. By which I mean that it had at last acquired the essential virtue of continuous change. This important step forward we owe to the fastidiousness of the Valois. Men's doublets had become shorter, and taken shape and were worn tight at the waist and loose over the chest; to take a doublet off, we had to unbutton it, and it had now been given a new name—the jacket. Hose remained tight-fitting. Any number of sound, conservative people, however, remained faithful to the old fashion, and Frenchmen became divided into 'partisans of the long robe' and 'supporters of the short coat'. Comfortable greatcoats appeared on the scene. The more refined among the short coat brigade wore leg-of-mutton sleeves (still fairly narrow, but destined to billow forth in the fifteenth century).

"Women's dresses became more and more precisely fitted and were cut with a round neck back and front; all the solid cloth was in the train. Uplift of the figure became very much *à la mode*."

"Slender or—full-figured?" asked Juliette.

"For the moment a slight, but perfectly rounded figure was the order of the day. Hands had to be tapering, the waist laced-in tightly, the hips very broad and the stomach protruding. Highly admired, too, were a stream-lined leg, a slender foot, a small mouth and chin, almond-shaped eyes with the corners turning upwards towards the temples—the feet and eyes, in fact, of a doe. Eyebrows were plucked, hair over the forehead was thinned out, while the chignon was well padded with a postiche. Pads on the hips, too, became very popular among those who felt the need for them. We had now come under the sway of the really feminine woman."

*Scruffy and Uncouth, but with a Noble Heart*

"Peace<sup>1</sup> had been signed with England. But the English bands saw no reason why, on that account, they should desist from ravaging the countryside; nor were we deterred thereby from re-capturing towns from them as opportunity offered. Charles V had entrusted to Du Guesclin the task of nibbling at them, and for fifteen years he waged a war of attrition, at pretty high cost, until the whole country was more or less cleared of foreigners."

"Yes," said Juliette. "That grand fellow, Du Guesclin, who planned and fought his battles with the Breton lads of his village!"

"Er—yes. His parents were of good family, but poor, and they were not over enamoured with their son, who was unprepossessing in appearance

<sup>1</sup> The Treaty of Brétigny, which ceded a third of France to the English.

and uncouth in manner. One day, when he was seventeen—in 1337—there was a great tournament in Rennes, and his parents left him at home. This he couldn't stand; so he jumped on to a farm horse and galloped to town. There he borrowed a horse and a suit of armour from one of his cousins and took part in fifteen jousts without finding a single opponent worthy of his skill. When he finally raised his visor, his father, of course, recognised him and was filled with admiration.

"Success begets success, and one day the King summoned him. He was seen to arrive at the *Hôtel Saint Paul* dressed in a very shabby grey garment. But as soon as he saw him, the King rose, took him by the hand and told him that he was appointing him Constable of France. Bertrand Du Guesclin protested, saying that he was but a very ordinary little man in the eyes of the great Barons and the valiant men of France. 'And it is my Lords, Sire, your brothers, your nephews and your cousins who will be commanding the men-at-arms. How can I dare to give them orders?' The King replied that anyone who failed to obey Du Guesclin would hear all about it from him personally. When the kneeling Bertrand had received the accolade, he rose, kissed the King on the lips and departed.

"As the King had given him only fifteen hundred men, he recruited another fifteen hundred by pawning his wife's gold plate."

"And what did Madame Du Guesclin have to say about that?"

"As a matter of fact it was a pretty safe gamble. Du Guesclin was very economical in the expenditure of his men. There was no chivalrous nonsense about him—he was there to wage war and win. Just after he left Paris and was in Pontvallain near Le Mans, the English sent a herald to him to challenge him to knightly combat. Bertrand so completely filled the Englishman up with liquor, that he was carried to bed in a stupor. The Constable then marched through the night on the English camp, delivered a surprise dawn attack on them and gave them a sound thrashing. What we had lost in panache, we were gaining in successes."

### *The Very Wise King*

"Du Guesclin died on July 14th 1380, in the same year as his King. The fact that he accorded such far-reaching powers to this quite ordinary young Breton alone suffices to prove that Charles V was a wise man. There are, however, many other things which bear eloquent witness to his wisdom. For myself, looking back with the eyes of the twentieth century, two things which he did seem to me to be pre-eminently admirable. He mitigated the ferocity of the Inquisition and he permitted the return of the Jews to France. They had been expelled by his father, John the Good, because they were said to have been the cause of the Black Death. Charles

was passionately modern in all things. His son was to be the Mad King.

"He was also a most subtle statesman, and he made one monumental error, an error that only the most subtle of statesmen could make. No—believe me, I'm not trying to be funny. His brother Philip the Bold—the young man, you remember, who bolted from Poitiers—had received, as his portion, the Duchy of Burgundy. At the same time, the heiress to the *Comté* of Flanders was seeking a consort. Her marriage to the King of England would have been a catastrophe for us; so Charles hastened to arrange for her to marry his young brother—a nice piece of statesmanship. Only—Flanders was so powerfully rich, that it attracted Burgundy to itself; and the King of France instead of having a fraternal vassal in Dijon, found himself faced with a hostile monarch in Brussels. If you wish to appreciate all the trials and tribulations with which we were faced during the final century before we emerged from the Middle Ages, keep these Burgundians well in mind."

#### *The Diary of a Parisienne*

"A hundred years have passed since Patricia, dear, pretty little Patricia in her house on the quay, was standing at her window, watching the Grand Master of the Templars burn."

"Don't tell me she's dead!" interrupted Juliette.

"I wouldn't dream of referring to anything so sad. See, here is the room in which we watched her dressing for dinner. Don't you think that that young woman, sitting at her writing desk, might well be her sister—or perhaps her great-great-granddaughter? Her name is Anne. She is twenty years old, and she can read and write. Since the advent among us of Queen Isabeau, with her taste for pomp and ostentation (for debauch, too)—and for comfort, our women's clothes have been becoming more and more sumptuous; and—yes, as you have correctly guessed—it is a *négligé* that our Anne is wearing in the intimacy of her own room, a *négligé* of violet silk lined, I think, with ermine. The latest craze is to keep a book, in which one jots down haphazard all one's thoughts, grave and gay—a diary as we call it today."

#### *The Darling of Paris*

"1407. November 24th. Alas! The Darling of Paris is dead! He was so charming, so discreet, so well-read, so brilliant, so insolent, so debauched—and so devout! The Duke of Orleans, the brother of our poor, mad King, assassinated as he emerged from the Queen's apartment! Yesterday evening, about eight o'clock, a dozen men were escorting him, with a couple of torch-bearers ahead, and he on his mule was humming and beating time

with his glove, when suddenly there were shouts, the Duke was on his knees in the mud, and six or eight of his companions, their faces covered, were striking at him. Once or twice he stretched up his arms to ward off their blows, and then he fell headlong to the ground. There is no need to go far to find the murderer. The murder bears his signature—John the Fearless, Duke of Burgundy. Note: I must keep the cats shut in the house. Someone has stolen poor little Grisette—for her grey fur, probably.

“*Jean sans Peur* has blatantly admitted that he is the murderer. He must be very sure of himself and of the support of the people! Even so, they say that he has left the city. People are also hinting that the Queen was his accomplice. Isabeau, who always received the Duke of Orleans in her private apartments, is said to have dismissed him abruptly and to have sent him straight into the arms of the assassins. And yet she was his mistress. But she could easily be the Duke of Burgundy’s mistress, too, quite hideous though he is. I know the latter is the lover of the Duchess of Orleans. But they also say that the Duke of Orleans was the lover of John the Fearless’ mother. The relations in our royal family seem to be terribly complicated! Even so, I should hate to feel that I was a silly little fool, who doesn’t know what’s going on.

“My husband says that these Court stories are mild in comparison with what’s going on in politics. It seems that since the King went mad—fifteen years ago, when I was five (and soon I shall be an old woman!)—the then Duke of Burgundy (the father of this one) and the Duke of Orleans (this one that’s been murdered) squabbled unceasingly in the Regency Council. And the sons will certainly carry on the good work. Charles, the new Duke of Orleans, they say, is fond of writing poetry.

“Is it right that I should never go out of the house, except to go to church, after having humbly asked my lord’s permission to do so? While he can come and go as he likes and spend his time dicing and playing chess—and let us pray he does nothing worse! But I know for a fact that he does. And when he comes home from his nonsense, I, if you please, must attend him, a lighted candle in my hand, with a basin of water and a towel ready, must say not a word, save to invite him to wash his hands. Poor women! Ah well! thank goodness our gallants go to church, too!

“In the good old days things were different! The King was mad about Isabeau when she first came from Bavaria in 1385. He was then seventeen and she fifteen. That beautifully sculptured little brunette has now, quite frankly, turned into a dumpy little barrel (we all do—at thirty-eight); but she loves him more passionately than ever; and he is completely insane.

“My mother often told me about the parties held during the early days of Charles VI’s reign. The *Bal des Sauvages*, where the nobles went dressed



up in jerseys impregnated with pitch and covered with tow; the fantastic follies committed that night, when anything and everything was permitted; the Duke of Orleans' torch setting fire to one of the "Savages"—and how five of them were roasted alive in their fancy dress. It's sometimes called the Ball of the Faggots. The next day, to give thanks to Heaven for having spared the King from hurt, the whole Court went bare-footed in procession from *Montmartre* to *Notre Dame*."

#### *Armagnacs and Burgundians*

"'1410. Charles of Orleans has married the Count of Armagnac's daughter, who will bring with her a number of Gascon bands to swell his forces. Paris is on the side of the Burgundians, who occupy the city. I'm going to the Servants Fair to choose a maidservant. I shall choose one who is very young and unsophisticated and shall put her in the penthouse, which has no window, in order to shelter her from the temptations of the street. I mustn't forget to see that she knows all the rules: garbage and night soil must not be pitched out into the street; water must not be emptied out of the window without crying out "Beware—water!" three times. N.B.—I must hire a tip-cart to take our garbage outside the city walls. To keep all the garbage of the town for the pigs of *Saint Antoine* is a fine idea, but there aren't enough of them. What we want is one pig per house. I must tell my husband.

"'1413. The States General have laid before the King a list of complaints as long as my arm, which took an hour and a half to read out. It is the professors of the University and the butchers, who are the most insistent among the Burgundians in crying out against the extravagant expenditure of the King and the Dauphin.

"'April. The butchers and their knackers have taken up arms and have been rushing about the streets, urging people to revolt.

"'They went, *en masse*, with a knacker named Caboché at their head, to the Dauphin's residence in the *Rue Saint Antoine*, planted the city standard before the gates and then broke into the courtyard. The Dauphin, more dead than alive, was forced to show himself at the window. Jean de Troyes, the Sheriff, demanded that the traitors within the royal household be handed over to him. The Dauphin retorted that there were none, and he challenged the Sheriff to name anyone who had failed in his duties or his fidelity. Jean de Troyes at once presented him with a list of fifty names. The Chancellor was forced to read it out aloud several times. His own name was at the head of the list. The Dauphin then withdrew into his private apartments. Then the crowd broke down the doors and invaded the *Hôtel*. Fifteen of the Dauphin's personal staff were seized.

“August. At last we can breathe again! The Caboche dictatorship is at an end and order has been re-established (by the *bourgeoisie* of the town, my husband among them). My husband explained it to me. It seems that we went along with the *bourgeois*, but we were forced to go further than we wanted to; but if we hadn't, these butchers would probably have ended up by butchering us!

“The Armagnac Princes have returned. They have killed about a hundred Cabochiens, the Dauphin takes his orders from them, and the King is madder than ever. I think he's even lost his power to cure the scrofulous; the King of England asserts that since he has adopted the fleur-de-lis it is he alone who has the power to cure them; but everybody knows that the only people the King of England can cure are the epileptics. Why don't they all stick to their own speciality? With the King of Hungary it's jaundice, with the King of Castile it's those bewitched by the devil and so on.’”

#### *In the Garden of Sérifontaine*

“I am still completely bewildered! What luxury! What graciousness and what a delight! And there was I, thinking that the whole of France, like Paris, was being torn in two by the Armagnacs and the Burgundians! My husband had occasionally had official contact with Renaud de Trie, the Admiral of France, before he retired to his country estates. His wife invited us to stay at their *château* in Normandy, at Sérifontaine—a visit that was, alas, all too short.

“The building itself is low and quite simple in style. In front of it are the river Epte, orchards and lovely gardens. Behind, there is a lake in which one can daily catch enough fish to feed three hundred people.

“The chatelaine of Sérifontaine is the most beautiful lady in the whole of France. She has no fewer than six damsels, whose sole task is to keep her company. In the mornings we went out, with our prayer books and our rosaries, to a little thicket, where we sat apart from one another until we had finished our devotions. Then, accompanied by the knights and the other gentlemen, we mounted our palfreys and wandered about the countryside at random. The air rang with the echoes of the lays and ballads, the rondos and laments we sang.

“While we ate, minstrels made pleasing music. Once grace had been said and the tables removed, the minstrels appeared, and for an hour or so we danced happily. After the dance, spiced wines were served, and then we retired for a little siesta. A brief rest, and then we mounted our horses again, accompanied this time by the pages with falcons. Madame, with a

falcon on her wrist, would make us take up our positions, the beaters went ahead, and, as the quarry rose, away went the falcons. When we had beaten right through the valley we dismounted in a meadow to partake of a picnic meal—cold chicken, partridge and lovely fruits. We ate, drank and fashioned hats of flowers, singing happily, until it was time to return to the *château*.

“After supper, we played bowls until it was dark; then we all trooped into the Great Hall, ablaze with torches; the minstrels came in, and we danced until far into the night. Finally, some fruit, a last glass of wine, a kiss of peace to the knight with whom one had been dancing, and so to bed.’”

#### *Agincourt, as seen from Paris*

“1415. October 26th. The Parisians are all smiles today. Seven thousand men-at-arms were killed yesterday at the battle of Agincourt, and fifteen hundred were taken prisoner by the English, among them being the kindly Duke of Orleans. The *bourgeois* are saying that at last we shall be able to get rid of these arrogant Armagnac knights—but they don't say it very loud, for the Armagnacs still hold the town. They are eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Duke of Burgundy who is on his way, followed by all his vassals, and who has forbidden them to go forth and give battle to the English.

“Near *Saint Martin*, a sow bit a child on the cheek and was hanged on the public gallows.’”

#### *The Armagnac Terror*

“1417. In three short weeks, the Armagnacs have banished eight hundred Burgundians out of Paris. The gates have been walled in. Even at a wedding their agents have to be present to see that nobody says anything that he shouldn't; and, if you please, the bridegroom has to pay them for their services.

“We have been forbidden to keep pots on the window sill, lest one should fall on the head of a passing Armagnac.

“I'm told that, what with the English, the Armagnacs and the Burgundians, the country folk just don't know which way to turn. The towns, too, are full of refugees.”

#### *The Burgundian Terror*

“1418. May 29th. Perrunet, the son of an ironmonger on the *Petit Pont*, was beaten up the other day by Armagnac lackeys. His father is the Guard Commander at the *Porte Saint-Germain-des-Prés*. Last night, while

his father was asleep, young Perrunet stole the keys from under his pillow and opened the gates.

"The roads are choked with the corpses of hundreds of Armagnacs lying there like stuck pigs; and the killers are still at work, going from house to house. The Burgundians even killed a pregnant woman; and when the child in her womb could be seen still moving, one of them shouted: "Look! The puppy's still alive and kicking, anyway!"

"My husband has a certain number of friends among these filthy Burgundians—thank goodness! Private scores, too, are being swiftly settled. Any number of people are simply shouting "Armagnac!" at their enemies and then falling on them and killing them. How I wish I were back at Sérifontaine! On second thoughts, perhaps not. The English are spreading all over Normandy, which will soon be completely anglicised.

"A man named Jeannin, who committed suicide, has been tried and hanged.

"Yesterday, for the inaugural ceremony of a new Fraternity, the church of Saint Eustache was very full; everybody, including the men and the priests, wore hats made of red roses. A horrible outbreak of plague. The corpses are being put into ditches in rows of thirty or forty and then sprinkled over with earth."

*Long live the King of France and England!*

"1419. September 11th. The murder of the Duke of Orleans has been avenged! Yesterday a meeting had been agreed upon between the Duke of Burgundy and the Dauphin on the *Pont de Montereau*. Abusive words were exchanged, and the Dauphin's men slew the Duke. The Parisians have gone completely mad. An egg costs eight deniers, and for a pickled herring they're asking three crowns!

"September 12th. The University and the *bourgeois* have sworn an oath that they will avenge the Duke and that they will never recognise the Dauphin.

"October. Philip, the new Duke of Burgundy, has decided to form an alliance with England.<sup>1</sup> The children are getting no milk. Can one wonder, when it costs twelve deniers a pint!

"1420. May 21st. Queen Isabeau and the Duke of Burgundy have persuaded the mad King to give his daughter in marriage to the King of England. Isabeau now refers to the latter as "our son and heir". And it is he who is going to govern France in the name of poor Charles VI and who will ascend the throne when the latter dies—which won't be long

<sup>1</sup> His father had already concluded a secret treaty with them three years previously, under which the Duke of Burgundy undertook to hand France over to the King of England.

now. As for the Dauphin, the Queen now refers to him as "the self-styled Dauphin"; and she has had the temerity to assert that her son is not the son of the King! That bitch has become truly monstrous!

"December 1st. Henry V and Charles VI are within our walls. They entered the city today. In spite of our poverty and hunger, the streets were all decorated, the *bourgeois* all dressed in red, and the streets along which the royal procession passed were lined with priests in cape and surplice, singing "*Te Deum laudamus*".

"My husband says that this is a blessing and that the King of England will restore order. On the dung heaps of Paris one sees dozens of children dying of hunger.

"1422. November 11th. Following Henry V, we now have the funeral of Charles VI. At the graveside the Herald-at-Arms cried "Long live Henry VI, King, by the grace of God, of France and England, and our sovereign Lord."

"I am ashamed to have to write such things in my diary. I think I shall go back to my cooking."

### *The Hand of the Devil*

Chronossus closed the diary and put it down.

"The Dauphin," he said, "called himself King of Bourges because the unoccupied portion of the kingdom lay to the south of the Loire and because he no longer dared to call himself King of France. The misdemeanours of which Queen Isabeau was guilty gave him more than good reason for believing that what she had said was true and that he was not, in fact, the King's son; and he had never been anointed King.

"He could, of course, have relied on the help of certain faithful servants like the Constable, de Richemont, and on that very wise counsellor, his mother-in-law, Yolande of Aragon, a Spaniard by birth, who had become the Duchess of Anjou. She it was who had rescued him from the clutches of the unspeakable Isabeau and had brought him up, before giving him her daughter in marriage. But the Dauphin preferred to put his trust in a bunch of highwaymen, who grabbed everything that his Court possessed. The most redoubtable of them was Pierre de Giac, whom he appointed as his First Chancellor in 1426.

"Giac was then forty. He was handsome, valiant and perfidious. He had concluded a pact with the Devil, to whom he had pledged his right hand; and, until the Devil came to claim his own, he was using it for the conquest of women, fortune and power. Those were the terms of the bargain. He had been Isabeau's lover, while his own wife had been the mistress of John the Fearless, and thanks to this convenient arrangement he had

dipped his fingers simultaneously and very profitably into the treasure of both the Queen and the Duke of Burgundy. But when he became fascinated by a rich widow, Catherine, Countess Tonnerre, he one night forced his wife, who was pregnant, to drink poison. He then slung her across his saddle and galloped off into the woods. He was forced to ride fifteen leagues before she finally gave up the ghost. Then he buried her in the forest and returned joyously to marry the wealthy Catherine.

"This man of Satan terrorised the whole Court with his gang of assassins. Yolande herself was forced to remain in her own residence in Le Mans. But she realised clearly that this monster was alienating all the Dauphin's loyal followers—and they were few enough, in all conscience. She sent for the Constable, De Richemont, and gave him his instructions.

"One morning at dawn, Giac was awakened by loud knockings at his door. 'Get up! Get up! You're very late abed!' cried a voice. It was La Trémoille, De Richemont and a handful of others.

"The door opened, and the favourite appeared, stark naked. On the bed behind him and equally simply attired, lay the beautiful Catherine. When he saw who his visitors were, Giac cried: 'I'm a dead man!'

"But he wasn't—yet. Three hefty fellows seized him and carried him off, while his wife looked on calmly. Suddenly, however, she rent the air with her clamorous shrieks, leapt from the bed and, naked as she was, rushed out in pursuit of the captors. She had realised that, in addition to her husband, they had also carried off the gold and silver from her boudoir!

"Her cries woke the King, and he, too started to yell at the murderers. Richemont, sword in hand, begged him respectfully to be silent for the good of the country.

"Without further ado, Giac was condemned to death by drowning. Perfidious to the end and anxious to cheat even the Devil, he begged his captors first to cut off his right hand. This favour Tremoille graciously granted him; he stood awhile gazing at the widening ripples of water and then went back to console the widow, whom he married a month later.

"Yolande of Aragon had saved the Dauphin from this man of Satan, and soon she was to receive and succour The Maid, sent by God.<sup>1</sup>

"The country districts were in a state of frightful misery. Indeed, they had been for a very long time—you remember the *Jacques*—but for some strange reason these peasants refused to become reconciled to misery, or anyway to become more accustomed to it than they could possibly help. Bands of armed men were now roaming the countryside, chastising all

<sup>1</sup> It was she who confirmed the virginity of Joan of Arc, the supreme proof demanded by her examiners at Poitiers.

with equal and furious impartiality—bands of English, bands of Burgundians and even bands made up of the men of the King of Bourges. The villages burned merrily. 'War without fire is like pork without mustard,' Henry V had once said. The same village would be held to ransom by eight or ten different bands; if it could not pay—fire! A peasant who refused to pay his share would be shut up in his hut. 'Pay, you rascal! Or we'll break every bone in your wife's body!' And when they had done so, and he still refused to pay, they killed him, too. Meaux and its vicinity was the happy hunting ground of a certain Denis de Vaurus. One day he captured a farm hand and demanded an enormous ransom. The young wife asked for a week in which to find the money. When finally she brought it, de Vaurus told her that her husband had already been hanged. The wife protested violently. He stripped her naked and hung her from the branch of a tree, where the corpses of others who had been hanged bumped against her and dangled grotesquely before her eyes. The young woman was pregnant, and it was terribly cold. Throughout the night she continued to shriek and shout. When daylight came, she started to give birth, but a pack of wolves arrived and devoured both the mother and her infant.

"Exasperated beyond endurance, the peasants too started to organise themselves into bands, stalking the brigands and slaughtering any stragglers who fell into their hands. In Normandy, where the English were on the rampage, the operations of the peasants assumed the proportions and vigour of a regular Resistance movement; dressed in rags and tatters, armed with hatchets, staves and clubs, some mounted on any old horse they could find, some on foot, they took to the forests, whence they sallied forth and ambushed their enemy. The women kept them supplied with food as best they could. Whenever they captured an Englishman, they cut his throat forthwith. The occupying forces paid a reward for every head of a guerilla brought to them, as well as to anyone who gave information that led to the capture of a guerilla. In Normandy, in one single year, ten thousand of these men, and of the people who gave them help or shelter, were hanged."

### *Towards a New Europe*

"Paris, nevertheless, remained Burgundian. The University and the *bourgeois* were the leaders in this Anglo-French collaboration, The Duke of Bedford, who was governing the country in the name of the King, demanded an oath of fealty, not only from the *bourgeois*, but also from the lower and the working classes. The former gave it gladly, the latter only with very bad grace.

"A young woman had all Paris talking of her skill at the *jeu de paume*; she played so well and so cunningly, that she beat all the men.

"Anne no longer keeps a diary; she is too sick at heart about the English. But her husband thinks that the fusion of the French and English Kingdoms would be a good thing and a definite solution to the European problem. When the English have re-established law and order, he argues, France will swiftly become prosperous again. In the Anglo-French partnership the English will not be able to pull their weight; they are themselves aware of this and not a little uneasy about it; and England, he asserts will wake up one fine morning to find herself a satellite and dominion of France.

"'And so,' insists our *bourgeois* student of world affairs, 'what is all this nonsense about some visionary, who hears voices and who wants to boot our English friends out of France?' To which Anne, always logical and by now a bit of a feminist to boot, retorts that it wouldn't be the first time that a woman had stepped in and taken over a man's job which the men failed to do. 'Have we not seen,' she says, 'during the last century three women warriors at the head of three separate armies and all three named Joan? Joan of Penthièvre, Joan of Belleville and Joan of Flanders.'

"The siege of Orleans continued. The people of Orleans could make neither head nor tail of the new order of things. The English cut off the supplies destined for the capital and made good use of them for the sustenance of their own forces. Prices in the black market soared. Those who had been rich and had lived well on their income now became poor; and the poor people—the taverners, the bakers, butchers, vendors of eggs, vegetables and the like—all became rich."

### *Joan, the Loveliest Maiden in France*

"The news of the relief of Orleans by the Maid, on May 8th 1429, spread across France to the ringing of bells and with fireworks and processions everywhere. The people were transfigured with joy and filled with hope. But the King of Bourges remained incurably doleful. The people still had in them the stuff that had inspired the Crusades and given rise to the building of our cathedrals; but the petty Princeling lacked their great-hearted simplicity. His military advisers like La Trémoille disapproved of the intervention of mysticism in strategy. Even the English, however, could not deny the 'buffets and hammerings'—to use Joan's own words—to which they had been subjected. When they saw their cities opening their gates, one after another, to this shepherd girl, who was dragging her



reluctant King to Rheims in her wake, they began to panic. For nearly a hundred years they had been used to making mincemeat of our swaggering braggarts—at Crécy, at Poitiers, at Agincourt, and now, here was a maid of nineteen! To have defeated them like that, she must, obviously, be a witch; and anyway, their military pride could brook no other explanation."

"Because," interposed Juliette, "to have been booted out of France by a Saint would have been a disgrace?"

"Firstly," replied Chronossus, "she did not boot them out of France; twenty years later they were still there; but she gave us back our courage breathed life into the soul of France—that was the wonderful miracle she performed. Secondly, she was not a Saint—not until 1920, that is. And thirdly, you've put your finger on the crux of the whole matter. If Joan really had been sent by God, then the English had no right to be in France at all. For it did not suffice that they were there *de facto*; they had, they felt, to be there *de jure* as well. After all—don't forget their national motto (in French, incidentally) *Dieu et mon Droit*. And for that reason alone Joan was already condemned to the stake, before ever the trial at Rouen opened. And for the same reason, the King, who deserted her then, re-instated her in 1456."

"I don't think you need bother to tell us the story of Joan of Arc," said Juliette.

"Pity! It is such a noble story."

"I know it is. But I know it, like everybody else—Domrémy, Vaucouleurs, Chinon, Orleans, Rheims, Paris, Compiègne and finally Rouen."

"One epic year and one year of prison."

"But I should very much like to know what sort of girl she really was. I take it, you must have seen her?"

"I wasn't at Chinon, when she arrived from Vaucouleurs, went straight to the King, who was hiding from her among his women, and told him straight out that he most certainly was the son of his father. I was told that at that time she wore her hair down her back. It's possible that she did, but all I can tell you is that later she always wore it done up."

"I know that," interrupted Juliette. "The *coiffure à la Jeanne d'Arc* is well known."

"... Or rather, trimmed, I should have said, like a man. The barber used to put a basin on top of one's head and then crop one close all round the rim of it. The hair was cut away from ears and temples, and all that remained was a little tuft in the middle. Joan was dark and very strong, and she could wear her armour night and day for a whole week on end. Then,

once she had 'succeeded', she started to dress like a young man of fashion in hose which fitted tightly round her sturdy legs, and a jacket, perhaps a little longer than normal, which reached almost to her knees. She was very fond of fine cloth—vermilion velvets, silks and gold brocades. Her breasts were large and firm; that I had from her comrades in arms, Xaintrailles, Novelonpont, Poulangy and the Duke of Alençon; for while she was campaigning, she made no bones about stripping in their presence like any other man; but not one of them would ever have dreamed of trying to take liberties with her. Later, one of her gaolers was foolish enough to try and have some fun and games with her; but when he tried to fondle that handsome bosom, she caught him a buffet that quickly brought him to his senses again. Though not prudish, she refused to tolerate the soldiers' girl friends who used to trail after her troop, and she used to beat them with the flat of her sword—and to such good purpose that on one occasion she broke it! 'I do wish you'd carry a stick!' complained the King, who had to buy her a new one.

"She was high-spirited, but emotional. Both at Orleans, when she was wounded in the shoulder by an arrow from a crossbow, and in Rheims, when at last she saw the King crowned, she sobbed with emotion. She had a pleasing, feminine voice, but she didn't mince words when she was angry, and she had a very summary way of dealing with fools. At Poitiers, when the monks were examining her, prior to the King's decision to place his trust in her, Father Séguin in his own rather uncouth dialect asked her: 'And in what language does your Voice speak to you?' 'A much better language than yours!' was Joan's sharp retort. In Rouen, one of the judges was saying, 'And when you were tending your father's sheep . . .' when Joan interrupted him. 'My father,' she said, 'had ample servants. There was no need for me to tend the sheep.' In the course of her interrogation, one of the lawyers made a silly mistake. 'If you make any more mistakes like that,' said Joan, 'I'll box your ears!'

"She was a strict disciplinarian, and whenever one of her soldiers disobeyed her orders, she used to give him a sound thrashing with a stick. As for her quick and direct intellect, you will probably remember her famous replies to Cauchon and the other theologians from the Sorbonne who flocked to her trial. Keenly alert and inflexible of purpose, pure but not prudish, passionately devout yet full of fun, the Joan who went to the stake in Rouen in 1431 was the personification of all that was best and most beautiful in French maidenhood.

"The Square of the Old Market, with its butchers' and fishmongers' shops, smelt of stale blood and stagnant seawater. Stands were erected for the public, and the stake, very high and built of wood and plaster, burned

slowly. Joan, clutching to her breast a cross made of two pieces of stick, could be heard calling upon God and the Saints. The fire rose slowly . . . higher and higher . . . reached her. 'Jesus!' she cried aloud.

"When her clothing had been completely burnt, the executioner pushed aside the burning faggots 'and she was seen, quite naked, by all the people, and all those secrets which can and ought to be in woman were revealed, in order that the doubts of the people should be removed. And when they had gazed their fill at her, quite dead and still bound to the stake, the executioner re-kindled a great fire round this poor dead thing, which was quickly consumed by the flames, and its flesh and bones were turned into cinders'.

"Many of the good citizens of Rouen were in tears. A few of the English were laughing. Her ashes were cast into the Seine.

"Joan had taken a house in Orleans on a sixty years' lease. She had hoped to return there, after she had booted the English out of France, to live in peace among those dear Orleanais, who loved her so much."

#### *Charles VII—Pampered by Women*

"Joan of Arc had re-awakened France. The throne rose once again to its true sovereign status with a speed that was remarkable and with a completeness which, a few years later, caused the King of Hungary to write to the ex-King of Bourges: 'You have become the pillar of Christianity.'

"You may well ask—how did all this happen? Paris, which had repulsed Joan, opened its gates to the King; Charles made peace with Burgundy; he created and trained a light infantry, with which he drove out the English, and an artillery,<sup>1</sup> with which he was able to demolish the fortress *châteaux* of the turbulent feudal Barons; he re-conquered first the *Ile de France* and then Normandy; and even the citizens of Bordeaux, those staunch friends of the English merchants, finished up by surrendering to France. Twenty years after the death of Joan of Arc, Calais was the only place still in the hands of the English.

"And yet—Charles VII was a weakling and a man of no character or personality. It is said of him that he was well served. By whom? By France, which had re-discovered the joy of living, and by England, which was just then falling into the anarchy of the Wars of the Roses; by obscure, minor officials like the brothers Bureau and by enterprising capitalists like Jacques Coeur; by his own selfish ingratitude; and last but not least by women. By Joan, of course; but also by Agnes Sorel, a most beautiful

<sup>1</sup> Only the King was rich enough to erect foundries for the manufacture of cannon. Gunpowder gave the *coup de grâce* to feudalism.

mistress and a most wise counsellor; by his wife, who knew how to efface herself when required; and by Yolande of Aragon, of whom I have already told you.<sup>1</sup>

"Yolande, his mother-in-law and wise adviser, died in 1442. The future Louis XI, who was anything but a sentimentalist, delivered a funeral oration that was as brief as it was remarkably apt. 'The heart of a man,' he said, 'in the body of a woman.' Four months later there arrived at Court a woman of most ravishing bodily beauty and of the highest intellectual order—Agnes Sorel."

### La Dame de Beauté

"She had a sweet, round face, lighted by eyes that sparkled ingenuously, the mouth of an infant and a round and firm neck; she . . . but, of course, you know all about her—you have only to think of the Virgin painted by Fouquet. She was a maid for whom even a Saint might have risked damnation, and Charles VI was certainly no saint. She was just twenty, and he was in his forties with a long nose and knock-knees; he could hardly believe his good fortune.

"Yolande had guided his footsteps. Joan had made him have faith in his Kingship. Agnes showed him that he was a man.

"For as long as she lived—for eight years—he continued to love her. She was the first officially recognised favourite of any of our Kings. The Parisians were scandalised when she made an almost royal entry into the city. She was wearing a girdle of red velvet, fastened in front with a gold buckle, a long, blue veil that floated like wings down to the ground, and she was scintillating with diamonds and necklaces of gold and emeralds. Among the estates which the King gave her was the *château de Beauté-sur-Marne* at Vincennes, and so we all called her *Madame de Beauté*.

"She was the Queen of Fashion, and I am bound to say that our women were becoming more and more extravagant (so were the men, for that matter). But it made no difference what she wore—a wimple so tall and wide of brim that she had to turn sideways to go through a doorway, plucked eyebrows, a coiffure that was like a balloon, a very plunging

<sup>1</sup> Among these admirable women, who rose to the occasion when the men had faltered, mention must be made of one more, who is as unknown as Yolande of Aragon—Colette of Corbie. She was exceptionally beautiful, but her humility and Christian piety protected her from the dangers of the world. She was the founder of the Order of Poor Clares, an Order of rigid and simple austerity. She founded convents, built churches and conducted important diplomatic negotiations on behalf of the King. While it was a shepherd girl who led the King to Rheims, it is Saint Colette, the daughter of a miller of Corbie, who had the honour of having her bare foot kissed by a Pope.

pointed *décolletage* (a thing she loved dearly, and who could blame her!) astonishing trains, brocades of gold thread, trimmed with fur, heavy necklaces, enormous cabochons—whatever she wore, she always looked lovely. The emphasis in fashion was on sumptuousness. Jacques Coeur supplied the whole Court, and he was always ready to make a loan to anyone who asked that small service of him."

*Nothing is Impossible*

"Everything this man did proved that France had but to show the will and she could become once more a commercial power. His father, a furrier in Bourges, had left him a modest inheritance. Jacques Coeur's motto was: 'To the valiant heart (*coeur*) nothing is impossible.' In May 1432, at a moment when the distress in France was at its worst, he went off to the Levant to purchase spices. On the return journey his ship was wrecked off Calvi. He managed to get ashore in a boat on the island of Corsica; the islanders stripped him of everything he had. He returned to France with nothing—except his courage. But he had learnt all there was to be known about the Mediterranean trade, and within a few years he was the most prominent business man in the Levant. His interests spread in every direction. He had a silk factory in Florence, mines near Lyons, salt mines in Tours, Loches and many other places, a dye-works in Montpellier, a perfumery in Rochetaillée and so on. He won the King's esteem and succeeded in interesting him in his activities. He was given various official appointments, his wealth increased continuously, and he was invariably able to get matters settled as he wanted. He was voted subsidies, and his merchandise was exempted from taxation. New tariff scales were drawn up to suit his convenience, and the ports and canals were repaired to facilitate the movement of his goods.

"His wealth and good fortune had become proverbial. But his own ambition was to use them for the glory and expansion of France, and he longed to see blooming in Paris the graciousness of the Italian Renaissance. Nevertheless, when it became necessary to fight our last war with England, he said to the King: 'Sire, all I possess is yours.'

"In the meanwhile Agnes had been egging on her timorous lover. 'Do you think you can sit and do nothing—and still be a King?' she cried. 'No, no! Great Kings always have great enterprises on hand. You will have plenty more opportunities to enjoy the delights of your body and of beautiful women! But now—Come! Lead us to war! Of all your gallant company, you will be the most gallant!' She strengthened and sustained the King; and she strengthened and kept at his side his two most faithful servants, The Senechal de Breze and Jacques Coeur."

*We are but Poor and Fragile Things*

"When she heard that Normandy had been reconquered, Agnes pregnant though she was, set forth at once to join the King.

"Charles VIII had entered Rouen amidst scenes of great rejoicing. The streets were strewn with light blue cloth, bonfires crackled in all the squares, minstrels sang, and the populace shouted 'Noel! Noel!'—the 'hurrah' of the period. The King was in armour, but an enormous diamond buckle adorned his cap of grey beaver lined with silver gilt. His saddle-cloth, which reached right down to his horse's hooves, was of blue velvet, studded with fleur-de-lis. On his left and right rode the sons of Yolande, and behind them came the architects of victory, Dunois, de Brézé and Jacques Coeur. Charles VIII was seeing come true the fairy tales that had been promised to him by his mistress. Perhaps, too, he gave a thought to Joan, who had died here for him.

"Agnes had not been with him for more than a month when on February 11th 1480 she was seized with an inflammation of the stomach and died, saying: 'We are but poor and fragile things.' She was twenty-eight years of age.

"One year after the reconquest of Normandy, which he had financed, and one year after the death of his protectress, Jacques Coeur was arrested and charged with having poisoned Agnes. The truth was that everybody, from the King downwards, owed him too much; and his debtors thought that by far the most convenient solution would be to get him banished for life and to confiscate his property.

"As regards the *Dame de Beauté*, the King hinted darkly at a very different person as the poisoner—his own son, the future Louis XI. For, in his attempts to seize power while his father was still alive, the Dauphin had tried first to seduce and then to assassinate his father's mistress; and all he had succeeded in accomplishing had been to have himself banished from Court. He had taken refuge at the Burgundian Court, where he continued to plot against the King. Charles VIII, who knew his own son, said: 'My cousin of Burgundy little knows what he is doing; he is nourishing the fox that will devour his chickens.'"

"If I understand you correctly," said Juliette, "we are now going on to Louis XI."

"In a moment. But first I should like to say a word or two about the Duke of Burgundy."

"Charles the Bold," interrupted Juliette, "the redoubtable enemy of Louis XI. Everyone knows about him."

"It is his father that I wish to speak about—and about certain other patrons of the arts."

"Oh! So now we're on to the arts! In the Renaissance period, in fact!"

"Have a little patience, and you will soon see the Renaissance burst upon us like a pagan blessing. At the moment we were being inundated by a wave of precious and arty-crafty artists, who pressed antiques, flamboyant Gothic art and books which were a marvel of illuminated calligraphy upon us. But opposed to these decadent subtleties, what enormous popular enthusiasm there was for the religious plays; how we laughed at the comedies and the farces, and how we admired the robust paintings, from Fouquet to Van Eyck and Van der Weyden (both the latter, Flemish subjects of the French Crown).

"There were plenty of patrons to encourage and give orders to the artists. Some were rich *bourgeois*, like Jacques Coeur, with his famous residence in Bourges; while in Paris—but I expect you know all about that—everyone was talking about the mansion of Jacques Duché."

"The name certainly rings a bell," replied Juliette.

"In the courtyard of his mansion, peacocks preened themselves. He had a reading room rich in illuminated manuscripts; a music room with harps, organs, violas—all of which he played well; a chapel with an exquisitely sculpted pulpit; a study, the walls of which were covered with precious stones and impregnated with sweet smelling perfumes. On the roof was a rare marvel—a square room with windows in all four walls to facilitate the enjoyment of the panorama. There *Maître Duché* gave dinner parties, the food for which was brought up by a lift which worked on a pulley system.

"The Duke of Anjou and Lorraine, Count of Provence, King (*in partibus*) of the Two Sicilies, better known as King René, had been ruined by the war, but nowhere were men of letters, artists and musicians given a greater reception than in his *château* in Angers—except, perhaps, in the *château* of Blois, the home of Charles, Duke of Orleans. You remember that gay and carefree young Duke, whom Anne found so very attractive and who was taken prisoner at Agincourt? After twenty-five years of captivity in London, he had returned home, where he spent much of his time writing poetry, and where he kept open house for all men of letters, regardless of their birth or fortune."

### *The Vow of the Pheasant*

"The parade of pomp and splendour maintained by the Duke of Burgundy outshone that of all the other nobles, not excluding the King himself; his Court was one unceasing round of fêtes, banquets, balls and tournaments. Nothing more brilliant than these could be found anywhere in Europe.

"A most rigid etiquette governed the conduct of the courtiers at the Court of Burgundy—it was a foretaste of Versailles, but all the more meticulous in its observance, because the public customs and manners of the times were still in a state of hesitant uncertainty.

"The practice of chivalry had become little more than a choreographic rite, devoid of any significance. Admittedly a knight still broke a lance on behalf of his lady—but he would then be unfaithful to her without the slightest hesitation or compunction.

"And yet this society, so very ceremonious, took great delight in tricks and practical jokes of extremely doubtful taste. In the gallery of the *château* of Hesdin Philip the Good had installed a whole series of gadgets for the amusement—or otherwise—of his guests, gadgets which automatically beat them with canes or covered them with flour or soot as they passed, and at the entry to the gallery there were 'eighte conduits to wet the ladies from below'.

"Of all the fêtes held at the Burgundian Court, the most ostentatious was that given by Philip the Good in Lille in February 17th 1454, which became known as 'The Banquet of the Pheasant'.

"The year before there had occurred an event which had greatly upset the whole Christian world—the Turks had taken Constantinople and by so doing had put an end to the Roman Eastern Empire."

"Couldn't you have told us that before?" cried Juliette. "Here we are, already out of the Middle Ages—and we didn't even know it!"

"There I cannot agree with you," replied Chronossus. "For me, the capture of Constantinople does not put an end to the Middle Ages. For that, surely, we must wait until Louis XI has completed the re-unification of the kingdom, and until certain discoveries and inventions—gunpowder and America, printing and Italian art—have changed our whole way of thinking.

"As it was, we were still thinking and talking in terms of the Crusades; the action of the Turks cried aloud for vengeance, The Emperor of Trebizond and the King of Persia appealed for help to the 'King of Kings'—our King, that is; but he had other (English) fish to fry. The Duke of Burgundy, fired with enthusiasm, therefore arranged a banquet."

"I'm sorry," said Juliette, "but I confess I don't see the connection."

"Cast your eye for a moment on these tables, laden with the '*entremets*'—that is what we used to call the side dishes and things offered for the amusement of the guests. Here is a marvellous forest 'as though it were a forest in India, peopled with mechanical animals'; a *château* of Melusine from which falls an orange waterfall, and here a pâté on which eight and twenty musicians are seated. Here, a ship, a fountain, a 'little infant seated,



quite naked, on a rock, making (rose) water', and here a church, in which four musicians sing and play the organ. And have a particularly good look at this last one—an elephant caparisoned in blue silk with the Prince's Master of Horse, dressed as a woman in mourning, on its back. That is 'the Holy Church' being led away by a giant, a wicked Saracen, who holds the Church in captivity. Now you will understand why we were making merry.

"After the banquet, a live pheasant, adorned with a rich collar of gold, was presented to Philip, for a solemn vow, according to current custom, was always taken in the presence of a noble bird. Philip and all the nobles present took the 'vow of the pheasant'. They all swore solemnly that they would 'go forth and give battle to the Great Turk'—and then they all went off home."

"Well," said Juliette, "as far as the Crusades are concerned, you seem to have introduced some very considerable changes since Peter the Hermit's days."

#### *The Brigands on the Run*

"The brigands were being slowly dispersed, but there were still some ranging the countryside, which they continued to terrorise until after Charles VII had made his final peace with England. The peasants to the north of the Loire did not begin to breathe freely until after 1450. Up till that year, the land lay fallow, the main roads were over-grown with weed and brushwood and the villages remained deserted. The land was cultivated only in the close vicinity and within hailing distance of fortified towns and *châteaux*, on the towers of which sentinels were posted to give warning of the approach of brigands. When the alarm was given—by bell or trumpet—the peasants working in the fields and vineyards scampered back to shelter. These alarms were so frequent, that even the cattle and the plough horses needed no further bidding and, once released from their yokes, galloped for shelter of their own free will. Even the pigs and sheep quickly acquired the same habit.

"This will give you some idea of the state of things: In the Chevreuse valley in 1458, when the archdeacon de Josas took up his duties, he found only eight parishioners in Bièvres (against one hundred before), sixteen in Gif (against a hundred) twenty-eight in Chevreuse (against three hundred) thirty in Bru-sur-Forge (against three hundred). Saint Cloud, on the other hand, which was a fortified town, had retained all its inhabitants."

#### *The Miller of Saint Rémy-lès-Chevreuse*

"Little by little, while Louis XI was fencing with Charles the Bold and

was gaining the upper hand by ruse, money and force of arms, the villagers began trooping back to their villages. At Saint Rémy-lès-Chevreuse the Great Mill on the Yvette began once more to grind corn. The miller (who was a woman) found herself in a position to buy box-wood plates and spoons, and pewter dishes and goblets to put on her beautifully waxed dresser; and in her chest she very soon had nine chemises (of which three were of linen), a dozen sheets, seven tablecloths and fourteen napkins. She wore a short, black skirt and a red bodice, laced over her chemise. On feast days, she wore a long grey robe over her bodice, trimmed with black velvet and she had a girdle of the same velvet.

"A great number of people stop and gossip at a mill, and the miller heard all sorts of things. She knew that Charles the Bold had died without a male heir and that King Louis XI had inherited Burgundy. But what she did not know was that Marie of Burgundy, by marrying Maximilian of Austria (and bringing Flanders to him as her dowry), had sparked off yet another long quarrel with the House of Austria. She knew, too, that we had inherited Maine, Anjou and Provence—Louis XI was busy putting into his basket the fruits which had ripened in his garden.

"Even if you had told her, she would not have believed that this puny and unprepossessing monarch was one of the greatest architects of French unity. What she did know was that he sold letters patent to rich men, and that, she knew, was most unfair to their equally worthy but poorer brethren; that he was organising an exhibition of our products in London to encourage trade; that he was always in need of money and was always browbeating people to get more of it (but used it to buy peace and security for them); that he used to shut up his enemies in hen-coops—even Bishops; that he had organised a postal service, but ran it as his own private concern, with couriers in blue blouses and red pantaloons, who galloped in stages of three leagues each.

"A great deal of water has since passed through the mill, a great deal of grain has found its way between its grindstones and not a little money has flowed into the miller's purse; but now she is no longer as young and as alert as she used to be. Having voluntarily shut himself up in his *château* at Plessis-lès-Tours, Louis XI had died in terror, even though the Pope had sent him a morsel of Saint Anthony's skin and had authorised him to anoint himself with oil from the Sacred Phial. Thanks to the two Annes, we had also gathered Brittany into the fold. When Anne, the Duchess of Brittany, became an eligible heiress, our Regent, Anne of Beaujeu suggested her young brother, the King, as a consort. Anne of Brittany, however, was unwilling; and so, Anne of Beaujeu repeated the proposal

of marriage, using an army of forty thousand men-at-arms to convey it. Now that's what I call courting in the *grande manière*.

"What the miller would have liked to do, but it was too late for her to do it, was—yes—she would have liked to learn to read, a much easier task now that books were being printed, so that she could take advantage of this great invention and read all about what was happening in the world. And lots of things were happening, so they said. A man named Christopher Columbus, for instance, was said to have discovered a country full of gold. For that reason, of course, the inhabitants had wished to remain hidden. When they saw Columbus arrive in his caravels, they tore out the feathers (which they wore on their heads) and cried: 'Alas! we have been discovered!'"

*Don't forget—I went through the Hundred Years War!*

"Thus we find that, just as the Middle Ages came to an end, two inheritances and one marriage had brought about a more or less complete reunification of France. A few years of peace had then sufficed for us to become prosperous once again. This little comparison with 1900—the period referred to by everybody as 'the good old days'—might amuse you. In 1900, with a day's pay a workman could buy one chicken; the workman in Charles VIII's day could have bought three and a half chickens. And in medieval days, mark you, chickens were an expensive article. I think it would be better to base the comparison on mutton. The 1900 workman had to spend two days' pay to buy a leg of mutton; for two days' pay Charles VIII's navy could have bought five legs of mutton. Those were the really 'good old days'.

"The feudal lords, finding themselves checkmated, became aristocrats. As they had always been too proud to work, they flocked to the Court, elbowing each other aside in their struggle to gather the crumbs from the King's table. The *bourgeois* showed great enterprise; the King protected their commerce, in return for which they provided him with the means to wage war. The peasants asked nothing of anybody, except to be left alone to till their fields in peace. Only the working man complained that he was being exploited. Little did he know what was coming to him!

"Women had made great advances. Graciousness in love and the cult of the Virgin had led to their acquiring civic rights. It was no use Louis XI and the *bourgeois* authors saying: 'The wisest woman in the world has as much sense in her head as I have gold in my eye.' So what? We all knew that perfectly well, and the women themselves emphasised it, as a sort of setpiece to the fantasies of the Middle Ages, by dressing themselves up in those astonishing, long, conical wimples; and for our own part we thought

it was rather sweet of them to pretend to be a little foolish, just for our amusement and our delight.

"The time had now come to send our Kings to Italy, to prospect, for the space of a few campaigns, among the artists of the Renaissance."

"I hope you went with them," said Juliette.

"Have a heart! I'd been through the whole of the Hundred Years War, remember. That, surely, was enough for any man. Rather not—I stayed quietly at home and waited for them to bring the Renaissance to us."

PART FOUR

The Most Beautiful Girl in the World



## The Art of Living and the Art of Killing

A.D. 1515-1547—Reign of Francis I. *The voluptuous and sophisticated Renaissance. Beginning of the austere and relentless Reformation. Struggle against Charles V*; A.D. 1547-1559—Reign of Henry II. *The art of living prepares to become the art of mutual killing. Calais re-taken (1558). Treaty of Cateau-Cambresis—Metz, Toul, Verdun restored to France (1559)*; A.D. 1559-1589—Reigns of the three brothers under the aegis of Catherine de Medici: Francis II (1559-60), Charles IX (1560-74), Henry III (1574-1589). *The religious wars. Saint Bartholomew massacres (August 24 1572)*; A.D. 1588—*The Invincible Armada dispersed to the four winds of heaven; the freedom of the West saved by a tempest*; A.D. 1589-1610—*Henry IV conquers his Kingdom from the Catholic League, expels the Spaniards, establishes religious tolerance (Edict of Nantes, 1598), with Sully he puts the country on its feet again and re-establishes his royal authority by means of a smile.*

“YES or no? Is Her Majesty the Queen pregnant or not?”

“Louis XII, after three months of most exacting endeavour in the arms of his incandescent young bride, was on the point of death. But had he, *in extremis*, succeeded in begetting a son? That was the agonising problem which kept the Count of Angoulême awake at night, would he or would he not very soon be King Francis I of France? He was then just twenty years of age.

“Queen Mary<sup>1</sup> was a rosy sixteen; she loved love, she had a delightful sense of humour, and she enjoyed the situation immensely. She would have found it even more amusing, had she known that with its malicious smile the century of the Renaissance was about to take the stage.

“We were about to enter upon an age of elegance and an age devoted to the art of living. In the middle of the century elegance becomes perverted

<sup>1</sup> The sister of Henry VIII of England.

into debauchery, and the art of living is drowned in the blood of the Saint Bartholomew massacres. This century of fêtes and tragedies has all the allurements of a whimsical, capricious woman, and from its beginning to its very end it is adorned with a series of gracious faces, among which those of Henry II and his *Mignons* (favourites) are by no means the least feminine."

### *The Queen Amuses Herself*

"From early in 1514 the enfeebled Louis XII had been a widower. He had cried bitter tears for his beloved Anne—that Duchess of Brittany, whose hand in marriage Anne of Beaujeu had demanded."

"With forty thousand soldiers as her messengers, I remember," said Juliette. "But I thought you said that that was on behalf of her young brother, Charles VIII?"

"Yes—so it was. But that estimable young man had banged his head against a door and died, in 1498, without leaving any children. Louis XII had then succeeded him, both on his throne and in his bed, having divorced Jeanne de France, the daughter of Louis XI, in order to marry Anne of Brittany."

"She must have been terribly attractive, that young Anne, to have all our Kings running after her like that."

"The real point is that she was a Bretonne. Louis XII had loved her with a sincere tenderness, and thanks to that fact, Brittany had remained a part of France. Anne, who had been lame in one leg, had given him a daughter, Claude, who was lame in both legs; in May Louis XII married her to his heir, his handsome cousin Francis, for, since he loved Brittany, he knew what he had to do, and he did it. Claude, then, would in due course become Queen Claude of France.

"But before she did so, before her Francis became Francis I of France, what a hullabaloo! A regular music hall farce!

"For in the month of October, behold our widowed and tottering King once more in possession, if one dare to use such a phrase, of a wife. And what a wife! When Francis, dressed in a costume of silver and gold and with a cloak of white silk thrown over his shoulders, went forth along the road to Abbeville to greet his new, sixteen-year-old mother-in-law, he was dumbfounded. Those blue eyes, that golden hair, those moist, tender lips, that aura of voluptuousness! 'By God!' he thought to himself, 'here's something which might re-ignite a spark even in a Louis XII!'

"And indeed, on the morning after the wedding, there emerged from the royal apartments a radiant and dashing King who told everyone who cared to listen that he had 'worked miracles'.



“‘I am in tremendous fettle,’ he exclaimed exultantly. ‘In truly tremendous form!’

“But after two months in sustained and tremendous fettle, the King rose no more, but lay back and awaited death.

“Francis, you will think, must have breathed a sigh of relief. Alas! he had just made an atrocious discovery. Suffolk, the Ambassador whom the King of England had sent to us with young Mary, had been her lover for the past two years!

“Francis called his mother to the rescue. Louise of Savoy, Countess of Angoulême explained most emphatically to Suffolk that it was not for this purpose that he had been appointed Ambassador; that if he should have the misfortune to saddle France with a Dauphin, then she, Louise, and her son Francis would become joint Regents and that their first care would be to see that Papa-Ambassador returned forthwith across the Channel whence he had come.

“When Louise, in addition, offered him fifty thousand livres, the Ambassador saw the logic of her reasoning. But to make assurance doubly sure, Francis installed him in the house of his own mistress, instructing the latter to minister in every way to his comfort and well-being, while he himself joined the entourage of his high-spirited young mother-in-law.

“Mary took it all in very good part. Whenever Francis appeared in person to mount the guard, she gave him a cordial reception, kissing him warmly (on the mouth, as was the prevalent custom in those days) enchanting him with her pretty ways and gentle caresses. So much so, indeed, that Francis straightway set about the most pleasant task of procuring for himself a son—and at the same time, of course, an heir to the throne.

“‘Good God!’ exclaimed Grignols, one of his Officers, ‘What are you up to? Can’t you see that this woman is very subtle, that she is trying to attract you, so that you shall give her a child? And here you are, playing with fire, getting closer and closer to her. You’re young and ardent, don’t forget; and so, is she! She will respond with fire. She will have a child. And then where will you be? You’ll say adieu to your kingdom of France. For heaven’s sake, man, think what you’re doing!’

“But Francis was enthralled by this provocative, youthful beauty. Poor Claude, his wife, begged him to come to his senses. In vain. He was ‘dying of love’.

“The Countess of Angoulême then intervened with a stroke of simple genius. She decreed that Claude should share Mary’s bed with her until the King died. Francis was now stymied. In the apartments of his mistress he found Suffolk; in Mary’s apartments he came face to face with his wife!

"Fortunately for all concerned, Mary's tender embraces had been so pre-eminently potent that King Louis XII died very shortly afterwards, on January 1st 1515."

"Ouf!" exclaimed Juliette. "There's a man, I must say, who deserved his throne."

"Ah—but wait a minute," replied Chronossus. "What about posthumous children? To make sure that Mary was not pregnant, they had to wait six weeks. She was sent off to spend forty days confined in the *Hôtel de Cluny*, in candlelight, behind barred windows and bolted doors and attended night and day, by two ladies, who took it in turn to watch over her. Of course, all she need have done was to swear that she had no cause to think that she might be pregnant. But she did not want to swear anything, the situation, she thought, was far too amusing. Francis was waiting, France was waiting, all Europe was waiting.

"And then—behold—suddenly the Queen began to swell, to become day by day a little fatter."

"That's when Francis cried out: 'All is lost, save honour!'" said Juliette.

"Hm," replied Chronossus. "That, surely, was after the defeat at the battle of Pavia."

"Oh—very well; have it your own way," said Juliette.

"Anyway, it was certainly the ruin of all Francis' hopes . . . until the Countess of Angoulême discovered that, for a joke, Mary had been simulating her condition with the help of additional under-garments! In a trice she was completely deflated and Francis was King."

"And it was then that he said: 'Woman is a fickle jade—more fool he who places his trust in her.'"

"Really! I'm afraid you don't take things seriously," said Chronossus.

"Nor do you—nor did Mary,"<sup>1</sup> retorted Juliette.

"Nor, for that matter, did Francis," said Chronossus. "For off he gallivanted at once to Italy."

"1515 victory of Marignan," said Juliette. "I'm pretty good on facts."

### *A King Festeoned with Women*

"Facts, which, if you don't mind my saying so, are quite useless. Those wars in Italy were too futile for words. Charles VIII had conquered the Kingdom of Naples and had then lost it. Louis XII had conquered the Duchy of Milan and had then lost it. Francis I, after Marignan, re-conquered Milan and then promptly lost it again; and that's all there was to it."

<sup>1</sup> Except about love. When Francis became King, he wanted to repudiate poor Claude and marry Mary. But Mary refused this second offer of the French Crown in order to become Mrs. Suffolk.

"And Bayard," said Juliette.

"And Bayard, of course."

"And the Field of the Cloth of Gold."

"Ah! now there you are right. There was something which was not futile—heroism and magnificence. We had a King, who was a good man, a man of intelligence and taste, who set the pattern of the art of living. Francis I was that valorous knight who was armed on the field of battle by Bayard and who for two whole days 'couched in the saddle and lance in hand' fought a fight 'of such pride and cruelty as had not been seen in two thousand years'. He was also that Prince Charming, scintillating in silver and gold, shimmering in white and crimson satin, encrusted with precious stones, his eyes cast down along his aquiline nose, who pranced and pirouetted in the midst of a bevy of beautiful women. 'A Court without women,' he used to say, 'is like a year without spring or a spring without roses.' He was good, because he was naturally joyous, an egotist, because he was thoughtlessly carefree—a brilliant, spoilt child, born 'with two women kneeling at his feet'—his mother and his sister, Marguerite of Angoulême—the 'Marguerite of Marguerites'. He was the *nouveau riche* among Kings, bursting with high spirits and happiness."

#### *Heads I Win, Tails You Lose*

"'No nation,' sighed Charles V, 'has done more to bring about its own downfall than the French; and yet everything conspired to preserve it.' Francis I wasted a great deal of money (but we had plenty), he waged war with unreasonable persistence, he allowed himself to be swindled by the King of England at the Field of the Cloth of Gold, and to be defeated by Charles V—all without any injurious repercussions.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, what we lost in the south, we gained in the north. His son, Henry II, realised that, in case of war, there was only one thing that really mattered—the frontier with Germany; and Francis de Guise seized the three Bishoprics of Metz, Toul and Verdun. He took Calais, too, from the English. Henry II preserved these acquisitions by the Treaty of Cateau-Cambresis, and in return renounced all claim to Italy (which we did not own, anyway). The price paid, then, was not very heavy. In any case, Italy was already in our midst—by which I mean her artists, her culture and the sensuousness of that Paradise on earth.

"The signing of this peace in 1559 was marked with great celebrations in Paris. In a tournament in which he took part, Henry II was mortally

<sup>1</sup> Francis I was taken prisoner at the battle of Pavia. In Madrid he offered to cede Burgundy to Spain. But the Burgundian delegates asserted with great force that the King had not the right to give away a province, as though it were his private property. This was a new theory, which the King adopted with great willingness.

wounded by the broken lance of one of his opponents. A fragment of the wood pierced his eye. The surgeons did all they could. Four criminals were at once decapitated at the Chatelet prison, and for four days the surgeons pierced these four heads with a fragment of lance, just as the King's head had been pierced, in an effort to find out the effect produced on the brain. But they gleaned no glimmer of light, and Henry II died. He left four sons (of whom the eldest was fifteen), and a widow, who was, in actual fact, to rule the country—a Florentine, who contributed not a little to giving the second half of the century that air of carnival and cloak and dagger, which became its salient features."

"Steady on!" cried Juliette. The second half already? Bit jet-propelled, aren't we?"

"But with the sole object of making a better landing," replied Chronossus.

#### *While France Warbled . . .*

"And where do we land?" asked Juliette. "At Henry II's Court? On the estate of Diana of Poitiers?"

"No—no. The splendours of the Court are too well known. And if you are not familiar with them, read that first masterpiece of French literature, *La Princesse de Clèves*. We'll drop in later and take a look at the Court, when it has reached its paroxysm of luxury and licence. Forgive me, if I do not dwell over much on things that everybody knows—the Renaissance manifesting itself in those *châteaux* planted in the garden of the Loire, Chambord, Blois, Amboise, Chenonceaux and many others; in Louis XII ordering pictures from Leonardo da Vinci; in Francis I, having danced all night at Amboise, galloping at dawn with his gay cavalcade to visit Leonardo and, himself doffing his hat to the artist at work, ordering his gentlemen to do likewise. All France was arguing, warbling, frolicking. Let us not tarry too long in that garden, or we will never get out. I think you will get a better view of the intellectual progress that was being made if we go off and regard it at work in a place where it is less glitteringly apparent. I should like to show you the Renaissance in a typical village."

#### *The Renaissance in the Village*

"Round about the 1550s there was a country squire of my acquaintance whom I would like you to meet. There was nothing particularly outstanding about him, but he did, I think, demonstrate very admirably, on the eve of the religious wars, the art of living from hand to mouth.

"The Squire of Gouberville lived in the manor of Le Mesnil au Val, in Cotentin. There is, I expect, no need for me to describe to you a typical country squire's establishment of those days. There are still thousands of

them in existence today, with the dwelling house itself raised slightly at the end of a quadrangular courtyard bordering on the village. A flight of steps leads up to a corridor which traverses the house and then leads out into the garden. On one side of it is the *salon*, and on the other is the vast kitchen, in which the master of the house takes his meals with his employees and the numerous members of his family.

"The squire of Gouberville was a bachelor, but he had seven brothers and sisters. His father had also left a natural son and daughter, of whom he was just as fond as of the legitimate members of the family, even though their mother was one of the servant girls; this latter also had three other sons—not by the old squire—and they, too, lived with the family on an equal footing in the *château*. They were not great sticklers where principles were concerned, but preferred rather to accept what the good God sent them. For instance, the uncle of our good squire was the *curé*, and God had sent him (and his house-keeper) four children. They all lived happily together, and his parishioners did not respect him any less, for the *curé* was every bit as good a man as his nephew, the squire.

"There were nine servants, and they too lived in the *château*, ate with the family at the great table in the kitchen, each dipping into the dish as he fancied and without any regard to rank, one forking for himself a morsel of beef, another a piece of veal or ham, all of which were cooked together with vegetables in one large dish. Anyone who wished to do so went out and washed his hands at the well, or sharpened his knife on its edge. If anyone were too shy to take a good helping, the master would call him back with a smile and tell him to help himself.

"The squire of Gouberville kept a personal eye on the cultivation of his lands. He was also the Lieutenant of Forests and Rivers, and he it was, too, who dispensed justice. If some villager fell ill, it was the squire who was sent for; he was quite prepared to get up in the middle of the night, and there was no surgeon more devoted or more skilful at binding up the wounds of quarrelsome peasants than he. He enjoyed a game of skittles or bowls with them, and he was very fond of wrestling. The *curé*, too, enjoyed a wrestling match with one of his parishioners.

"The statutory labour in the fields, the feast days of Saints, the hunting parties, the beats—everything was used as an excuse for a fête and a drinking carousel. The squire's own great passion was hunting—hunting deer, fox and wolf; his pack of hounds was considered to be one of the best in the country. He also used to shoot (with crossbow and arquebus) and go out with hawk, net or ferret.

"In the evening, seated in front of the great kitchen fire, he used to read aloud to his household. The stories with a moral by Marguerite of

Angoulême, with their theses on love, which had been inspired by Eleanor of Aquitaine's Courts of Love, were thought by peasants to be rather dull. Gargantua and Pantagruel amused them vastly. But Rabelais rather shocked these simple country folk. They found him impertinent, and what they much preferred were the legendary and mysteriously symbolical rides of the swashbuckling knights of old; the stories of chivalry were their Westerns, and the knights their cowboys."

"Forgive me," said Juliette. "Though I find this idyllic and rural picture most touching, it. . . ."

"... Is also a bit boring, eh? You want something with a little more red blood in it? Well you will lose nothing by waiting a moment. Meanwhile, let me point out to you such interludes of happiness and virtue as there are. Otherwise, you will think that for two thousand years on end we have been doing nothing but kill each other!"

"Think hard!" said Juliette. "And I'm sure that even in the midst of your Rural Renaissance you'll find something unusual and stimulating."

#### *Good Redskins and Naughty Typographers*

"I'm only too anxious to meet your wishes . . . let me see . . . there were a few wars, of course, but very little fighting in our own country, and none of it any great hardship for the people. A few inter-village squabbles? But they were merely the high-spirited manifestation of ebullient health. No, I can think of nothing, unless, perhaps, we have a look round some of the towns. In our own part of the country, Dieppe and Caen were very prosperous, to say nothing of that port created in 1517, which had sprung up like a mushroom and which we called *Le Havre de Grâce*. Ships were bringing back gold from the New World; Symonnet, the bastard brother of the squire of Gouberville, was talking of sailing to Peru; in the streets you would have seen quite a number of copper-skinned men, Indians. They were our good Redskins, of whom Rabelais said: 'One must feed them, nurse them and make a fuss of them, as though they were new-born babes,' and about whom Montaigne waxed so indignant because the *conquistadores* maltreated them. There were negroes to be seen too. A Norman skipper sold some as slaves in Bordeaux, whereupon the Parliament of Guyenne ordered their immediate release. 'France, the mother of liberty, will tolerate no slavery!' Francis I was an ardent supporter of commerce and peaceful colonisation; he sent Jacques Cartier on an expedition (but not yet the one that resulted in our colonisation of Canada), and he was benevolently inclined towards the Brazilians. Right up to the eighteenth century, we shall have the spectacle of gentlemen and Princes of the Blood appearing at Court Fancy Dress balls dressed as Indians.

“We should have to go as far afield as Lyons, before we found a strike—of typographers, workers at a new craft. Their employers made them work sixteen hours a day in summer and then proposed to reduce their ‘pittance’—the part of their wages, that is, that was paid to them in food. The typographers went on strike in 1539, and an edict was published forbidding them to ‘Plot and scheme together’. I only mention this, because a striker in those days was as much of a novelty as was a Red Indian. Strikes were still of not the slightest importance, and the working classes were far too few in numbers for us to have to bother about them and their troubles. The squire of Gouberville hadn’t even heard of them.”

*Quick Wit and Good Cheer*

“All he knew about Lyons was that travellers very much liked spending two or three days there, because the hostelries were so good. He himself had never been there, but he had read about it in a translation of the *Colloquies* by Erasmus, a savant, whose word could be accepted without question. Our modern *hôteliars* might well pick up a tip or two from this reportage by Erasmus. But listen for yourself:

WILLIAM: At the table there was always a woman, who charmed the guests with her gracious attractiveness. Incidentally, the fair sex in Lyons is extremely fair. First of all, the mother of the family used to come out to welcome us and bid us be of good cheer and to express the hope that we should enjoy what would be placed before us. She was followed by her daughter, a charming woman, so full of character and so witty in her conversation, that she would have delighted Cato himself. She conversed with us not as though we were passing guests, but as though we were old friends.

BERTULPHE: Therein I recognise that urbanity of the French nation that I know so well.

WILLIAM: As mother and daughter had to supervise the servants and greet newcomers and could not therefore be there all the time, there was a young girl, well versed in the art of witty repartee, who hovered constantly around us; she accepted good humouredly all the shafts we fired at her and sustained the conversation until the daughter of the house returned.

BERTULPHE: Yes—yes! But what about the food? Conversation doesn’t fill the belly!

WILLIAM: Truly sumptuous. I am astounded that they are able to regale us at so cheap a price! Then, when the meal is over, they do their utmost to entertain you and to prevent you from being bored. I really felt as though I were in my own home, instead of being on a journey.

BERTULPHE: And what about the bedrooms?

**WILLIAM:** They were besieged by frolicsome, laughing maidens, who took away our dirty linen, washed it and returned it to us spotlessly clean. In short, the whole place seemed to be full of women and young girls, except in the stables; and even there, some of them managed to worm their way in. When the travellers depart, they kiss them and take leave of them for all the world as though they were brothers or close relations."

*Rabelais Has a mauvais quart d'heure*

"Would you believe it? It was in a hostelry of this type that Rabelais had a trying experience. On his way back from Rome, he had broken his journey at Lyons, where he did not fail to indulge in a Pantagruelian feast, even though he had not a sou in his pocket, with which to pay either for his meal or for his onward journey. But casual acquaintances met at the table can often come in very useful. Drawing to one side a doctor, who was obviously very filled with a sense of his own importance, Rabelais confided to him that he was bringing back from Rome a new and most devastating poison, which he proposed to administer to 'that tyrant, Henry II'. The doctor knew his duty. He denounced him, and Rabelais was arrested and sent to Paris under escort (and free of charge!). The King, to whom Rabelais later told the story, was vastly amused."

"In fact," said Juliette, "there is no more killing in the kingdom of France?"

"Very little," replied Chronossus. "And it would hardly be worthwhile to mention the burning of heretics, except that. . . ."

"Ha! heretics!" interrupted Juliette. "You hadn't mentioned them. So they weren't all dead, after all?"

"On the contrary, we had any number of them, of a new kind, that multiplied very swiftly. At first, we could see no harm in it, when these people with their Martin Luther declared that it was essential to reform the Church; it was, after all, rather difficult to say that they were wrong, when they asked for rather fewer external manifestations of piety and rather more proof of internal virtue. Reformation of the Church—why, that was something in which the Pope and Francis I themselves had played a very active part, albeit with the object of pouching its revenues and splitting it between them. The *Concordat* of 1516 left the choice of the Bishops to the King and their investiture to the Pope, the distribution of ecclesiastical benefices to the King and the annates (the income from the first year of incumbency), to the Pope. Luther, however, fulminated against these profitable prerogatives, this trafficking in ecclesiastical office and against the formalism in Church affairs, preaching a return to the Bible (which printing was now in the process of placing in everybody's hand), and direct com-



munion between man and God. By demanding a return to the sources of the supernatural, Luther was liberating nature. 'The Reformation and the Renaissance, the forebears of our modern liberty, sprang from the same tree,' wrote Michelet. Quite so—but not before the former had done its best to stifle the latter at birth.

"Francis I and his sister, Marguerite, certainly did not give a single thought to modern liberty; but human happiness was the slogan of the day and with equal sincerity they gave their protection to artists, to writers and to the disciples of the man who had dared to say that words, not fire, were the weapons to be used against heretics—a tolerance so intrinsically intolerable, that it was inevitably bound to lead swiftly to bloodshed.

"Francis' Court followed the movement; and the whole of the French Court which had snobbishly been singing the Psalms in French, suddenly found themselves heretics without knowing it from the day that Martin Luther was excommunicated.

"Francis I then found himself obliged to disown the Reformers, although he continued to make a firm stand against the persecutions which Parliament demanded. One day, towards the end of his life, he allowed himself to be browbeaten into signing a document placed before him, and on the strength of it the Lieutenant-Governor of Provence burnt down twenty-four villages. Net result—nine hundred houses burnt down and three thousand corpses. On his death-bed, the King exhorted his son to punish those who had been guilty 'of perpetrating in my name and on my authority this cruel atrocity'. But the guilty parties were called 'Parliament' and 'Sorbonne', and they were already powerful enough to burn at the stake a great humanist and friend of the King, Etienne Dolet. He was condemned as an atheist because, among other things, he had published a translation of Plato.

"All this only gave greater impetus to the growth of heresy. The Church obviously had forgotten that it is martyrs who become the founders of religions. And in this case, to the blood of the martyrs was added American gold."

"A queer combination," remarked Juliette.

"Nevertheless it existed. Without pause, ships were pouring gold and silver into Europe. Prices soared. The working classes, the landlords of agricultural holdings, the *bourgeois* shareholders—all, in short, who lived on a fixed income—were becoming more and more discontented; and rising prices give splendid impetus to heresy."

"And wherever heresy flourished, the countryside was rased to the ground by fire," murmured Juliette.

"In a few years' time, we shall go one better. We shall see the tolerant

and humane Luther relieved by the merciless Calvin, for whom man is 'a monkey', 'a wild, untamable beast', 'dung', and 'an excrescence'. And in the name of liberty of conscience we shall see the movement setting fire to a holocaust of stakes; and a kindly and freedom-loving soul like Clement Marot, who was persecuted in Paris by the Sorbonne and forced to take refuge in Geneva, will shortly have to flee from there too, to spend the rest of his days in Turin."

*Everyone wants to be a Civil Servant*

"These new ferments did not in any way disturb the even tenor of life on the estates of the squire of Gouberville. Conscience was at the time something which belonged only to the 'advanced' nobles and the intellectuals among the *bourgeois*, who were flocking to the service of the State like flies to a honey pot."

"Already—even in those days?"

"Even in those days. It is a French idiosyncrasy which has been of great service to absolute monarchy. State employ offered an escape from the vulgar world of commerce, and very quickly the Civil Servants came to regard themselves as a kind of uniformed aristocracy.

"From the moment the King decided to introduce the custom of selling the offices of Justice, Finance and Administration, it was quite astonishing to see how the *bourgeois* jostled and barged each other in their desire to serve him. They all wanted to be Civil Servants.

"Later, Henry III sold in one lot no less than a thousand letters patent of nobility—human vanity was becoming quite an important factor in the country's revenues.

"Even our squire of Gouberville thought he'd like to have some sort of official position, He would very much have liked to be promoted to the position of Master of Rivers and Forests; and so, one day in the winter of 1556, he set out on a long journey. He was going to Blois to ask the King to grant him the promotion he sought.

"From Cotentin to Blois was the longest journey he had ever made. It took him eight days on horseback, by easy stages. The roads were one endless and indescribable quagmire, but the inns, he found, were great fun—*The Pewter Pot* in Caen, *The Three Marys* in Falaise, *The Golden Lion* in Mortagne—everywhere he stayed, he met with a smiling welcome, the food was abundant, the service excellent, and a bright, clear fire burned in every fireplace. And all that, you know, was just as much part of the Renaissance as were the *châteaux* of the Loire, the erudite Latin scholars and the talented painters; it was the expression of joyous benevolence of the spirit and cleanliness of hearth and home.

"In Blois, he put up at the *Saint Christopher*, had a few meals at *The Cock and Griffon*, attended Mass in the chapel royal, went to see a tournament in the grounds of the *château*, was invited to one of the King's dinner parties and to a royal ball on Shrove Tuesday. But to obtain private audience of the King—that was a very different matter. Distribution of largesse among the official staff got him nowhere—all he received in return was fine speeches. On the other hand, in the anterooms, in the inns, and particularly in the pantry of the royal kitchen, where his friend, Petit Jean, Master of the Stables, entertained him (royally), our good Norman squire heard some truly astonishing things about the private life of Queen Catherine."

### *The Cinderella Queen*

"She was not the real Queen. The one who reigned, both in the heart of Henry II and over the kingdom, was Diana of Poitiers, Duchess of Valentinois. Her royal sway extended as far even as the nursery of the royal infants, and it was she who supervised their meals chose their governesses or changed a wet nurse whose milk she found suspect. It was she, too, who even controlled the activities of the royal bedchamber and it was she who roused Henry to that measure of conjugal assiduity which resulted in his possession of heirs to his throne.

"Catherine was entirely complacent. This 'daughter of a pill merchant', as the Court called her, this thirty-seven-year-old Florentine with the heavy body and the bloated face, loved her husband with a passionately sensual love. Whenever the rugged athlete climbed into her bed, even though she knew he did so on the orders of his mistress, she didn't care, she clasped him eagerly, hungrily in her arms.

"And yet her rival was fifty-seven years of age. But her beauty defied the onslaught of time. She still had the high, firm breasts of Diana the Huntress and lovely white skin which was set off to perfection by widow's weeds, the weeds she wore in perpetual and very flattering memory of her hunch-backed husband.

"Catherine de Medici suffered in silence. It was undoubtedly her destiny never to be anything but a drudge. For twenty-five years already, from the day of her marriage, she had been nothing else. When she arrived in Marseilles in 1533, accompanied by her uncle, Pope Clement VII, Henry was already in Diana of Poitiers' arms. Francis I, whose mistress Diana is also said to have been, had begged her to try and sharpen the wits of 'this witless great loon'. 'Trust me,' Diana is said to have replied. 'I will transform him into my polished and gallant lover.' And her gallant lover he had remained until he was pierced through the eye by that fragment of broken lance.

"Uncle Clement VII, however, had been determined that Catherine's marriage should be a bond indissoluble. Diana or no Diana, he had demanded an immediate consumation of the marriage; and as dawn succeeded the bridal night, the Holy Father had paid a surprise visit to the lovers in bed, to make sure that the young husband had done his duty.

"All this solicitude, however, proved to be in vain. Catherine remained sterile for nine whole years—until, indeed, Diana insisted that her lover should devote some of his nights to the service of the conjugal bond. From thence onwards, it was a case of mass production; but all the children were ugly and rickety, and Catherine had no love for any of them.

"The eldest, Francis, was already thirteen; he was betrothed to little Mary Stuart, an ardent, red-haired Scottish lass, who was being brought up at the French Court. Whether, when they were married, he would have the strength to respond to her ardour remained to be seen. But the third child, a boy of five, had all the disturbing charm of the *bambini* of his own country, and to him, and him alone, Catherine was passionately devoted. He also had a little sister of four, who already gave promise of becoming an eyeful for the men.

"The squire of Gouberville set out on his return journey to Normandy in the same state as when he had come. The Mastership of Forests and Rivers was not to be his. And while he passes the rest of his days in peace, let us remain for a while where we are, in Blois. Let us take a nap in the *Saint Christopher*. I've set the alarm. . . . Oh, yes—rather, we now have clocks and watches actuated by a marvellous invention of the end of the fifteenth century, the main-spring . . . as I was saying, I've set the alarm for 1588."

### *Foppish, Murderous and Roistering Swashbucklers*

"The seductive *bambino* had turned into a raddled old man of thirty-seven. Debauchery, worry and illness have worn him out. Dressed in black, with the blue ribbon of the Saint Esprit round his neck, grimacing, daubed with kohl and rouge, clasping a chaplet of miniature skulls, this little travesty of a man was in deadly fear. The Duke de Guise, that scar-faced giant, was master in Blois and was holding the King more or less prisoner. The States General had ranged themselves with the Catholic League. Henry III had none on his side, save his bodyguard of favourites, the *Quarante Cinq Mignons*, as they came to be known, those fearsome painted and pomarded bullies, dressed in open-necked doublets, mutton-leg sleeves, tight-fitting trunks and skin-tight hose. Like their master, they had to have perfumes and scented face creams, and they slept in gloves and with a mask on their faces. Their hair, curled and billowing like that of a

woman, was powdered with musk-violet powder, and their white, pierrot faces rested on enormous frilled ruffs. In the streets of Paris, the students used to shout after them: 'You can always tell a calf by the frill it wears!'

"But in the back streets of Blois, in the mists of the Loire in this month of December 1588, the representatives of the Church, the aristocracy and the Third Estate all looked very much like a band of conspirators. They referred to the King as Frater Henry, and they had sworn to exterminate the Huguenot infidels. Their Chief, the Cardinal de Guise, in his scarlet Judge's robes, strode hither and thither like an Emperor; with him he carried a satchel filled with gold coins, which he flung with superb disdain to the delirious mob. His magnificence was matched only by his debauchery. Many were the young women at Court who could boast that they owed their initiation to his Volcanic Eminence.

"The Duke de Guise, brother of the Cardinal, held the keys of the *château*. With the silken garments of the church dignitaries and robes of the monks there mingled, too, the professional swashbucklers, who felt that the grand and intoxicating old days of feudal anarchy had returned. With their plumes fluttering in the breeze, their spurs jingling and their swords rattling in their scabbards, they lorded it through the streets of the town. Every now and then they clashed with the *Mignons* of the King, and when that happened the blood flowed.

"The monarchy was hanging by a thread—the thread that maintained the mannikin Henry III standing on his feet and obstinately determined to safeguard the unity of his kingdom. How much longer, he wondered, would he be able to go on vacillating between the Protestants and the Catholic League? He had accepted Henry of Navarre as his heir, but the Guise family, who looked upon themselves as his successors, had forced him to outlaw the Protestants. He had forbidden Henry de Guise to enter Paris; but that bold Scarface had done so, alone, to be acclaimed by the people, who at once manned the barricades. The King sought refuge in Blois and summoned the States General, only to find that they supported the mutineers; compelled to humble himself before them, he had adopted a conciliatory attitude. Things looked bad. Everybody was waiting for tragedy to burst upon us, but never had the beauties of the town been more captivating or fashion more provocative. Dancing and revelry, murder and flirtation were inextricably mixed, and the murders—sparks kindled in this most extravagant of all Courts—joined the lightning flashes of the gathering storm.

"It was a fine spectacle for a philosopher. Among the deputies, there was one at least who viewed the scene with a serene eye—Michel de Montaigne, the Mayor of Bordeaux, who wrote in his 'Gospel of

Indifference and Doubt', which appeared in 1580: 'To boil a man alive for his convictions is putting a pretty high value on them.'

"And in the midst of all this frantic chaos there was at least one man who knew how to keep things in order—the Baron d'Oignon, the Master of Ceremonies. Everybody was filled with admiration for the way in which he marshalled the Deputies and the artistry and sense of proportion he displayed."

### *The Head of Scarface de Guise*

"The aged Queen Catherine was deeply mortified—her dear son had just intimated that he proposed to rule without her aid. It looked as though the King had drawn courage from the disaster which had that year overwhelmed the invincible Armada—that Armada 'blessed by the Pope, but cursed by God', which had been on its way, crammed with priests and engines of torture, to convert the heretics of England. The seamanship of Drake and the fury of the celestial storm had scattered the Armada and its inquisitors, the Nazis of their day, to the four corners of the raging seas.

"That, you know, was a turning point in history. If Spain and the Inquisition had conquered England, we should not have had Henry IV, Molière would not have written *Tartuffe*, the encyclopaedists would have been burned at the stake, and all idea of liberty would have disappeared in the flames.

"As it was, however, Henry III felt that he was now in a position to stand up to the League, to Spain and to his mother, who was hand in glove with the Duke de Guise against him. But in his private apartments in Blois he was all alone. Was he, I wonder, as he played with a little cup-and-ball toy, seeing in his mind's eye the head of Henry, 'Scarface de Guise'? . . . Scarface, who was preparing to come out in open revolt. . . Henry III was pondering over the possibilities of assassinating this monster. . . And, yet, that very morning, at the bedside of the Queen Mother, who was suffering from a touch of bronchitis, the two of them had exchanged smooth words and nibbled comfits together; and as he was leaving, de Guise had said to his brother, the Cardinal: 'He's not a bad fellow you know. His heart is in the right place.'"

### *The Incandescent Marguerite*

"Henry III was indeed alone. His mother had joined the de Guises, his sister, Marguerite, after a thousand acts of infidelity, remained defiant. The Queen, Margot of Navarre, had more than fulfilled the promise of the little Marguerite. Henry had hanged by the feet d'Aubiach, one of the last of her long line of lovers. He had shut Marguerite up in a terrible little

eagle's nest of a place, the stronghold of Usson, perched on the edge of a precipice in Velay. However, she had first seduced the old Governor and had then flung him out of his own stronghold. Marguerite, the first love of his life. . . .

"This fascinating child had been fifteen years old when their mother decided that the time had come for her to shine at the most dissolute Court the world had ever seen, that of Charles IX, the second of her three sons to sit on the throne of France. The King fell violently, passionately, and, true to his nature, brutally in love with his young sister; Marguerite, however, had known how to calm the beast. But brother Henry, more feminine than she herself, had given her dancing lessons, had arranged her hair, chosen her clothes and sometimes even had put them on himself, in order to teach her how to wear them. But that perverse little *ingénue* and the tender bond that had then bound them were now things of the distant past.

"That she should have given herself to all and sundry was not a thing that caused any particular scandal at Court. Brother Henry himself would have forgiven her for the Bacchanalian orgies she held in her residence in the *Rue Saint Catherine*, but for the fact that at them she had seen fit to parody his precious *Mignons*—and had encompassed the assassination of the handsome and terrible du Guast, the greatest friend he had ever had. The assassin she had employed had been hesitant. She had told him to meet her in the evening in the chapel of the convent of the *Grands Augustins*. As the killer had approached the rendezvous, the monks were passing in procession through the streets filled with kneeling Parisians. The chapel had been deserted, and in the evening gloom he had hardly been able to discern the figure of the Princess, dressed in an immense and frilly costume, on which her jewels sparkled but feebly. They had talked, and at last he had consented to do the deed; but he had demanded an enormous reward—not money, not land, but her, the pearl of the Valois. Marguerite had paid the bill then and there in the cloisters of the chapel."

### *The One Woman in His Life*

"Henry was indeed alone. Should he, or should he not kill Scarface? He had loved but one woman in his life, but her he had loved insensately—the Princess Condé. When, before he succeeded to the French throne, he had gone off to rule Poland, he had carried her image with him in his heart; and when he returned to France to become King, his first thought had been to arrange for her to be divorced and to marry her himself. His mother had learnt of his intention and maternal love can sometimes be a very terrible thing. She could not bear to think of the son she idolised

exposed to the influence of another woman. At the time the question of resumption of the war against the Huguenots was being debated. Rather than see her son in the arms of Marie Condé, Catherine decided in favour of war.

"She need not have been so drastic. A few months later, Marie died giving birth to a daughter. No one dared show the letter containing the news to the King, and it was slipped into the middle of a pile of State papers. The next morning, going through his despatches at table, he had come upon the fatal parchment. For a moment he had remained motionless and speechless. His face turned ashen grey, his hands fluttered impotently in the air and he crashed to the floor in a faint. With Marie's death he had lost his only chance of simple, human happiness.

"He gave way to delirious and ostentatious despair. One day he appeared in a costume embroidered from head to foot with tiny skulls. Christmas was approaching. He was in Avignon at the time and he organised a gigantic procession. He placed himself at its head, bare-footed, a torch in his hand, his head hidden beneath a monk's cowl, and the whole Court followed in his wake. Throughout the whole day he kept them marching, and when evening fell, a strange fury seized this frenzied crowd, intoxicated by its own exhalation. The young courtiers stripped to the waist, dashed hither and thither and lashed each other with whips till the blood spurted from their bodies; they yelled and screamed in a frenzy of pious masochism."

#### *A Wedding Feast and a Bloody Massacre*

"He had first met Marie during the celebration of the wedding of her sister, Marguerite, to Henry of Navarre. He fell in love with her at once. But at the time he was only *Monsieur*, the brother of the King, and in spite of anything he or Marie could do, with bitter pain in his heart he saw Marie wedded to that abortion, that Huguenot infidel who called himself Prince de Condé. It was a summer during which few, if any, married according to the dictates of their hearts. In *Notre Dame* Marguerite obstinately refused to say the 'yes' which would unite her to this bucolic yokel, badly dressed and stinking of garlic. Charles IX gave her a sharp blow on the back of her neck, which made her jerk her head forward, and the officiating Cardinal accepted this as a silent mark of assent.

"That was on August 19th 1572. Paris was full of Protestants, who had flocked there to attend the weddings of their Princes. After three days and nights of revelry, a shot was fired behind the Louvre and cut off one of Admiral de Coligny's fingers. Queen Catherine had plotted to kill the Protestant leader, and the plot had failed.



“The Protestants growled wrathfully. Seized with panic, the Queen succeeded in persuading Henry to agree with her that they must be exterminated. As far as Henry was concerned, there was only one thing that mattered—Condé would himself be killed in the proposed massacre, and then he himself would be able to marry Marie. All that remained to be done was to persuade Charles IX to give the necessary order.

“The Queen spent a whole evening in an effort to do so; she had to confess to her son that she had been the instigator of the attempt on the Admiral’s life, and she begged him to believe that, if he failed to give the order, the Protestants would quickly plunge the whole country into civil war. Charles, worried and harassed beyond endurance, at last shouted: ‘Very well! Kill them! But kill every single one of them, so that none shall survive to come and reproach me when it is all over!’

“The massacre began about six o’clock on the morning of Sunday August 24th, and the fury of the mob was unleashed in wholesale butchery. The streets, the quays, even the corridors of the Louvre itself were all swiftly piled with corpses. By midday, two thousand at least had been slaughtered. Horrified, Charles ordered that the killing should cease forthwith.

“That same morning Henry of Navarre had left his wife at daybreak to go off to a game of *paume*. Suddenly, a gentleman covered in blood burst into Marguerite’s room, followed by four archers, and hurled himself on her bed. She dashed out into a side-street, pursued by her visitor, who seized her and held her fast. A Captain of the Guard rushed to her rescue and, at her intercession, spared the life of the wretch who had assailed her. While she was changing her blood-stained chemise, the Captain reassured her with regard to the fate of the King of Navarre.

“He had, in fact, been picked up at the tennis courts and, with his cousin de Condé, had been taken direct to the King. On the way there, they both heard the cries of their guards, valets and pages, who were being dragged out of the *château* and slaughtered like hens. The two Princes had to choose between Catholicism and death. Navarre did not hesitate. Condé looked grim and sullen, but he, too, had no desire to die—which was ungracious of him in the eyes of both his wife and of *Monsieur* who loved her.

“Plenty of Protestants remained alive. Catherine (Madam Serpent, as her son-in-law, Condé, called her) hoped that they would round on the Guises and destroy them in their turn. Then, when these two fanatical factions had destroyed each other, the kingdom, she felt, would be able to breathe in peace again.

“It was a miracle which, by restoring to the Catholic extremists their

lust for butchery, saved them from themselves being massacred. The next morning monks appeared all over the town, spreading a wholly monstrous story—a hawthorn in the Cemetery des Innocents had just burst into bloom. It was a sign that God had approved of the massacre of the Protestants! And for the next two days the Catholics returned to the slaughter with tremendous enthusiasm. Quite a number of people seized the opportunity to rid themselves of a tiresome neighbour, even though he might be a Catholic, or of an uncle, into whose shoes they were waiting to slip; the Civil Servants, too, killed off a few of the higher grades of officials, for it was a splendid chance to ensure a little accelerated promotion.

“On August 28th, by the time the King had at last ordered a cessation of the massacre, the province was in a position to make an offering to our Lord of whole hecatombs of Huguenots.”

*The Girl with the Violet Eyes—and the Political Mind*

“I trust,” said Chronossus, “that you feel that events have once more become a little colourful, since we stopped watching the way of life of our squire of Gouberville? And you will, I am sure, no longer complain that life was lacking in pulsating, red blood.”

“How could such things happen,” whispered Juliette, “and at the very moment, too, when man was just discovering the simple joys of life?”

“The urge to slay,” said Chronossus “would be hard put to it to find a better or more plausible excuse than religious fanaticism. God’s back is broad when the people are daily being incited to murder, when the nobility, the Guise family on the one side and the Montmorency family on the other, exploit hatreds to further their own plots against the monarchy, and when the Monarch himself sets an example of debauchery, interspersed with antics of contrition and penitence.”

“I presume,” said Juliette, “that by this time your Henry III has finished playing with his cup-and-ball in Blois and that the Duke de Guise has not much longer to live?”

“As a matter of fact, Scarface has just slipped into the room of his mistress, Charlotte de Sauve. An astonishing woman, that Charlotte, one of the beauties of Europe—after Mary Stuart, of course, whose lovely head fell last year under Elizabeth’s axe. Charlotte de Sauve had violet eyes, which few men could resist. And as she herself never said ‘No’ to anyone, starting with Charles IX, Henry of Navarre and the Duke of Alençon, the King’s brother, there was not a Prince, not a faction leader, not a noble of any importance who at some time or other had not ‘languished for love of her’. She, on the other hand, was working as a

confidential agent on behalf of the Queen and she bartered her love out of love for the secrets of State. At the moment, however, in the Duke de Guise I rather think she had met her master.

"A little while before, at the supper table, de Guise had found in his napkin an anonymous letter, telling him that the King was preparing to have him assassinated. De Guise, anxious to avoid frightening Charlotte, had shrugged his shoulders, scribbled: 'He wouldn't dare,' on the note and tossed it aside.

"Just after he had gone to bed with Charlotte he was given another warning. She begged him to be careful, but he closed her mouth with a kiss."

"And while Scarface was lying there, caressing his *amie*," interrupted Juliette, "Henry's *Mignons* were sharpening their daggers. Really! your history is pure cinema!"

"And what do you want me to do about it? Love, blood, daggers, poison—that's what they thrived on, those people!"

"Those people, indeed!" cried Juliette. "And weren't you one of them? Stop wriggling, Monsieur Chronossus! It's high time you told us frankly—were you a member of the League? A Huguenot? Or were you perhaps a *Mignon*?"

"I'm terribly sorry to have to disappoint you," replied Chronossus. "But at that time I felt more as though I were a member of the squire of Gouberville's family, or that of this Henry of Navarre, of whom we shall hear quite a lot in the very near future. In the meanwhile, let me tell you that Henry III was still busy with his memories and playing with his toy. And now, let me give you one last sketch which very well sums up this period that had gone so completely rotten."

#### *Saturnalia to Celebrate a Massacre*

In June 1577, Henry sent his brother Francis against the Reformers. He defeated them at Charité-sur-Loire, Henry hailed him as a saviour and in his honour gave an extravagant banquet at Plessis-lez-Tours, at which the women were dressed as men and the men as women. All the costumes were green—the symbolic colour of madness.

"The Queen Mother was anxious to go one better and at the same time to discredit the *Mignons* who, she thought, were undermining her influence with the King. While Francis was besieging Issoire, she mobilised her Flying Squad—a troupe of Maids of Honour (for want of a better description) chosen for their beauty and their readiness to minister to the desires of those nobles, of whose support Catherine had need; and she invited the King to sup with her on June 9th at her *château* at Chenonceaux.

"Long tables, laden with costly gold and silver plate, were laid out near the entrance to the gardens, at the end of the *Grande Allée*. Henry presided, dressed in a robe of damask rose and silver; diamonds shimmered in his violet powdered hair, pearls glistened at his ears, the full sleeves of his doublet of gold and silver thread were adorned with clusters of emeralds, and his corsage, modelled upon an iron corset, was cut so low that . . .

'chacun estoit en peine

S'il voyait un roi-femme, ou bien un homme-reine.

"Seated close to him were Catherine, paternally maternal in her long black robes, Queen Louise (for Henry III had a loving and docile wife<sup>1</sup>) whom he loved . . . like a sister, I should have said but for the fact that Marguerite was his sister and was—what she was.

"The most beautiful and most virtuous women of the Court,' wrote L'Estoile, 'being half naked and having their hair parted in the fashion of married women, were in charge of the service, presenting the dishes and the wines with light and passing caresses. And the *Mignons* themselves were threatened with apoplexy.'

"At dessert, the most lovely of them all was delegated to offer sweets to the King. His Majesty raised his eyes to the beauty that was being offered to him. The guests held their breath in a palpitating hush. Hope changed from one camp to the other, the struggle changed its nature, history was about to change its course . . . a malicious smile spread across the King's face and he turned his head away.

"Catherine had failed to win the game, but the evening was by no means wasted. From the shrubberies emerged a group of nymphs, unveiled, naked and unashamed; the guests, *Mignons* or not *Mignons*, leapt at them, and until day dawned there was a confused *mêlée* of love-making, chaotic, anonymous but—universal.

"On June 12th Francis captured Issoire, and he, too, passed a most agreeable night—watching three thousand Protestants being put to death."

<sup>1</sup> On his way to Poland Henry had stayed a while in Lorraine, where he was attracted by the tender beauty of Louise de Vaudemont. Later, when he became King of France, he had to marry; and as Marie de Condé was already dead, he decided that the young woman whom he had seen but once in Lorraine would make an excellent consort and he sent emissaries to solicit her hand. She became his gentle and docile confidant. For the rest . . . he did his duty, but without result. He even had recourse to a *chemise of Chartres*, such as was said to have been worn by the Virgin Mary and which was regarded as a great aid to fertility. He went personally to Chartres, procured 'two such *chemises*, one for himself and one for the Queen, returned with them to Paris, where he lay with the Queen and hoped for a child'. Catherine loaned Chenonceaux to Louise who retired there when Henry III was assassinated. She remained there for eleven years, during which she continued to wear the white mourning of Queens; she was called *The White Lady*.

*Greater Dead than Living*

"All was now ready for the assassination of the Duke de Guise. The deep silence of the *château* of Blois was shattered by a clock striking eleven. Henry, his nerves intolerably on edge, felt an urgent need of affectionate companionship, and he remembered the one being whose love had never failed him. He picked up his candlestick and set off to seek refuge in the Queen's bed.

"At three o'clock in the morning de Guise, satiated and all passion spent, left Charlotte's room to seek repose in his own.

"At four fifteen the King rose, dressed and returned to his own apartments. Coming one by one down a spiral staircase hewn in the solid thickness of the walls, the *Forty-Five* gathered silently about the King. Urgently he exhorted them, told them that on the very next day de Guise meant to usurp the throne. He asked if they were ready. The Gascons were loud in their anger, clamant in their protestations, and their noisy enthusiasm threatened to awaken the Queen Mother, asleep in her room on the floor below. Henry enjoined them to silence.

"Then Bellegarde, one of his favourites among the *Mignons*, arrived laden with daggers.

"Gentlemen—help yourselves!"

"Henry posted his henchmen in his cabinet, his own room and on the spiral staircase. The sombre walls, with their panels of Cordovan leather, shone with the pale reflected light of the torches. Outside, the night was pitch black, and rain was streaming down the window-panes.

"The Council, which de Guise was also to attend, was due to sit at seven o'clock. The King sent word that he would like to speak to him. And as the first grey of dawn lightened the sky of this December 23rd 1588 Henry de Guise—Scarface—a giant every bit of six foot six tall, strode into the King's room. In his hand he held a dish of dried fruits at which he pecked as he went. Those of the *Forty-Five* who were posted in the King's room saluted him as he entered and in apparent respect followed him as he went on towards the cabinet.

"In his 'new study'—at the end of the room—a trembling Henry heard the approaching footsteps.

"Die traitor!"

"The *Sieur de Montsériac* had leapt upon de Guise and plunged his dagger into his left breast.

"The giant fought furiously, became entangled with his cape. Hands grasped him by the leg, by the throat. The dish of fruit crashed into the face of one of his assailants. In his strength, he dragged the rest of them

the whole length of the room. The air was filled with the noise of shattering porcelain, and then . . . a sudden silence.

"Henry could stand no more. He raised the curtain.

"Before him, shaken free of his aggressors, stood de Guise. His face and throat, his breast, his loins, his stomach—all resembled so many fountains spouting red. With outstretched arms, closed eyes and his mouth open, the Duke de Guise staggered towards one of the *Forty-Five* who, with a blow from his sheathed sword, sent him crashing to the ground at the foot of the royal bed.

"'Oh God!' stammered the dying man. 'This for my sins! Have pity upon me!'

"The youthful Bellegarde stepped forward.

"'Monsieur de Guise,' he cried. 'Beg mercy of God and the King!'

"'Miserere Mei Deus!' mumbled Scarface once again. Then he thrust his fist into his mouth and died.

"Henry gazed down at the corpse of his rival, wrapped up in a piece of carpet. I do not believe, as has been asserted, that he kicked him in the face. Nor do I believe he ever exclaimed: 'God! how big he is! He is greater dead than he was living!'

"In Scarface's pocket they found a letter which began: 'To finance a civil war in France, we shall require one hundred thousand livres a month.' "

### *The Death of Madam Serpent*

"The King went down to his mother's apartments. She was resting languidly between her mauve curtains.

"'Madam—how are you?'

"'Poorly, my son.'

"'I myself am extremely well. Forgive me, but now I am King of France. I have killed the King of Paris!'

"The Queen Mother made 'a terrible grimace'. Her reign was at an end. Her son was slipping away from her, as was her life. Eleven days later she died.

"Catherine de Medici has been accused of being a person of the blackest duplicity. She was. Nevertheless, throughout the reigns of her three sons, each depraved in a different way, and notwithstanding civil wars, she had succeeded in preserving the Crown and the unity of the kingdom. Henry IV, who himself only escaped death by a hair's breadth on Saint Bartholomew's Day, judged his mother-in-law more indulgently. 'How,' he asks, 'could she have avoided playing some questionable roles, if she were to succeed in circumventing first one faction and then the other and, at the same time, in protecting, as she indeed did, her children, who reigned one

after the other, thanks to the wisdom of this clear-sighted woman? For myself, I am only astonished that she did not do worse things.' ”

*Thus Shall the Race of the Valois be Extinguished!*

“ ‘Now I am King of France!’ He wasn’t—yet; and Paris was going to make him pay dearly for the assassination of the King of Paris!

“On January 6th 1589 a long procession of robes black, brown and white, carrying candles and torches, rolled slowly through the streets of Paris, mourning loudly for the Duke de Guise. When they reached *Notre Dame*, the monks, the young priests from the Clerical College, the students and even the children accompanying the procession flung their torches to the ground, trampled them underfoot and, enveloped in smoke like the demons in some fairy story, shouted savagely:

“ ‘Thus shall the race of the Valois be extinguished!’

“Henry of Navarre, however, acted with his customary sagacity. Far from taking advantage of the turmoil to seize the Midi, he sought a reconciliation with his brother-in-law. ‘For four years,’ he said in his appeal, ‘we have been intoxicated, insensate and furious. Is not that enough?’ He was being moderate enough, in all conscience; he could with equal justice have said: ‘For thirty years’.

“The meeting took place on April 30th in the vast park at Plessis-lez-Tours. Such a great crowd had gathered, that ‘for more than a quarter of an hour the two Kings stood on a pathway in the park with hands outstretched but unable to approach and join each other’. At last le Béarnais,<sup>1</sup> dressed in a doublet full of rents torn by his breastplate, forced his way through the fraternising mob of Protestant and Royalist soldiery and flung himself on his knees before his brother-in-law.

“ ‘I have seen my King! Now I can die!’

“Navarre had a way of delivering himself of such Gascon hyperboles that went straight to one’s heart. Henry III raised the future Henry IV to his feet and ‘they embraced each other very lovingly, with tears even, particularly the King of Navarre, from whose eyes we could see them falling, as big as peas’.

“Together they marched on Paris. But Paris had no intention of surrendering to the murderer of the de Guises. The monks and preachers lashed him with inflammatory speeches; Madame de Montpensier, a sister of the murdered nobles, added fuel to the flames of fanaticism. And, as a final stroke, the Pope excommunicated Henry III.

“A Dominican monk of the convent of *Rue Saint Jacques*, roused to a state of exaltation by the words of his own Prior, felt that he had been

<sup>1</sup> Le Béarnais—Henry, King of Navarre.

called upon by Heaven to make a mystic sacrifice. The Duchess of Montpensier went in person to his cell and promised him a high destiny—a promise which she sealed with a kiss that raised the poor Jacques Clement to the seventh heaven of joy.

“On August 2nd 1589 he presented himself at *Saint Cloud* before the King, who, in a dressing gown, was seated on his commode with his trousers down—a royal manner of granting audience which persisted right up to the times of Louis XIV.

“The monk knelt before the Monarch, handed him a letter and, while he was reading it, stabbed him in the pit of the stomach.

“The guards hurled themselves upon him, and in an instant Frater Jacques was in Paradise—where Henry III joined him later in the day.

“On his death-bed he had presented the King of Navarre to the gentlemen of his Court as his successor. The latter, however, were horrified at the idea of having a pauper King. This ragged peasant, without a penny, without a decent suit of clothes . . . and a heretic at that. They hesitated.

“Henry III raised himself painfully on his pillows.

“‘I command you!’

“‘But France’s hesitation was to last for four years.’”

### *Juliette Becomes Meticulous*

“You may think I’m being a little meticulous,” said Juliette. “But you’ve told me a great number of stories about this sixteenth century; what, in your opinion, is the salient feature that I ought to retain and remember?”

“That is easily answered. That the French, having spent half of the century in learning the art of gracious, intelligent living, spent the second half of it in killing those who did not think as they thought!”

“Good,” said Juliette. “But what I really meant was—what decisive facts should I memorise—reigns, treaties, battles, massacres, dates—in short, history.”

“Well,” replied Chronossus, “Does it not suffice for you to know that the sixteenth century came between the fifteenth and the seventeenth?”

“For me, personally—yes. But it’s not much of a basis on which to pose as a historical savant, is it?”

“Even so, I think you should be content with it. If on the other hand you are sufficiently—dare I say futile—for it to worry you that you can’t remember whether the massacre on Saint Bartholomew’s day took place in 1568 or 1575, well, I’ve given you all the salient facts as I went along. They’re all in the history books, and you can learn the dates from there, if you must. For my own part, I’m going on to Henry IV.”



"Wait!" cried Juliette. "You can't tell me anything I don't know about Henry IV. He's my favourite King!"

"Mine, too," replied Chronossus. "Right—You tell me."

*Henry IV and Juliette*

"Henry IV," said Juliette, "was killed by a blow from a dagger, like his predecessor. In 1610."

"An accurate and mournful statement of fact. And now I suppose we can go on to Louis XIII?"

"Give me a chance," expostulated Juliette. "I know much more than that. I only began at the end because that is a style of narration for which you yourself seem to have a great affection. But I should also like to tell you. . . ."

"I beg your pardon. Please go on!"

" . . . That Henry IV launched a famous slogan at the battle of . . . er . . . of,"

"The battle of Ivry, March 14th 1590; please go on."

" . . . A famous slogan, anyway, that was typical of the man. 'Rally to my white standard!' he cried. 'You will find it on the road to victory and honour!'"

"And a grand fight it was, too—between Frenchman and Frenchman," remarked Chronossus dryly. "But on that same day Henry IV said something else that was equally admirable. He called on his men to 'spare the French nobility', for he hoped to be able to rally to his white standard also those nobles who were at the moment his enemies."

"Henry IV," continued Juliette, "also said: 'Paris is well worth saying a Mass for', and he allowed himself to be converted in order to restore peace to the country."

"Yes. But only after four years of war."

"I know. But surely, the man had every right to stick to his Protestant faith?"

"It wasn't so much a question of conviction, you know. Born a Huguenot, he was brought up in the Catholic faith. When his father, Antoine of Bourbon, was mortally wounded at the siege of Rouen while imprudently relieving himself in full view of the enemy, his mother brought him back to the reformed Church. There he remained until the Saint Bartholomew massacre, when it seemed to him that life, like Paris later, was well worth going to Mass for. The moment he was free again, however, he returned to Calvinism. When he became King, it was in no way religious conviction that made him wait for four years. He did so in order to safeguard the monarchical principle. Heretic or not, he was the

rightful heir to the throne, and it was not for the Church to contest his position on any ground whatever. He waited until France had recognised him as her legitimate King; after that, but only after that, did he allow himself to be once more converted. For he had never contested that France required a Catholic King."

"And it was just on that account that the French continued to fight each other for four years?"

"Just for that. But please—don't let's haggle over four miserable years of civil war!"

"Let it go at that," replied Juliette. "He also said that tilling and cultivating were 'the twin breasts of France'."

"Did he, now? I'm not sure that it wasn't his Minister, Sully, who said that, you know. Sully wanted to see a purely agricultural France. But that wasn't good enough for Henry IV; he wanted colonies (Champlain founded Quebec in 1608), and industry as well. He set up forty royal factories, among them those of the Gobelins."

"And thanks to the measures he took, every Frenchman had, as he said, 'a fowl to put in the pot'."

"Theoretically—yes.<sup>1</sup> But as you can well imagine, thirty years of civil war had not been very conducive to prosperity. At the beginning of his reign, thanks to the shortage of bullocks, peasants could be seen hauling the plough themselves and 'doing the work of beasts with the rope about their shoulders'. It took some years, before the fowl reached the peasant's pot. Still—the country was very fertile.

"The small tradesmen and the working men saved every penny they could. Their ambition was to educate their sons and buy for them a job in Government employ. And, by making these jobs hereditary on payment of one per cent of their value, Henry IV sold the real power to the *bourgeois*—as Louis XVI was later to find out.

"Every single little town in France had more officials in Henry's time than they have today. Henry IV himself disliked this state of affairs and he called these officials 'the demi-gods of our times'. As for the nobles, ruined by continual devaluation, they had no means other than their royal allowances, which absorbed one-third of the country's revenues. I'm boring you with all these economic facts only in order to show you that that fowl was still a very long way from the pot.

"That does not, however, alter the fact that Henry IV was justified a thousand times over, when he said: 'I found France not only all but ruined, but also all but lost to the French people. By my endeavours and my

<sup>1</sup> It may well have been Louis XVIII who popularised this slogan. But whether he said it or not, Henry IV certainly had the same idea in mind.

labours, I saved her.' Not only did he save her from ruin, from civil war and from foreign occupation (the League had called for help from the very Catholic Spain), but he also imposed upon his times the most prodigious of all revolutionary ideals—tolerance. If you are still keen on dates, here is a most memorable one: in 1598 the Edict of Nantes imposed upon Catholic and Protestant alike the obligation to respect the beliefs of the other party."

*All Done with a Happy Smile*

"Believe me, it was truly prodigious, what this woefully dressed and not over clean yokel of a King accomplished. But his feats were prodigies which we accepted as a matter of course. We had been accustomed to the miraculous from the days of Charles Martel, Charlemagne, the Crusades, Philip Augustus, Saint Louis, The Maid . . . and of them all, you know, it was the Maid that Henry most closely resembled. Like Joan, he had that knack of charming men and events, that assured air of happiness which carried everything before it without apparent effort and with just a happy smile. You don't suppose he would have been able to reconquer and pacify his kingdom, had he not been possessed of profound political wisdom; but he conquered us by his escapades and his gusts of hearty laughter, by his jokes and his good stories, by his grand gestures of clemency, by his cracking oaths and his white standard.

"After the decadent depravities of the Valois, based for the most part on religious hatred, do you know what was really the marvel of marvels? It was the fundamental healthiness of the man. In him every Frenchman recognised all that was best and truest in the essence of our race. Each one of us might have been a Henry IV, and in loving him we were loving ourselves, and he succeeded in transforming us into ourselves. This Henry IV of ours was akin to a squire of Gouberville, touched with divine Grace.

"At the extreme other end of the century stands another vigorous roisterer as his counterpart. In comparison with our somewhat bedraggled Béarnais, the polished Francis I seems, admittedly, a bit of a fop. But each of them was at the right place at the right time. And throughout the whole century it is a series of women who form the connecting links between them."

"At last!" cried Juliette. "For a moment I thought you were going to have the audacity to finish the story of *Le Vert Galant*<sup>1</sup> without breathing a word about his mistresses!"

<sup>1</sup> *'Un Vert galant'*—one who maintains his interest in the ladies despite advancing years—a gay old dog. It was also the nickname given to Henry IV and one, apparently, which he richly deserved.

"One single word about each of them would be beyond my respiratory capacity," replied Chronossus, "for he had fifty-six (definitely pin-pointed by history, and even history doesn't know everything). But the most charming, the one most worthy of love and the one that this philanderer never ceased to love was the beautiful and exquisite Gabrielle d'Estrées.

"At the outset, she didn't want to have anything to do with him. She belonged to one of the most glitteringly brilliant of his companions, Bellegarde; but the latter never ceased bombarding the ears of his King with the praises he sang of his lovely mistress; and then, one day in November 1590, he was unwise enough to take the King with him to share his admiration of the lady's beauty. *Le Vert Galant* shared it to such good purpose, that he stole Gabrielle—after a long struggle, for in the ingenuousness of her seventeen years, she thought that the King, at thirty-seven, was far too old; but her parents, who saw wealth and fortune within their grasp, got to work and persuaded her that her suitor was indeed both a vigorous and gallant courtier.

"Bellegarde had no intention of becoming odd man out. He succeeded in getting so well back into the graces of his *inamorata*, that one night, surprised by the arrival of the King, he was compelled to seek hasty refuge under the bed. The King, who knew much more about what was afoot than he was prepared to admit, sat down and quietly offered Gabrielle a box of sweetmeats. Then, when they had both helped themselves, he pitched the box under the bed, saying: 'Here you are—live and let live—that's my motto!'

"For ten years Henry and Gabrielle continued to love one another. When he made his solemn entry into Paris, she preceded the procession in a sumptuous litter. That evening, he took her by the hand and together they went through all the rooms of the Louvre, one after the other, laughing admiringly at finding him at last master of so wondrous a palace. So impressed were they by it all, that when finally they retired to Catherine de Medici's curtained four-poster, they did not sleep a wink.

"Gabrielle presented him with three sons, all of whom he legitimised. He wanted to marry her; but Sully was opposed to it. One evening, in the presence of a disconcerted Court, he slipped on to her finger the ring which had been given to him when he was consecrated. Meanwhile he was waiting for Rome to sanction his divorce, and Marguerite was already soliciting the favour of her successor designate, when the crisis was solved by a tragedy. On April 10th 1599 Gabrielle died giving birth to a still-born baby. Some said that she had been poisoned, but there was nothing to justify such an assumption—other than that her death suited everybody concerned; except, that is, the King and herself. Henry collapsed com-

pletely. He was forty-seven at the time; in a few days he appeared to have become an old man.

"Sully at once set about hawking the hand of his master among the Crown bankers, the Medicis. The State was in debt to the Grand Duke of Tuscany to the fabulous extent of one million, one hundred and seventy-four thousand, one hundred and forty-seven golden crowns. The Medici had barely time to cancel this debt and to add six hundred thousand crowns as a dowry for his clumsy daughter, Marie, before Henry had become entangled<sup>1</sup> once more, this time in the meshes of a maid as seductive as she was unprincipled—Henriette d'Entragues.

"This amiable young woman set her cap high. Her mother had been Charles IX's mistress. With the help of her parents, she roused the unfortunate King to such a pitch of frantic desire, that she was able to extract from him a monstrous promise, set down in writing in due and proper form. It was a promise that she should wear the crown if, within six months, she became pregnant and subsequently produced a son. With this promise safely in her possession, she set to work with assiduous ardour.

"The negotiations with the Florentine were nearing completion, when their conduct was disturbed by an explosion. Henriette was pregnant. Henry, his passion for her now appeased, threatened and raved at her in his efforts to regain possession of his promissory note. Nothing doing. But, as I told you before, the gods were always on the side of our Béarnais. Henriette's bedchamber was struck by lightning, and this caused the premature birth of a son, still-born.

"The marriage contract was thereupon signed, and Marie de Medici was married by proxy in Florence on October 5th 1600. Henry IV had hit upon the happy idea of sending Bellegarde, Gabrielle's ex-lover, to stand proxy for him.

"While the new Queen was on her way to France, Henry divided his time between the war in Savoy and Henriette's bed (he now saw no further risk, as far as the latter was concerned). Suddenly, however, he had a whim to see what sort of woman he had taken as wife.

"Marie was then in Lyons. On the evening of December 9, while her women were assisting her to retire for the night, a grizzled and cheerful-looking ruffian burst into her room with a broad smile.

"As neither spoke the language of the other, their conversation was somewhat restricted. This, however, did nothing to lessen *Le Vert Galant's* appreciation of the ample bodily charms before him, draped decorously in a voluminous skirt and so palpably suitable for the propagation of a dynasty. After supper, he intimated to the Duchess of Namours, who had

been promoted to the role of interpreter, that, the ceremony already performed in Florence being in his opinion sufficient to permit him to do so, he proposed to take his rightful place in the conjugal bed at once. Marie was at first so taken aback, that she was 'seized of a shivering fit and had to be restored by the application of very hot cloths'.

"Then, however, she did her duty. Nor, apparently, did she find there-in anything to complain about. The next day, each gave evidence of having been agreeably surprised. She had been 'more beautiful and gracious' than he had hoped; she had found him to be 'much younger' than she had expected."

### *The Amorous Flying Squad*

"Henry still had ten years before him in which to continue to frivol among the petticoats, and you will, I hope, forgive me if we do not exhaust ourselves in following this truly remarkable athlete to the end of the course—the arms of the 'miraculous' fifteen-year-old Charlotte, into which the gay old rascal tumbled a few weeks before he was assassinated. To tell you the truth, he had himself found the course pretty exacting—the truth, that is, as far as it is possible to be certain in matters of this kind. The fact remains, however, that one day someone far better placed to judge than myself, Henriette herself, called him 'Captain *Bon Vouloir*'."

"Oh—if you believe everything that women say!" protested Juliette. "The real truth is that this Henriette was a venomous little so-and-so, all scandal and tittle-tattle. Please, don't spoil *Le Vert Galant* for me."

"You are quite right. In point of fact, she had always treated him very badly; and between them stood the sour memory of that marriage racket, which always rankled. But one thing this young harpy did possess, mark you, was that rare virtue of a truly royal mistress—the ability, in a world prostrating itself before him, to bring the King down to earth, to reduce him to the equality engendered by the boudoir and to give him the precious chance once in a while to hear himself talk like a human being.

"Other women, women infinitely better bred than Henriette d'Entragues, played the same part even better—Gabrielle with Henry IV, Diana of Poitiers with Henry II and Agnes Sorel with Charles VII. In spite of the *Mignons* and the religious wars, the sixteenth century was the century of women. Hand in hand with Diana and Gabrielle we find the erudite Marguerite, sister of Francis I and grandmother of Henry IV's first wife and the dissolute but brilliant Marguerite of Navarre, Henry IV's first wife; Mary the gay Queen, Mary Stuart and Marie de Medici; the romantic poets, Louise Labé and Pernette du Guillet; the rebellious Fosseuse, the tender Corisande. Catherine de Medici, black and abandoned, could

not have prevailed against this flying squad of brilliant and amorous women, which sped across the century of the Renaissance and the Reformation, with all its youthfulness and its licentiousness, its graces, its hatreds, its massacres and its fêtes."

LOUIS XII A.D. 1610-1643—*Regency of Marie de Medici. Revolt of the nobles and the Protestants; A.D. 1614—The States General vote subsidies and are forthwith sent to their homes where they will remain until 1789; The Ministry of Richelieu A.D. 1624-1642—Defeat of the nobles, the Protestants and the House of Austria. Creation of absolute monarchy; A.D. 1628—Capture of La Rochelle; A.D. 1629—Truce of Alais, the Protestants lose their strongholds but retain their religion; LOUIS XIV A.D. 1643-1715—Ministry of Mazarin; A.D. 1643-1661—Regency of Anne of Austria. The Fronde, the last revolt of the nobles. Mazarin brings them to submission and goes on to humble the House of Austria; A.D. 1648—Treaty of Westphalia, France acquires Alsace; A.D. 1659—Treaty of the Pyrenees. France acquires Artois and Rousillon; Personal government by LOUIS XIV A.D. 1661-1715—There is no need to learn all the campaigns and treaties by heart. There are too many of them. Up to 1681 the Roi Soleil rises steadily and acquires Flanders, the Franche-Comté and Strasbourg. In 1682 he takes up residence at Versailles and the sun begins to set. There follow twenty-two wars from which England and Prussia alone benefit. In 1685 the revocation of the Edict of Nantes deprives the Protestants of the right to practise their faith. Behind the façade of Versailles misery and poverty are widespread.* THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY—*Under Louis XIII the Marquise de Rambouillet creates Society, High Society and good form. Belles Lettres tend to become titles of nobility. Under Louis XIV the nobles become tame pets at Court and the financiers extremely rapacious. Louis XIV sets his wild animals a fine example of self-control. But it is in Paris, in the salons of a few enlightened women, that the masterpiece of the century is fashioned, the man of honour. The classical writers are his mouthpiece.*



## The Glory of Being a Man

“THE century of the *Roi Soleil* and Versailles has as its salient feature the emergence of Paris and the *bourgeois*. We have seen gallant nobles clustered round Eleanor of Aquitaine, Agnes Sorel and Diana Poitiers. We have seen squires like the squire of Gouberville on their country estates, rich *bourgeois* in their *hôtels*, sumptuous fêtes at Chenonceaux, at the Louvre and other royal residences; but a *salon* where they converse, an urban society—that is something we have never seen before. Parisian high society was a mixture—of nobles, of financiers, of men of wit and culture and of pretty women; it was not a caste, it was a coterie which wished to be exclusive, but no one quite knew where it began or where it ended. In it, superimposed upon those most useful credentials, the quarterings of nobility and a nice, fat bank balance, but by no means in substitution of them, was something else—‘good form’. And the principal arbiter of good form was the Marquise de Rambouillet. In much the same way as a knight of old was dubbed, a man was now given the *cachet* of being a man about town, a man of the world.”

### *The Perfumes of Paris*

“The capital of the kingdom, now promoted to be capital of Society, wit and fashion, had, however, still nothing of *La Ville Lumière* about it. At night, its obscure and tortuous little streets were less safe than the verge of some gloomy wood, and if any naïve stranger tarried in them a moment, footpads lurking in the dark doorways would leap out to relieve him of his money or his life—as he preferred. The *Pont Neuf* had become the most fearsome spot in all Paris, and it was there that the ‘Brothers of the Samaritaine’ and the ‘Knights of the Short Sword’ held sway. During the day, on the other hand, this bridge and the *Place Dauphine*, triangular in shape and tricolour in colour—white stones, red brick and blue roofs—was the Parisians’ favourite promenade, and from it there was a lovely view of the *Louvre*, the *Sainte Chapelle* and *Notre Dame*. Round Henry IV’s statue

there was always such a crowd that it was said that at any hour of the day 'you would be sure to find a monk, a white horse and a——'. There was also a great number of *carrosses*, the new type of carriage so popular with the gentry, mingling with sedan chairs and knights on horseback. No one who was anyone would have dreamed of walking in our Paris streets, which were always filthy with mud and full of the dirty water and garbage of every sort that everyone threw out of the window.

"The stench in the Paris streets was becoming annoyingly notorious all the world over. When little Louis XIII made his entry, at the age of three, into the capital—and even though he only passed through the *Faubourg Saint Honoré*—he turned to his governess, Madame de Montglas, and said: 'What a nasty smell I smell!'

"By this time the *Pont Neuf* had pavements, and the Parisians, of course, put them to the best possible use. Itinerant pedlars spread out their trumpery and wares on them, and the raucous shouts of dentists impudently solicited the patronage of toothless passers-by. Everywhere in the city there was a great jostling and floundering; and in the streets the pavement sloped gently upwards towards the houses, and the top of the slope, where the mud was less thick, was, by common consent, reserved for the ladies. Sometimes, too, gay and pretty young things could be seen perched on the robust shoulders of brawny porters.

"Another place that was always the scene of great throngs was the Saint Germain Fair, which was founded by Louis XI and which lasted from February 3rd to Palm Sunday. Henry IV took such delight in wandering hand in hand with the Queen or with Gabrielle round the stalls, that he went there nearly every day; Louis XIII, who was rather frightened of crowds, went there but rarely, and Louis XIV never once set foot in the place.

"We also had our fashionable quarter—the *hôtels* round the marvellous *Place Royale*, which also had been constructed by Henry IV; and people of fashion, in their coaches and on horseback, used to meet in the *Cours de la Reine*, in the acacia grove planted by Louis XIII and made fashionable by Queen Marie de Medici; from it we could see the market gardens and the vineyards on the hillock of Chaillot.

"Paris was dirty. Paris stank abominably, but she still inspired a poetically minded official to write of her

'Paris est si charmant et si délicieux  
Qu'il n'en faudrait partir que pour aller aux cieux.'

"The city, which by now had very nearly five hundred thousand

inhabitants, was spreading in every direction. An architect named Christopher Marie had been given a contract to join into one the two meadowland islands, the *Ile Notre Dame* and the *Ile des Vaches*, to construct quays round their periphery, to build houses along the quays, to join the islands to the mainland by means of a bridge (the *Pont Marie*) and to give to the resultant whole the name of the King. Louis XIII, however hid his identity behind the title of Saint Louis. Near the hill occupied by the windmills (which has now been levelled by the *Avenue de l'Opéra*), Richelieu built himself a palace of unprecedented luxury—the *Palais Cardinal*, which later became the *Palais Royal*—and then proceeded to sell the plots of ground which surrounded it. It was, by the way, Queen Margot who had set the example in this type of business activity.

“She had been leading a gay life in the *Hôtel de Sens* (the traditional residence of the Archbishops of Sens). But, having had the misfortune to see one of her lovers assassinated beneath her windows, she had conceived a horror for the neighbourhood and had built herself a fine *hôtel* in the *Rue de Seine*. At the same time she had set about acquiring most of the property in *Pré-aux-Clercs*. And there, complete with her *vertugadin*<sup>1</sup> and its hearts, she had installed herself. . . . Don't you know the story about Queen Margot's *vertugadin*? It had pockets all round, in each of which reposed a box containing the heart of one of her deceased lovers, for she was most punctilious, as each one died, in having his heart embalmed.<sup>2</sup> Incidentally, she had as her almoner a most pious man, Vincent de Paul. I should dearly have loved to hear some of their conversations.

“To return, however, to Queen Margot's activities in real estate. She indulged in such a lot of deals and so much sharp practice as regards the construction of the neighbouring *quai* that it became known as the *Quai mal-acquis* (dishonestly acquired)—now corrupted to *Quai Malaquais*.

“In a little while we'll drop in and pay a visit to a famous *demi-mondaine*, Marion Delorme in the *Place Royale*. We sometimes used to call it the *Place Louis XIII*, because of the King's statue there. Talking of which, you might be interested to note that at the end of the seventeenth century there will remain in Paris only three *Places* and three statues. Hence the

<sup>1</sup> A small cushion which women wore beneath their skirts and round their waists, in order to make their skirts billow out.

<sup>2</sup> In her latter years Queen Margot fortunately became sufficiently corpulent to allow ample room for all the hearts of her very considerable band of lovers around the circumference of her generous person.

epigram: 'Henry IV is with his people on the *Pont Neuf*;<sup>1</sup> Louis XIII with the people of quality in the *Place Royale*; Louis XIV with the financiers in the *Place des Victoires*.' "

*Richelieu—a Birds Eye View*

"I don't in the least mind wandering about the streets of Paris like this, even though they do smell," said Juliette. "But while we've been doing so things must have been happening, I suppose, you know, things of historical importance."

"Historical importance!" exclaimed Chronossus angrily. "And isn't the way in which the French lived of historical importance, pray?"

"Yes—of course. But I mean, well—dash it—History with a capital H."

Chronossus snorted. "There you go again. You are really a very obstinate young woman."

"No—really—I was only thinking of the things in our history books—er—Richelieu and all that. You must have something to say about him, surely?"

"And I am quite sure that you already know all that there is to be known about him."

"He decapitated the nobles who ignored the law and persisted in fighting duels," recited Juliette, "he took La Rochelle from the Protestants and he signed the Treaty of Westphalia."

"You see!" cried Chronossus. "You've got it all pat! Except that it was Mazarin who signed the celebrated Treaty; but that's a minor detail, it was only the final curtain on Richelieu's policy."

"No—please be serious, Monsieur Chronossus," protested Juliette. "I'm relying on you to improve my mind."

"Very well. You've asked for it—so here goes. Louis XIII was nine years old when his father died. His mother, who acted as Regent, was completely under the influence of two Florentines—Galigai, who was her own sister, and Galigai's husband, a fop called Concini. The nobles, as usual, seized the opportunity to indulge in their favourite pastime of revolting, and they obliged the Queen Regent to convene the States General."

<sup>1</sup> The Revolution hurled Henry IV to the ground with the rest of the "tyrants". The First Tyrant who followed placed his own statue, made from a cannon from the battle of Austerlitz, on the top of the column in the *Place Vendôme*. Louis XVIII hauled Napoleon down and ordered him to be transformed once more into *Le Vert Galant*. The sculptor Quesnel was given the task of re-modelling Henry IV. As he was an "imperialist", he seized the chance to stuff anti-royalist pamphlets into the belly of the horse; he placed a small statuette of Napoleon in the King's arms and a written statement of what he had done in the King's head. Before he died, the sculptor revealed what he had done and stated that only half a day's work was required to relieve Henry IV of his burden. The autopsy still remains to be done.

"Ha!" exclaimed Juliette. "The nobles placing their trust in the Deputies—in the people, in fact! Splendid!"

"*Chère Madame*, The King alone was able to speak for the people, and at that moment we had no King. The Third Estate—the *bourgeoisie*, that is—voted subsidies and, as usual, demanded a reduction of taxes in return. Then—and once more, as usual—the tapestries of the Assembly Hall were taken down, and the Deputies knew that this was a sign that they were now expected to go off to their respective homes. That was in 1614. We shall not see them again assembled until 1789.

"But a great orator had arisen among us, the young Bishop of Luçon. With his aquiline nose and thin lips, his pointed beard and cavalier moustache, his pale, ascetic face and compelling eye, Richelieu had attracted the Queen's attention.

"That same year Louis XIII was proclaimed to have reached manhood. In fact, he did so three years later, when he had Concini assassinated. He was then sixteen."

"A promising youngster," remarked Juliette.

"He was a very unhappy youngster," retorted Chronossus. "Louis XIII certainly had some most ridiculous traits, but before I show you that side of him, I should like to try and make you realise that he was perhaps the most pathetic of all our Kings."

### *Hamlet, King of France*

"Balzac had a great sense of drama. He called Louis XIII the Hamlet of France—Hamlet, whose father was murdered by his mother's lover, by the man who usurped the throne; Hamlet, who pretended to be mad while he planned his revenge. 'I pretended to be a child,' Louis XIII is declared to have said, referring to those seven years which separated the assassinations of Henry IV and Concini."

"Gracious!" exclaimed Juliette. "Now there's something I didn't know! Was it Concini who had Henry IV assassinated?"

"Nothing has ever been proved. The case was hushed up, too many important people, beginning with the Queen herself, were implicated; but everything points to Concini.

"Everybody was quite certain that Marie de Medici was Concini's mistress. We used to call the little gangway joining the Queen's apartments to Concini's house 'the bridge of love'.

"Shortly before Henry IV's death, Concini had made friends with Henriette d'Entragues, the Marquise de Vermeuil (who, as I told you, had never forgiven the King for not having married her), and she and the Queen had entered upon a strange alliance.

"The King's death seems to have been generally anticipated. Indeed, on May 3rd a courier announced it prematurely in Cambrai, and affirmed that the King had been struck down by three blows from a dagger. The only question in peoples' minds was—who would do the deed? And we ourselves believed it would be the Jesuits. Henry IV himself once said: 'They will kill me. I am quite sure they will spare no effort to encompass my death.'

"Jacqueline d'Escoman, one of the Marquise de Vermeuil's maids, did her utmost to persuade the Queen, Father Coton, the King's chaplain, and Sully that the King was to be assassinated; but she was politely shown to the door.

"Ravaillac<sup>1</sup> was wandering about the city, trying to gain access to the King. On May 13th Marie de Medici was at last to receive the supreme and most rare honour of being crowned—an act which would ensure that she would remain in power in the event of her becoming a widow. Henry IV, wearied by his wife's persistence, had at last agreed. But again and again he had been heard to say: "That cursed sacrament! It will be the cause of my death!"

"In fact, he was killed on the day after the ceremony, on Friday, May 14th 1610, expiring at about four o'clock in the afternoon. At four o'clock, the Duke d'Épernon, formerly one of Henry III's *Mignons*, took matters in hand, galloped to Parliament and saw to it that Queen Marie was proclaimed Regent; and by seven o'clock, the necessary powers had been conveyed to her.

"While the news was spreading across France, the common people began to 'wander like lost sheep, bereft of their shepherd, not only weeping, but groaning and crying aloud, like people possessed'. Hénault, the President of the Council, went so far as to have the temerity to say that he had found the Queen 'neither sufficiently surprised nor appropriately afflicted'.

"An enquiry was opened, but forces were already at work to ensure the suppression of any scandal.

"Father Coton had said to Ravaillac: 'My son, take care not to cause anxiety to those in authority.'

"Notwithstanding this, towards the end of his horrible sufferings, when he was being torn limb from limb by horses, he muttered some confused words, which made his tormentors decide to despatch him as quickly as possible.

"The Provost of Pithiviers, arrested for having announced the death of the King on the day on which it had occurred, was found strangled in his cell. Épernon was obliged to confess that he had had three interviews with

<sup>1</sup> Ravaillac, the man who assassinated Henry IV.

Ravaillac before the assassination. (Epernon was the Governor of Angoulême, where Ravaillac was born.)

"Jacqueline d'Escoman claimed that she had found out about the plot in the house of Epernon's mistress. She was locked up in the *Conciergerie*, where she created such a fuss, that Parliament felt obliged to re-open the enquiry.

"Epernon, hiding his anxiety under a cloak of bravado, paid a friendly visit to the former President of the Council, de Harlay.

"I am neither your friend nor your advocate,' declared the stern old Cato. 'I am your judge!' And he insisted that d'Epernon appear before the tribunal in the normal way. To those who sought information from him on behalf of the Queen Regent, he contented himself with saying: 'God has seen fit to make me live in this century that I might see marvellous things, things so strange and of such great import as I would never have thought to see or hear in all my life!'

"When he was told that there was no evidence to support Jacqueline d'Escoman's allegations, he lifted his arms to high heaven and exclaimed: 'Alas! there is too much! Far too much!'

"De Harlay was then gently persuaded to admit that he was eighty years old and that the state of his health obliged him to hand over his duties, which he did, to a member of the Court.

"The case was dead and buried. But even the fact that the Queen and her lover were behind d'Epernon did not stay the murmurings of the people. The little King allowed himself without protest to be ejected from the Council and in silence he watched his Court bow low before the foppish Concini. Louis XIII was 'pretending to be a child', and all the while he was turning over in his mind ways and means of cleaning up his father's Court."

#### *A Nought that Has Considerable Significance*

"Richelieu once said: 'I am a nought, a symbol of some significance, provided that it is preceded by some number.' But the requisite number—Louis XIII—had not yet even thought of sending for him.

"Richelieu, the Queen's confessor, had gone to earth in Luçon, and the King had confided the power to his very dear friend, Luynes, a great expert on falconry, but not much of a hand at politics. Luynes died conveniently in 1621. But three more years were to pass before Louis XIII reached the conclusion that Richelieu was the dominant personality of whom he had need.

"Montesquieu exaggerates when he says that Richelieu 'despised the King and honoured the Queen'. It is true, however, that he made him

'play second fiddle in the monarchy and first violin in the concert of Europe'.

"His Eminence knew what he was about and, with the sole exception, perhaps, of The Grey Eminence, Father Joseph, he was the only one who did know. His enemies complained rather naïvely that 'the Cardinal never does what he says and never says what he is doing'.

"What Richelieu did—you have already recounted. He reduced the nobles by rasing their fortress castles to the ground and cutting down the stature of the strongest among them by a head. By the Edict of Nantes Henry IV had left in possession of the Protestants places in which they could defend themselves in case of renewed persecution, and the Protestants had taken advantage of the fact to create a State within the State. The siege of La Rochelle made them realise that independence of this sort could not be tolerated. The truce of Alais (1629) deprived them of their strongholds, but left them their religion. As far as the House of Austria—which also ruled over Spain and Germany—was concerned, the Cardinal supported the German Princes, Protestants though they were, in their struggle against it. That was a war that began badly—the enemy advanced as far as Corbie in 1636—and ended, thanks to Turenne, Condé and Mazarin, with the Treaties of Westphalia (1648) and the Pyrences (1659). We had acquired Artois, Rousillon and Alsace (without Strasbourg). The House of Austria had lost Spain and Germany and for the next hundred and fifty years would be in no position to invade us again.<sup>1</sup>

"So much for History—with your capital H. And if that's not enough for you, I can escort you into the realms of high philosophy, if you like.

"It has been asserted that, by humbling Austria, Richelieu created Prussia. That is true. But Prussia only came into being a hundred and fifty years later. while Austria would have stifled us then and there; indeed, with her inquisitors and her *auto-da-fé's* she would, I think, have completely emasculated us. It has also been asserted that by creating an absolute monarchy, Richelieu paved the way for the Revolution. It is perfectly true that he did create an absolute monarchy. But it was Louis XIV who, *en route*, forgot his half of the programme. Having domesticated and tamed the nobles, not only did he not suppress their privileges, but to them he added those other privileges exercised by the financial barons; he raised the monarchy on too high a pedestal and he cut it off from the people—its traditional prop and mainstay.

"I grant you, of course, that Richelieu was detested while he lived and was mourned when he was dead."

"And that," interrupted Juliette, "was, I am quite sure, as it should be.

<sup>1</sup> Richelieu died in 1642. Mazarin pursued the same policy till 1661.



You have shown me that he was the creator of France's greatness. But you have certainly not convinced me that he cared a fig for the happiness of the French people."

"I think you're right," said Chronossus, slightly disconcerted. "The French people certainly had no cause to love Richelieu, who had no desire to see them become too prosperous. 'One must realise,' he used to say 'that they are like mules, which, accustomed to their duties, are more spoiled by a long rest than by continuity of labour.' That epitomises the chasm which separates the viewpoints of Richelieu and our good King Henry. At the same time, it must be admitted that thanks to him and the security he had given to the State, Frenchmen were able to live handsomely.

*La Bourgeoise may well envy la Gauloise*

"When I say live handsomely, I do not by any means refer to material comfort. Louis XIII had far less material comfort than the workman of the twentieth century. Our narrow-fronted and bulging houses drew light from tortuous little streets and dingy squares. It is true that by then we had at last got glass in our windows; but so very little sunlight could get at and through them. In most rooms in the house from early in the morning we had to light an oil lamp or candles made from tallow fat, which smoked and smelled abominably. Wax candles were still terribly expensive. There was no running water. Some, the more favoured among us, had a well in their garden, which they shared with their neighbours. Most Parisians, however, bought their water from the water vendors or sent their servants to queue at one of the thirty public fountains in the capital. The steam baths of the Middle Ages were no longer in fashion, but very few citizens indeed possessed a bath-tub of their own. When they felt like having a bath, they used to send off and hire a tub. The more elegant among them stifled their malodours by drenching themselves with perfume. We had forgotten all about the cleanliness of the Middle Ages, and we were further away from real comfort than was the Gaul in the year Nought.

"As for the women, our *bourgeoises* (and our Duchesses) of the seventeenth century would have given anything to be as free and as esteemed as their Gallic mothers. You remember Molière's words, of course—'*Du côté de la barbe est la toute-puissance.*' Marriage was a transaction between vested interests, into which young girls entered with an appropriate 'Amen'—or went into a convent; and lucky indeed were those few who were able to catch even a fleeting glimpse of their future husbands before the wedding ceremony. The woman contributed her dowry, and her husband expected her to be the servant-in-chief of the household and at the same time to put in a few hours of overtime to produce children.

(Generally anything between six and twelve of them.) Under these conditions, love, of course, flourished outside the home, and conjugal love was regarded as the last word in vulgarity.

"One day, the Count de Guiche, one of the most dashing gentlemen at Court, when calling upon the Countess d'Olonne, by whom he was regarded with much favour, heard a noise coming from her room, a noise of a kind that caused him to peep through the key-hole. You will never guess what he saw, a sight so prodigious, so incredible that . . . but let him speak for himself: 'Guess what I saw? No—I'd better tell you, for there are some things which you can't guess. I saw Madame d'Olonne caressing her husband and lavishing upon him all those delights which are properly reserved for a lover! Her husband! A rival in the house; an aspirant, by right of contract, and in broad daylight! I ask you! Wasn't that more than any man could stand! I withdrew, filled with scorn and indignation.' And off went the good Count de Guiche, muttering to himself: 'Husband and wife making love! Disgusting! The woman's lost all sense of decency!'

"If in the near future I take you to meet a few women libertines, you must forgive them. For just as the despotism of Louis XIV made the bed for the Revolution, it was the 'omnipotent beard' which made the bed for lovers.

"Nevertheless, there were a few ardent feminists fighting for the emancipation of women. Later, we shall see Molière giving them his support. On the threshold, too, are the *précieuses*, some of them sometimes, admittedly, also *ridiculés*. The movement centred round the Marquise de Rambouillet."

### *Never a Dull Moment*

"Her aim was not so much to bring about the emancipation of women, but rather to surround herself with people who were good company, a circle in which behaviour would be free without being licentious, conversation intelligent without being pedantic, wit mordant without being vulgar. A few women had already tried to do the same thing. In the previous century I could have taken you to see the des Roches ladies in Poitiers, who were a sort of social brains-trust.

"But Madame de Rambouillet held her *salon* for forty years, and she transformed, or, I would rather say, she gave form to our way of life, in exactly the same way as Malherbe, who, incidentally, was a frequent visitor to her *salon*, gave form to our language."

"Please," interrupted Juliette. "You're not going to take me to see the *précieuses*, those art-crafty bores, are you?"

"Who said anything about the *précieuses*? The imitators who followed her were precious; but not Madame de Rambouillet. There was nothing arty-crafty or artificial about the famous *Chambre Bleue* in the *Rue Saint Thomas du Louvre*, where each day she received her guests. It was the essence of refined and exquisite taste. The walls and ceiling were painted sky blue. From the cornices hung brocaded tapestries, on the gold and blue backgrounds of which were delicately traced floral patterns in pink and white; between the panels of tapestry hung pictures—landscapes and mythological or religious subjects. Above the parquet floor, softly padded with a glorious Turkey carpet, rose majestically a bed surmounted by gauze curtains and graced with flounces and a counterpane of Bruges satin, embroidered in gold with trceries of silver thread. Around it were grouped a circle of chairs, piled with cushions, and stools, covered in crimson velvet edged with gold lace; and upon this bed Madame de Rambouillet reclined gracefully and held her Court. Standing upon a table in an alcove, an enormous silver chandelier stretched forth its fifteen branches, each with a candle of perfumed wax. Here and there were dotted small tables and consoles, laden with enamelled boxes and marquetry, transparent Chinese porcelain, figurines in alabaster and lapis lazuli. A bronze basket and crystal vases filled with fragrant flowers graced the mantelpiece.

"At the outset, only the aristocracy were invited. Then came Malherbe; and with him Racine. But it was only with the advent of Voiture, the son of a wine merchant and a young man of sparkling but wicked wit, that the *salon* acquired its true character. With him Voiture brought gaiety, irony, elegance, badinage and courteous, flattering compliment—and also a whole heap of writers, among them a certain Corneille, who was a bit of a boor, but he had written *Le Cid*.

"Most unfortunately, the good man read to us in his heavy and hesitant voice another of his tragedies, seeking our approbation, and everybody was rather shocked to find religion thus strangely mingled with love in the play, which he called *Polyeucte*.

"I expect it would interest you to know what sort of things amused our society. They yawned at the interminable Alexandrine verses of Chapelain's *La Pucelle*, but the younger element, led by Voiture and Julie d'Angennes—'Princesse Julie'—were very fond of acting parts taken from the classical romances and from farces of less literary merit. One day Julie gave vent to her high spirits by balancing a jugful of water on the top of a door and toppling it down on Voiture's head as he entered; on another occasion, she gave a dinner party and, having previously found out what dishes the Count de Guiché (the horrified lover of Madame d'Olonne)

detested most, she watched his face delightedly as they were offered to him, one after the other. Then, having had her fun, she regaled him with a feast of all the things he loved best. The Baroness de Vigeau was deaf; Voiture publicly recited to her the fifty-first Psalm with such gallant and dashing gestures that the dear old lady was delighted at the flattery he was apparently lavishing upon her. One evening he appeared in a caricature disguise as a Cardinal. And the Marquise herself was once taken completely aback to find, in the space between the wall and her bed, two handsome bears, which had been brought from the Fair by some roistering mountebank. So, as you see, there was nothing at all precious about childish pranks like those.

"The Marquise de Rambouillet's greatest innovation, however, was conversation; we were no longer treated to long colloquies on a given subject, such as had been served up to us a hundred years before at Marguerite of Angoulême's Court. Conversation now flowed freely, well-informed, spiced well with sly digs and tit-bits of gossip. 'Have you heard the latest?' People broke up into little circles, argued, commented on men and affairs and poked fun at the V.I.P.s of the day."

#### *Odds and Ends, Picked up in the Chambre Bleue*

"Do you know that the most incredible, the most astounding, the most prodigious thing has just happened? The King has entered the Queen's bed! It is true he had to be put there by force, but at last the deed has been done.

"During the whole four years since his marriage, Louis XIII had maintained an attitude of timorous reserve. In vain had the Nuncio, Bentivoglio, anxious to put an end to this coldness so insulting to the very Catholic Spanish Princess, Anne of Austria, sought to provide the King with a mistress in an effort to rid him of his inhibitions; in vain had the young wife of the King's favourite, Luynes (the future Duchess of Chevreuse), tried to exercise the charm of her sixteen years. 'I love my mistresses from the waist upwards,' the King told her. 'Then we shall have to wear our waists round the middle of our thighs,' pertly retorted Madame de Luynes. But she was wasting her time.

"Wasted, too, was the pleasurable demonstration that the King's sister was pleased to stage for him. To his confessor's reproaches, the King had replied that he feared lest he encounter 'difficulties beyond my power to surmount'. His sister, Mademoiselle de Vendôme, was about to marry the Duke d'Elboeuf. 'Sire,' said the Nuncio, 'I cannot believe that you would willingly accept the shame of seeing your sister have a son before you yourself have produced a Dauphin.' Louis, blushing furiously, agreed. But what about the famous 'difficulties'? His sister, daughter of the lovely

Gabrielle, undertook to prove to him that they were by no means insurmountable. She consummated her marriage in the presence of her brother, who, installed at the end of the nuptial couch, watched everything that happened with the closest attention.

“‘Now—off you go and do the same thing!’ the young wife advised him, and you’ll be all right.”

“There was an air of general and expectant emotion. The young Queen never fell asleep without hoping that she would hear a discreet knock at her door. For five nights after the demonstration she hoped in vain. It was altogether too much of a good thing! The honour of the Sovereign, of his dynasty of his alliances, was at stake.

“On January 25th 1619, at eleven o’clock at night, His Majesty, having said his prayers, was about to compose himself to slumber. His servant withdrew, the candles were extinguished, the glimmer of the night-light began to flicker on the gilt of the coffered ceiling. Suddenly Luynes burst in and delivered himself of a passionate homily. For long enough, he cried, the King had presented this pitiful figure to the eyes of the world. The time had now come for him to behave like a man. Louis was all aflutter with dismay, and he hid beneath his bedclothes. His favourite brutally tore them aside and forced his master to rise. Alas, poor Master! Everyone, then was against him—even his favourite! He burst into tears. Luynes, grim and pitiless, seized him by the arm and dragged him forth.

“The First Valet of the Bedchamber, who was a witness of the scene, would not countenance any waiving of etiquette. Seizing a torch and walking gravely backwards as was meet, he lighted the path of this strange expedition.

“At last the King and Queen had come together—but by no means alone! The First Woman of the Bedchamber remained present, to ensure that this time there should be no mistake. At two o’clock in the morning victory had been won. Louis returned to his own apartments to sleep on his laurels, and the glad news flashed forth on its triumphant journey. The next day, the whole Diplomatic Corps came to offer its congratulations to Luynes and to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

“And in the *Hôtel Rambouillet* tongues wagged until sore throats begged hoarsely for mercy.

“He had a queer nature, this King. He was no longer content to plait and braid hair or to make pastries. He next started to grow peas and send them to market for sale. Montauron, the financier, bought them for their weight in gold in order to curry favour with the King. His latest passion was playing barbers, and he started assembling all the Officers of his Court and trimming their beards for them.

"And I wonder how this will strike you? His Majesty was supping. In the front rank of the crowd which pressed forward to watch<sup>1</sup> was a young woman, whose dress was extremely décolleté. The King took a large mouthful of wine and squirted it deftly over the young madam's exposed breast.

"And what, I wonder, too, would old *Vert Galant* have said to the following antic on his son's part? Madame de Luynes, now a widow, had been exiled; while she and the Queen had been running through one of the galleries of the Louvre, she had caused the Queen to tumble, and the fall had brought about yet another miscarriage. Louis was not pleased. He disliked very much giving himself a lot of trouble for nothing. And Anne had meanwhile lent her ear to the sweetly murmured flatteries of the fascinating Duke of Buckingham! That, briefly, represents the final balance sheet of the King's conjugal enterprise. Then the King fell in love—at last—with Mademoiselle de Hautefort, an olympian blonde, so young, so radiant and so starry-eyed, that she was called Aurora. She was one of the Queen's Maids of Honour, and the latter was quite content to delegate to so devoted a girl the powers which she herself could not exercise.

"The two of them were joking and laughing in Anne's apartments, when suddenly the King came in. The young Maid of Honour at once made to hide a paper with just that amount of hurried confusion necessary to awaken the King's curiosity. He asked to see the letter. She refused to show it. His Majesty insisted.

"Very well, Sire—if you insist, come and take it for yourself," cried the lovely young girl, and laughingly she bent invitingly forward, tendering her corsage at the bottom of which, between two marvels of loveliness, the bone of contention was nestling. And what, think you, did our gallant Louis do? From the mantlepiece he took up a small pair of tongs and with them. . . .

"Women frightened him, and he took a delight in offending them. And for his pains he at least won for himself a flattering nickname. When Madame de Guémadeux, wife of the Governor of Fougères, flung herself at his feet and begged mercy for her husband, Louis remained quite unmoved, very beautiful though she was. And because he did not like women he was called Louis the Chaste; and for the same reason, he was also called Louis the Just."

### *Red and Black*

"Sometimes the comédies with which the King amused the town ended in tragedy, and sometimes he caused the mockers of the *Hôtel de Ram-*

<sup>1</sup> Our Kings, as you know, ate and died in public. They belonged to their people!

*bouillet* to tremble in their shoes. One such occasion was the famous *Journée des Dupes*,<sup>1</sup> which landed the brilliant Bassompierre, one of the regular members of the *salon*, in the Bastille for twelve years, and which consolidated Richelieu's position in power.

"I must tell you that the Cardinal's relations with the two Queens were not of the best. Times had changed since Marie de Medici had carried him to power and he had sat adoring at the Florentine's feet. She had realised long ago that the Cardinal's lute was, to him, nothing more than an instrument of government, a means to an end. He had tried his persuasive powers on the neglected Queen Anne, too, and, on the advice of the perfidious Madame de Chevreuse, His Eminence, dressed in a costume of green velvet adorned with silver bells, had even danced before Her Majesty. There was nothing that Richelieu would not do for the honour of the Kingdom!

"But it was not Anne whom Richelieu feared. It was the Queen Mother, on whom the King, 'that great baby still in his swaddling clothes', lavished a devotion which she accepted scornfully. The rivalry between Richelieu and Marie de Medici had now reached a point when the King had to make his choice between them.

"One Sunday morning—it was November 10th 1630—in the *Palais Medicis* (the *Luxembourg*), the Florentine Marie launched her great attack. Silent and crouching in the depths of his armchair, Louis looked with consternation at this heavy shrew of a woman, to whom the ample padding of her skirt, her thick neck and high, square sleeves gave the appearance of a massive black tower surmounted by a scarlet, quivering face.

"Marie, talking rapidly and with a wealth of gesticulation, went on and on. She was sure of herself. The doors of the Luxembourg were carefully locked. Intrusion was impossible. Her son was delivered into her hands.

"Suddenly, a private door, which gave access to the Chapel and which was the only door not bolted and barred, opened to admit the last person she expected to see—the Cardinal, pale, subdued, yet smiling withal. Marie choked with rage. 'You—here!'

"'I am prepared to wager that Your Majesties were talking about me.'

"'Nothing of the kind!' Then she became ashamed of her own weakness, and her anger, rushing suddenly to her head, drove her to fury. 'Very well! Since you ask—Yes, we were speaking of you—as the most ungrateful and most wretched of men!'

<sup>1</sup> *The Journée des Dupes*, 11 November 1630, so called because Richelieu's enemies, notably the Queen Mother and Queen Anne of Austria, were quite certain that he would fall—and were quite wrong.

"Louis and Richelieu remained open-mouthed. They had seen people angry before, but never had they witnessed such transports of fury as this. In a mixed jargon of French and Italian the haggard old lady screamed that she it was, who had made this upstart, who had showered her bounty upon him, who had given him a million gold francs.

"The King tried to stem the torrent. 'Madam! Madam! You displease me! You hurt me!'

"She took no notice.

"Richelieu in his turn tried his utmost to make himself heard. He knew Louis would not tolerate any lack of respect shown to his mother, even when she was behaving like a woman demented. So he allowed those tears to flow, which he shed so easily, and fell on his knees. Marie paused, gasping for breath. He seized the chance to humble himself before her. Humbly he begged her pardon for errors which he had not committed, he would testify to the honour of the Queen, he would resign his high office; was there aught else she desired? She had but to say, and he would obey.

"Once again the old Queen exploded and, as the King began to murmur conciliatory words, she turned and shouted at him.

"'Do you prefer a valet to your own mother?' And then she burst into a paroxysm of enraged weeping.

"Livid with anger, shame and mortification, Louis found himself caught between the gusts of these conflicting emotional tornadoes, between the black robe that seemed to be animated by a hurricane and the red robe that seemed to have been stricken to the ground. He must, he felt, put an immediate end to this horrible scene, to this amazing exhibition of lack of self-control, which they had dared to display in his presence.

"He commanded the Cardinal to rise and to depart, and then, cutting short any further argument, said that he would go at once to Versailles. He wished, he said, to be alone, to be able to breathe once more.

"Motionless, like a beggar before his patron, Richelieu awaited some gesture, one little word from his master. But his master had no thoughts other than to escape. Without a glance at anyone he entered his carriage and drove swiftly away.

"Red or black? The Cardinal was convinced that he had just received his dismissal and he prepared to depart. Then it was, however, that the King, whom we have seen to be so feeble, so ridiculous, showed his true character.

"He summoned Richelieu to Versailles.

"'I am bounden more in duty to my State than to my mother,' he said.

"Shortly afterwards, Marie de Medici departed, never to return. The King was destined never to see again this mother, whom he treated as



Public Enemy Number One and whom he never ceased tearfully to regret, like a little child, who so dearly wanted to be loved.

"The whole country, confident that the Queen Mother would triumph, had put its shirt on the black. Among the most completely compromised was Bassompierre; Richelieu threw him into the Bastille. He was deeply mourned in the *Hôtel de Rambouillet*, for he was one of the shining lights of that little Court, and one of its wittiest, most carefree and dashing ornaments."

*His Majesty Loses His Head—So Does Cinq Mars*

"Louis XIII's love for Mademoiselle de Hautefort dragged rather drably on. 'Remove the word *desire*,' said the King one day to a poet who had sung the praises of this romance, 'for I desire nothing.' And that, we all thought, was quite true. Richelieu, however, deemed that the moment had now come to provide the King with a doll upon which to lavish his affections. The doll he chose was Cinq Mars; and for him the King developed a delirious passion that endured for three years.

"Richelieu appointed Cinq Mars Master of the King's Wardrobe on his eighteenth birthday, and the first thing he did on assuming the appointment was to replenish his own wardrobe. He had fifty-two suits, and the following description, given to me by a page boy after the mad young upstart had lost his head under the axe, will give you some idea of his expensive tastes: 'A cloak, a doublet and hose in hazel-coloured Dutch broadcloth, the cloak lined with the same material, the doublet lined with grey satin and the hose lined with white taffeta, the whole edged with gold and silver lace; buttons of gold and silver gilt. The lower portion of the hose embellished with satin bows and lace. Price of the complete costume—Two hundred livres.'

"The favour which Cinq Mars enjoyed was made plain for all to see in the summer of 1639, when the King appointed him Grand Master of the Horse. From then on he became known as Monsieur le Grand. Monsieur le Grand however, accepted the favours of his royal Master, but rejected his love. This fawning King exasperated him. He much preferred pretty women, and one very pretty woman in particular, Marion Delorme. At night he used to slip out of the *château* of Saint Germain and gallop all the way into Paris to the *Place Royale*, where his mistress lived. The King, to be avenged of his rival, used to order her to leave Paris whenever he himself went there.

"There were constant and terribly stormy scenes between the King and his favourite. Richelieu always acted as peace-maker, for Cinq Mars was useful to him as a spy. Every now and then the King would send his formidable Minister little notes, couched in terms such as this:

'We, the undersigned, do hereby affirm to all whom it may concern that we are very content and satisfied with each other and that we have never been in more perfect accord than we are at this present moment. In witness whereof we have signed this certificate. Given at Saint Germain, this twenty-sixth day of November 1639.

(Signed) Louis

Effiat de Cinq Mars.'

"Or he would fretfully complain to the Cardinal:

'It grieves me, cousin, to have to bother you with regard to Monsieur le Grand's attitude since his return from Reuil. I have told him that, under the obligation that he owes to me, he ought not to speak to me in the way in which he does. He replied as usual that he had no use for my favours, that he was quite ready to dispense with them and that he would just as soon be plain Cinq Mars as Monsieur le Grand; that, as for changing his way of life, he would not live in any other way than that in which he was now living. Then he followed me, teasing and bickering, right into the very courtyard of the *château*, if you please, where I said to him that, being in the humour in which he was, he would please me by withdrawing from my sight. This, he replied, he would do with great pleasure. And from the day of all these happenings I have not set eyes on him again.'

"When in the spring of 1640 the King was preparing to join his armies in the field, Cinq Mars realised that he would be separated from him. He therefore forced the King to sign the following document in the presence of the Cardinal:

'This ninth day of May, 1640 the King, being at Soissons, His Majesty has been graciously pleased to promise Monsieur le Grand that, throughout the ensuing campaign, he will harbour no malice against him and that, should anything that the said Monsieur le Grand do cause His Majesty some slight displeasure, a complaint shall be laid, without rancour, before His Eminence the Cardinal, in order that with the advice of His Eminence the said Monsieur le Grand will be able to mend his ways of everything that may have caused the King displeasure, and that thus all his creatures will find themselves in peace with His Majesty. This promise has been signed by His Majesty the King and the said Monsieur le Grand in the presence of His Eminence the Cardinal.

(Signed) Louis

Effiat de Cinq Mars.'

"This state of affairs continued for two years, right up to the moment when the flighty Cinq Mars, exasperated in his turn, started to conspire with Spain—and lost his head in consequence. No word of regret passed the King's lips; at the moment when Cinq Mars placed his handsome head on the block in Lyons, the King was playing chess. He broke off the game and glanced up at the clock.

"'I should very much like to see the expression on Cinq Mars' face at this moment,' he remarked."

### *Madame la Grande*

"Madame la Grande had a quite different temperament."

"Madame la Grande?" queried Juliette.

"When she made publicly known her liaison with Monsieur le Grand, that is what we used to call Marion."

"Marion?"

"Yes—Marion! Marion Delorme, of course."

"From your tone of voice, *cher* Monsieur Chronossus, you must have known this Marion rather well?"

"Oh! Madame," protested Chronossus with simpering modesty, "that is the sort of thing which no gentleman may divulge. Let me say I knew her much as everyone else knew her. She was, you know, so very hospitable!"

"I understand," said Juliette. "There's a name for that sort of woman."

"There is, indeed, a whole collection of names for them, from which one can only conclude that they must be of very great interest to men. But Marion had style! She was carefree and morally quite uninhibited. She was alive, witty and amusing. All her actions were governed solely by her emotions, which were both violent and changeable. And she had a body of superb beauty."

"Keep calm!" said Juliette. "There's no point in getting all worked up like that—it's far too late, anyway!"

"When I knew her she was twenty-six or seven—round about 1639-40. Yes—Louis, Richelieu, Cinq Mars, they were all still there, and at long last Heaven had sent us a Dauphin. But I'll tell you about that later. A most amazing story! What was I talking about? Oh, yes! Marion! Marion was the daughter of a rich Parisian *bourgeois* family, who lived in the *Rue des Trois Pavillons*, just behind the *Place Royale*, quite close to where her friend, Ninon de Lenclos later came to live. There was another one for you! Ah! Ninon! What charm, what genius!"

"One at a time," said Juliette. "First—Marion."

"She started off as a very virtuous country lass. Her father possessed a

*château* at the bottom of that valley which is a prolongation of the Petit Morin, on the borders of Brie and Champagne. Any number of *bourgeois* were buying themselves *châteaux* at the time, and. . . .”

“Cut the cackle,” interrupted Juliette tersely.

“Well, you will hardly believe it, but she started off by resisting for three whole years the advances of a real prince of libertines, a certain Des Barreaux. For three whole years he had to be content with sending her sonnets (when we were in love we always wrote sonnets). Three years of platonic friendship—at the age of twenty and in the middle of the seventeenth century! That will give you some idea of how virtuous our provincials were!”

“And then, she surrendered,” said Juliette. “And then?”

“Well, then Delorme gave up trying to extinguish the flames that burned in his daughter’s breast, and Madame Delorme very soon took a flat in the *Place Royale* and moved in with Marion. If she could not prevent her daughter from indulging her emotions, she would at least herself take charge of the business side. And it really was rather like a big public concern. I won’t bore you with the details of the accounts, but one or two side-lights might amuse you? Des Barreaux was a protégé of Richelieu, who expressed a keen desire to see this beauty at close quarters. Our lover resisted stubbornly, but Marion herself knew where her duty lay. In disguise she visited the *Palais Cardinal*. Richelieu received her attired in a robe of grey satin embroidered with silver and gold, in top boots and a plumed hat. It was not really seemly that a Cardinal should have donned such garments; but that he should then have taken them off was downright unseemly! That he did so, however, was confirmed by Marion herself, who declared that a Cardinal without his scarlet robe was a pretty poor fish. After this first visit, he sent her away with a purse of sixty pistoles. At her second visit he told his valet to count out a hundred pistoles; she threw them disdainfully to the floor, and there was no third visit.

“Marion sought more generous patrons. Once she had been ‘launched’, she spent a fortune on clothes and was indeed a worthy rival in this respect of her own precious Cinq Mars. One small detail; she never wore a pair of gloves for more than three hours.”

#### *Queens of the Demi-Monde*

“One day, one of her regular patrons brought a young girl to see her, a young girl of good family, like herself, but as yet not emancipated. She was twenty years old, and her name was Ninon de Lenclos. What Ninon saw was a revelation to her. Before her very eyes she saw the perfect realisation of that type of emancipated and independent beauty which she herself

aspired to become. She behaved with demure discretion, suppressing the impact of her own personality and taking great care to give Marion no cause whatever for umbrage; and thus she remained, under instruction, for several months. Marion and Ninon became inseparable, and very often Ninon stayed and spent the night in her friend's apartments. In this way the two of them made for themselves a singularly unique position. Until finally Ninon set up house on her own.

"As she is to reign until the end of the century, we shall have plenty of time to drop in and see her later on. For the moment I will only say this: from the very outset Ninon gave evidence of her keen intelligence by the way in which she classified those 'dying of love' for her. She decided that there should be 'paying clients' to whom she would accord nothing, 'favourites', who would get everything without having to open their purses, and 'martyrs', men of neither fortune nor charm, who would be allowed to sit and sigh in vain, but free of charge. This system functioned marvellously for sixty years.

"Marion had not organised things nearly so well. She gave herself to those who paid, serving them according to the emotions they aroused in her. When she accepted the attentions of Emery, the Superintendent of Finance and a real rogue, the latter took over in very professional manner the supervision of her finances. He came across a bill from Martial, the perfumier, for fifty million crowns—for one year! To her friends who teased her about this financial clodhopper she justified herself by saying that he was 'awfully good at looking after the pennies!'"

### *Queens of Society*

"You may well be thinking that we have wandered a long way from the society of the *salon* and good form, and that I have lost myself in the alcoves of the *demi-mondaines*. That is by no means so, and what I am really leading up to is the fact that the best people were wont to visit the *salon* of our very delightful *demi-mondaine*."

"I don't see anything very remarkable about that," said Juliette. "There are always plenty of men. . . ."

"Quite. But what is remarkable is the fact that Marion herself was always received in high society, in a world to which she would never have acquired the *entrée* had she remained the *châtelaine* of the paternal *château*. The *bourgeois* disapproved strongly of her, for the *bourgeois* were already beginning to lay great store by their 'respectability'; but the gentlefolk were much more go-ahead and broad-minded, and in Marion they paid tribute to what in sporting circles is referred to as 'class'. In short, by putting herself beyond the pale, Marion had achieved real 'class'.

"The Prince de Condé was unable to invite her to the celebrations marking the betrothal of his son, because the King was among the guests, and the King was jealous of Marion. But he did invite her the next day to a reception he was giving in his mansion, and he apologised profusely for having been unable to invite her on the previous occasion. Tallemant des Réaux used to say: 'Anyone else who had done what she did would have brought dishonour upon her family. But how greatly we respected and admired her! The moment she died, we dropped all her relations, making just one or two exceptions, for love of her.'

"She died in 1650 at the age of thirty-seven of a miscarriage brought about by an over-dose of antimony. For two days the *curé* of Saint Gervais went backwards and forwards between the church and Marion's apartments; she confessed ten times, and each time she had something new to add. Her mother and sister dressed her in a white robe with a garland of orange blossom (the virginal symbol of a maid), round her forehead, and laid her on her bed of red damask. But the *bourgeois* of the neighbourhood were not in the least hoodwinked by this display of parental love, and they flocked to file through the chamber where she lay and to gape at the spectacle in envious wonder. The masses were highly scandalised; and Marion, whom debauchery had raised to high honour, was buried in a highly scandalised atmosphere under the protecting wing of maternal piety.

"She had deserved well of French Society. A Marquise, a minor poet and a great courtesan, had combined to form the recipe for a 'Parisian salon'. Only the financiers had been lacking. And for them Louis XIV was about to open the doors of the world—and even those of France itself."

### *Feudalism Makes a Last Bid for Power*

"But in the middle of this *Grand Siècle* when Marion died, the absolute monarchy was chased out of Paris by a revolt that foreshadowed the Revolution, and all but disintegrated in shreds and tatters. At the very moment when Mazarin was signing those treaties of Westphalia which were to ensure French domination in Europe for a hundred and fifty years, the Parliamentary magistrates unleashed the *Fronde*—the civil war between Crown and Parliament—against the architects of the nation's success, our Italian Minister and our Spanish Queen. Patriotism sometimes takes queer turns like that.

"But a lot they cared for the well-being of France! The Officers—so called because they were civilians holding civil office—revolted against the corporate despotism of Richelieu, and with the ulterior motive, of course, of defending their privileges, their revenues and the powers of

their caste. The Crown could tolerate this new type of white-collar despotism no more than it had been able to tolerate feudalism in arms.

"To tell the truth, the protagonists of the old feudalism also took fresh heart. No sooner had the black-coated brigade been put in their place than the nobles carried on the good work and revolted in their turn (1650-1653). We can, I think, with justice say that this rising of the nobles was feudalism's last bid for a return to power, and that the memory he retained of it affords an ample explanation of Louis XIV and his reign.

"The nobles, humiliated by Richelieu, sought vengeance. They were all in it—Condé, Conti, Longueville, Beaufort, the Duke de Bouillon, and those Amazons, La Grande Mademoiselle and the masculine, enterprising 'knight in armour', the Duchess de Chevreuil, who sealed her alliance with Gondi, coadjutor of the Archbishop of Paris, and future Cardinal de Retz, by giving him her daughter. Even Turenne himself marched against the King and was flirting with the Spaniards, ever eager to profit by our troubles.

"The rising in Paris, the battle of *Porte Saint Antoine* and La Grande Mademoiselle directing the artillery fire against the royalist troops, the excesses committed by the 'big men', finally reduced the *bourgeois*—'that lousy class who are of no use when trouble starts and who reap all the rewards when it ends'—to a state of utter lassitude. The people-waxed indignant at the sight of Spanish flags in the army of the insurgents—that army commanded by Condé, the victor of Rocroy and the conqueror of the formidable Spanish infantry. Turenne, recovering from his aberration, placed his sword at the service of the King. In October 1652 Louis XIV, now proclaimed a major (at the age of fourteen) returned to Paris, where the rebellion had entirely discredited the idea of liberty for a very long time to come."

*After the Rain, the Roi Soleil*

"I don't know whether it has ever struck you," continued Chronossus, "that Louis XIV was the son of Louis XIII?"

"Naturally!" replied Juliette.

"As naturally as all that?" said Chronossus. "And after all I have told you about Louis XIII?"

"Are you trying to insinuate that the *Roi Soleil* was a bastard?" asked Juliette bluntly.

"It has been said. Some have even gone so far as to name Mazarin as his father. But Mazarin was in Italy at the appropriate time. No, no, Louis XIII did well and truly beget Louis XIV, and it was quite the most remarkable thing he did."

"The truth is," said Juliette "that father and son were not a bit alike."

"No. Nor was Louis XIII a bit like his father, Henry IV. He stands between the two as a sort of accident. But the real accident was Louis XIV himself. When you reflect on the importance of this King in our history . . . do you remember what Pascal wrote about Cleopatra's nose? 'Had it been shorter, the face of the whole world might well have been changed.' In much the same way, had it not rained that night. . . ."

"How you love talking in riddles, Monsieur Chronossus," said Juliette.

"On December 5th 1637 His Majesty King Louis XIII left Versailles, which at the time was still little more than a weekend chalet in the depth of the forest, *en route* for Saint Maur, where he intended to spend the night. On the way he stopped at the Convent of Sainte Marie de la Visitation, in the *Rue Saint Antoine*, in which his *chère amie* was confined. His sweetheart was no longer Mademoiselle de Hautefort, whose olympian hauteur had been altogether too much for his timid nature, and was not yet Madame de Cinq Mars. She a was tender and pious young maiden, Louise de la Fayette, the only being with whom he had ever felt completely at ease—so much so, indeed, that one day he had all but clasped her in his arms. They had both been so terrified at this narrow escape, that Louise had forthwith entered the convent.

"There, with an aged nun telling her beads in a corner, Louis and Louise could abandon themselves to their tender passion without peril. On the other side of the grille the gentlemen of the Court waited, listening to the hammering of the pouring rain on the roof. Night was approaching, and still the two lovers went on talking, unable to resolve to part.

"When at last the King was ready, it was already very late, and the storm was so violent, that the wind extinguished the lanterns as soon as they were lighted. The Captain of the Escort, Guitaut, a man extremely devoted to Anne of Austria, did not hesitate to speak his mind. It would be the height of folly, he declared, to try and reach Saint Maur in this weather, and he suggested that His Majesty should sleep in the Louvre.

"Let's wait a little,' said Louis. 'It may pass over.'

"But the storm grew steadily worse. Guitaut returned to the charge. The King impatiently pointed out that, as his quarters had already been set up in Saint Maur since early morning, it would be impossible now to set them up in the Louvre, and that his servants and kitchen staff had equally long ago left the small *château* in Versailles. (In those days, the Sovereign used to take all he required with him when moving from residence to residence.) With an air of innocence, Guitaut suddenly remembered that the Queen happened at that moment to be in residence in the Louvre. She would be only too happy, he declared, to entertain her



royal spouse. But that was just what Louis wanted to avoid. So he gave the order to prepare to set out in defiance of the manifest intentions of the elements.

"Guitaut, however, stuck to his guns and continued to pester the King. Had he no pity, he asked, on his unfortunate bodyguard, and was he determined to risk catching some nasty, feverish cold? The Queen would swiftly do her utmost to provide all that he could possibly desire. He, Guitaut, would gallop ahead and warn Her Majesty.

"The King acquiesced with a long sigh of resignation. 'Very well,' he said. 'So be it.'

"But the gallant Captain was already bounding towards the Palace. By the time His Majesty arrived, everything had been done to ensure that nothing should put him in a bad temper or was contrary to his tastes and habits. The royal couple supped together before a company consumed with curiosity. Then, since there was no bed available other than that of the Queen, a mattress and pillows were placed beside it. With due ceremony the King donned his night attire and slippers. Preceded by his head valet carrying a torch, he entered his wife's apartments.

"Some mysterious message, emanating, apparently, from the Convent of Sainte Marie de la Visitation, had been sent to all the parishes in Paris, and, as the King entered his wife's room, prayers were being said in all the pious establishments throughout the city.

"Thus, in the pouring rain, the *Roi Soleil* was conceived. Nine months later, to the very day, on September 5 1638, Louis XIV gave his first howl."

#### *The Roi Soleil at His Zenith*

"Forty years later, he had grown up.

" 'Gentlemen—the King!'

"Through a succession of *salons* in Versailles, sparklingly new with their great mirrors, their gilding and their freshly gleaming pictures, Louis (who, incidentally, was of very modest stature) advanced between two rows of courtiers, bejewelled and splendid in shining satins and brocades. Monsieur, his brother, accompanied the King with a frou-frou of plumes and ribbons, among which scintillated a plethora of precious stones. But the King himself was simply attired in a robe of brown cloth, devoid of jewels save for the diamonds in his shoe-buckles, his garters and his tricorne. Gloves, tricorne and cane in hand, he advanced with pointed toe and gliding, elastic step.

"With his full cheeks, pock-marked and bronzed by the sun, and his decidedly Bourbon nose, His Majesty was not handsome, but he was majestic. After much study and practice, Louis, who formerly had been so

shy and gauche, had succeeded in achieving a masterly and harmonious combination of formality and naturalness. At a more tender age, the *Roi Soleil* had been equally natural but much less formal.

"We are looking at the year 1682. The King has just left the Louvre to take up residence at Versailles. The fountains were playing, the courtyards were rapidly being filled with carriages and gaily dressed men and women. The King was about to give a house-warming party in the superb Versailles we know so well.

"But Versailles was far more than merely the most noble of our *châteaux*; it was the most pregnantly significant act of his reign, a gesture, and a sign that the King had cut himself off from his people of Paris.

"The Fronde had remained vivid in Louis XIV's memory. When Mazarin died in 1661, he at once decided to take the reins of government into his own hands, and he forthwith gave orders for the building operations to be put in hand in the vicinity of his father's rural pavillion. He went there frequently and gave a number of brilliant and sumptuous receptions. And his Court awaited with impatience the completion of this vast pile, its dimensions conceived by this young god for the glory of his reign and the pleasure of his mistresses. That is to say, the young god promised. . . ."

"I know," said Juliette. "Marie Mancini, La Vallière, Montespan, Maintenon, his lady loves are as famous as he is himself."

"Altogether too famous," retorted Chronossus. "And to such an extent that it is quite easy to believe that he spent the whole of his life in the pursuit of pleasure, whereas in reality he was a King deeply imbued with a sense of his duty, passionately devoted to his high office and avid for its glory. If he occasionally made a mistake—and he made some very grave mistakes—it was never as the result of carelessness or indifference. In foreign policy, right up to the peace of Nijmegen (1678), he experienced nothing but success."

"I hoped," said Juliette discreetly, "that you were going to tell me about his favourites."

"So I will—in a moment. Just now, three-quarters of a century ago, you remarked that you had great doubts about Richelieu's policy, and I myself cannot help feeling equally dubious about that of Louis XIV."

"Good," said Juliette. "Let's leave it at that."

### *The Conquests of Louis XIV*

"Let us turn, then, to the higher realms of history," said Chronossus. "We had two great Captains, Turenne and Condé. Louis XIV attacked Spain and acquired part of Flanders."

"That's curious," ejaculated Juliette.

"Then an attack on Holland gave us Franche Comté."

"Strange!"

"Louis XIV then felt himself to be very powerful; and he was, indeed, the most powerful man in Europe, but still not as powerful as he thought. In 1681, while Europe was in the midst of a period of universal peace, he suddenly annexed Strasbourg on a point of law and on his own personal authority as the *Roi Soleil*. He had gone too far. Blinded by the vision of his own greatness, he had failed to appreciate the limits to which he could go with impunity. Holland, Sweden, the Protestant German Princes, the German Emperor and the King of Spain formed a coalition—the League of Augsburg. England joined them, and together they all made war on us. In actual fact, from 1688 to 1697 we fought against the rest of Europe; but the most serious event during these nine years of land fighting was a naval defeat. Colbert had given us a navy, and the English annihilated it at the battle of La Hougue in 1692, and it is from that day that England's command of the sea dates. A brief, uneasy period of peace was followed by more war. Louis had accepted the succession to the Spanish throne on behalf of his grandson, Philip of Anjou (Louis' wife was Maria Theresa of Spain). He had hesitated a long while before he did so. He knew that his enemies would view with distaste any French intervention in Spain. But the risk that Germany might successfully lay claim to the succession and encircle us was equally great. So he banished his hesitations and accepted. The Emperor of Germany thereupon renewed his alliance with England and Holland, and the upshot was the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714), during which we suffered disasters and invasion, but we restored the balance at Denain in 1712. Denain was the Battle of the Marne of the seventeenth century."<sup>1</sup>

#### *Industrialists and State Officials*

"Colbert died in 1683. He had been the King's most efficient servant, a 'veritable ox for work', and he disappeared from the scene at the very moment when Louis was intoxicated with the sense of his own power and was marching headlong to disaster.

"Colbert realised where the monarchical shoe pinched. Finance, he knew, was the worry, and finance, he realised, would kill the monarchy. 'I beg Your Majesty,' he wrote to the King, 'to permit me to point out that neither in peace nor war has Your Majesty ever examined resources before deciding upon expenditure.' A balance of revenue and expenditure was a principle from which he refused to budge. He succeeded in increasing revenue threefold; whereupon the King promptly doubled his

<sup>1</sup> The seventeenth century ended in 1715, fifteen years late, like nearly all the other centuries.

expenditure. 'We ought not to spend a penny on non-essentials. I assure Your Majesty that an unnecessary meal that costs two thousand francs causes me infinite pain.' But the glory of the King was above such sordid details.

"Money was scarce. The supplies of precious metals from the New World were proving inadequate. In short, in terms of political economy, Louis XIV's reign was a period of deflation. Colbert, by inventing the practice of economic planning nevertheless succeeded in making of it a period of expansion, creating new industries or restoring old ones in the footsteps of Henry IV (tapestries and furniture—Gobelins, glassware in Saint Gobain, textiles in Sedan, lace in Alençon), encouraging initiative, channeling industry into the export market, restraining the volume of imports and castigating the speculators. But his principal obstacle was the State itself, which was for ever creating new appointments in order to sell them, and which thus created a horde of quite unnecessary State officials. 'Every time Your Majesty creates a new office,' declared Pontchartrain, 'God creates a fool willing to buy it.' And if by any chance there were a shortage of fools, the King knew well how to remedy the defect. Every *bourgeois* of means was forced to take out letters patent of nobility, which were issued in blank form: 'THE BEARER. . . .' In 1696 they were being sold for two thousand livres. During the last twenty-five years of the reign the *bourgeois* spent more than five hundred million francs on these sterile acquisitions—at the expense of the country's industry, in which the money should have been invested. In spite of this French industry dominated the European market of the seventeenth century, and that was thanks to the fact that France represented one-fifth of all Europe. (Out of a hundred million Europeans, twenty million were Frenchmen.)

"I need not add that all these activities naturally led to an improvement of communications and to the creation not only of a navy, whose fate has already been described, but also of a considerable mercantile fleet, which linked us with our colonies—Canada, Louisiana, the Antilles and our settlements in India and Madagascar."

### *Greatness Degenerates into Despotism*

"What, one could, in very truth, ask oneself, might France have not not accomplished under Louis XIV, had he not been obsessed with this zest for spending and for warfare—in a word, with this obsession for his own glory? But, after 1682, to the wars he waged was added the greatest mistake of his whole reign—the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. At the zenith of his glory the King had become totalitarian. The Protestants, entirely peaceful and law-abiding though they were, seemed in his eyes to be dissenters, while the interventions of the Pope in the kingdom's affairs

were, he felt, quite intolerable. In 1682 Bossuet succeeded in rousing the Assembly of the French clergy to refuse the Pope the right to intervene in our temporal affairs. It was the old story of who should appoint the Bishops. In the meanwhile the Protestants were being subject to an offensive of forcible conversions; they were not allowed to practise as lawyers, bailiffs or even to become confectioners; posses of dragoons descended upon them in their own homes with authority to resort to any and every kind of excess. The King only saw the results obtained and knew nothing of the methods employed. In 1685, convinced that the Reformation was now dead, he revoked the Edict of Nantes, and Protestantism was forbidden throughout France. The Protestants then numbered nearly a million and a quarter, and they were among the most energetic and industrious of our people. An immense exodus took them to Holland and Prussia. A small village called Berlin was transformed into a flourishing town by five thousand French Protestants. Vauban estimated that more than one hundred thousand Frenchmen left the country. During the course of the eighteenth century the number rose to half a million; and you can imagine for yourself the sort of publicity they gave Louis XIV in the countries in which they had settled.

“By this act Louis had broken our tradition of Kingship with Justice and had confused greatness with oppression. His head was turned. Nevertheless he remained most punctilious in the exercise of his royal function. And he was so brilliant, so dazzling a figure! Then the *Roi Soleil* was stricken down—with sunstroke, while strolling in the Hall of Mirrors.

“On his deathbed he came once more to his senses. To his great grandson, Louis XV, then aged five, he said: ‘Do not imitate my taste in architecture or my zest for war.’ And at that moment the people were crying about the famine.”

### *Human Beings*

“The last years of the war, and particularly the hard winter of 1709, when the Seine and even the wine on the King’s table froze, saw a repetition of horrible scenes reminiscent of the Carolingian era. There had been other famines during the reign, due to rigorous winters, to faulty methods of distribution and to hoarding by speculators. In 1693 the Bishop of Montauban wrote of his diocese: ‘A good four hundred people are dying daily from lack of nourishment.’ In 1710 the Procurator General of the Burgundian Parliament reported: ‘Children of four and five years of age, for whom their mothers can provide no sustenance, are feeding like sheep on what they can find in the fields.’ The same year the *curé* of Vincelle, in Yonne, wrote: ‘Men, women and children could be seen, their hands

and faces smeared with mud, grubbing in the earth in search of little roots which they stuffed into their mouths and devoured as soon as they found them. Others, less enterprising, cropped grass with the beasts in the field; others again, completely exhausted, lay on the verge of the roads and awaited death.' Such, then, was the sorry end of a glorious reign. But even in 1662, when the young King decided that he would govern the country himself, the *curé* of Chambon stated that he had buried twenty-five children and thirteen adults who had died of hunger, 'not counting the babies still at the breast, none of whom survived'.

"I quite admit that a farm labourer's pay wasn't too bad—it was better anyway, in comparison, than that of a workman in Paris who got twenty sous for a fifteen-hour day. On her country estates Madame de Sévigné paid an unskilled hand eight sous and a mason sixteen sous (but no food); but she sold her chickens for two sous apiece, and the price of her beef was one sou and a half per pound. But of what value was this money, anyway, when periods of scarcity alternated without respite with epidemics of plague? In 1680 Madame de Sévigné wrote from Brittany to her daughter in Paris: 'All round me I see nothing but people who owe me money, who sleep huddled in the straw and who spend their days weeping.'

"And all this was happening just at the very moment when Louis XIV, at the zenith of his glory, was putting the finishing touches to the splendours of Versailles and was making ready to wage interminable wars. Lamentations echoed and re-echoed throughout the whole course of the *Grand Règne*. Revolt succeeded revolt, and typical of them all was that in Vivarais in 1670, which was suppressed with such bloody ruthlessness by d'Artagnan."

"What!" cried Juliette, "The charming d'Artagnan of *The Three Musketeers*?"

"He and none other. I will show him to you later in a more favourable light as a Captain in all his ruffled splendour. But the peasants had no other ruffles than those afforded by their rags and tatters; a large number of decent-minded people were for ever raising their voice in an effort to bring to the King's knowledge this other side of the picture. In this I am not referring to his administrative officers, whose duty it was to do so, but to people like Fénelon, Saint-Simon and Vauban. Let me make one final comment on all this terrible misery. You remember that famous passage from *La Bruyère* which we used to learn at school, and I expect that you thought at the time that there was perhaps too much 'poetic licence' in it? Well, let me tell you that you should accept it as a piece of very sober, factual reportage. As a matter of fact, *La Bruyère*, for all his rather

lugubrious outlook, is an inexorable but faithful reporter on the seamy side of the *Grand Siècle*:

'Dotted about the countryside one sees a number of wild animals, male and female, black, livid and scorched by the sun, bent close to the ground, which they scratch and dig with implacable obstinacy. They appear to possess articulated speech, and when they stand upright, they are seen to have human faces; and, in truth, they are—human beings. At night they retire into their lairs, where they live on black bread, water and roots. . . .'

Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme

"As for the *bourgeois*. . . Well! the *bourgeois* would deserve a whole chapter to themselves, but for the fact that Molière has already done the job. I have already told you how they spent half a milliard on buying office, but fortunately commerce and industry were flourishing and could afford it! The confectioner who had made his pile added a handle to his name and sported a wig. The King sold office to the judges, and the judges sold justice by auction. But even all this was mere chicken-feed in comparison with the activities of the jacks-of-all-trades, the purveyors of food, the farmers, the tax collectors, the Treasury officials and the rest of them; public finance had been surrendered to the mercies of private enterprise. The luxury in which these upstarts lived was a positive insult. 'If a financier fails to make his pile,' wrote La Bruyère, 'society dismisses him as a *bourgeois*, a fellow of no class and a clot; but if he succeeds, they hasten to ask for the hand of his daughter in marriage.'

"Snobbishness had its uses, however, Samuel Bernard, the biggest financier of the State, tore up all his promissory notes in return for the privilege of walking in the Marly gardens with the King. Saint-Simon stigmatised this 'prostitution of Kingship'. But—what else could the King do, when he had delivered himself utterly into the hands of the money-lenders?

"Nothing in her costume now distinguished the rich *bourgeoise* from the Duchess. They both wore three garments, one on top of the other; the underneath one, of the colour favoured by the lady's lover, was called '*la fidèle*', the one in the middle, which was semi-exposed, was called '*la friponne*', and that on the top was '*la modeste*', presumably because it was made of the most sumptuous gold and silver brocade, damask, velvet, satin or taffeta, all heavily embroidered and overlaid with laces, flounces and furbelows. *Bourgeoise* and Duchess also adopted the same *coiffures* and wore a beauty spot—*passionnée* near the eye, *baiseuse* at the corner of the mouth, *coquette* on the lips, *galante* in the middle of the cheek and *effrontée*

on the nose. Like the Duchess, the *bourgeoise* washed her face *nearly* every day with milk of almonds, and they both smothered themselves with perfume. Beneath these furbelows and perfumes of the *Grand Siècle* was the hint of the odour of the jungle, which clung to the gentle ladies, to the rapacious courtiers and, in particular, to the sharks of the *haute bourgeoisie*, the real wild beasts of the jungle; these latter, held in some small measures of check only by Christianity and 'good form'."

### *Petty Crime and Charity*

"To complete the picture, I now ought to take you to the court of miracles in the *Rue Saint Sauveur*. Behind the façade of Versailles and the *Place Vendôme*, lurked diseased hovels, swarming with vermin and riddled with petty vice. The Parliament of Paris, instead of trying to eradicate the cause, preferred to seek to suppress the effect. A general hospital was founded, consisting of five establishments, among them those of *La Pitié*, *Bicêtre* and *La Salpêtrière*. At the end of the century, two thousand wretches were crammed in *Bicêtre*. In *La Salpêtrière* four thousand women slept, four to a bed, while two more crouched on the floor beside them, awaiting their turn to sleep. At regular intervals these women were shipped off to the colonies; and this was their great opportunity—the chance, perhaps, to act as wife to some colonial settler or other.

"Saint Vincent de Paul had refused, towards the middle of the century, to accept the management of these operations; he had a very different conception of Christian charity. You know how he devoted his life to the poor and the unfortunate, and how, in particular, he founded the Society of the Sisters of Charity, which bears his name, and the Society for the Care of Foundlings.

"The glowing Christianity of this great champion of charity has eclipsed, through no effort of his own, that of his lieutenant, Louise de Marillac, the woman who founded Society of the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul. Louise de Marillac had allowed herself to be married to a decent, though lowly, civil servant. Widowed at the age of thirty-four she wanted to enter a convent. Vincent turned her away from the cloister, for which in his opinion she was unsuited, pacified her scruples and her excessive urge towards self-mortification and enrolled her in one of his charitable institutions in which ladies of gentle birth devoted themselves to the care of the sick and needy. Here she performed marvels, and very soon, under the supervision of Saint Vincent de Paul, she founded a corps of specialists, recruitment for which went far beyond the confines of the world of fashion. These 'servants of the poor' were called *Les Filles de Charité*. Louise de Marillac raised, organised and controlled them until she died in



1660. And to this day they bend in love and mercy over the poor all over the world.

“Saint Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac are admirable examples of the Christian revival of the seventeenth century—a revival that was both widespread and general. The Bishop of Grasse and Vance wrote in 1660: ‘It must be admitted that if the state of the Church in France today is compared with that in which it previously was, its ministers will be found to possess now as much knowledge, zeal and piety, as they had previously to their shame shown of ignorance, indifference and impiety.’”

### *The Vale of Horror*

“Others went even further along the path of austerity—too far, indeed, for the liking of the King and the Jesuits. But the widespread misery and injustice which surrounded them go a long way to explain the reaction of these gentlemen who sought refuge in the Abbey of Port Royal. I don’t suppose you want me to discourse at length on that community of nuns.”

“Gentlemen, seeking refuge with the nuns?” said Juliette. “The way you put it, I should have expected to hear some rather lewd scandal, but for the fact that it is not long since I left school. No, thank you; don’t let’s waste time on the Jansenists. I have never regarded them as a very cheerful crowd.”

“Let me then just say that the Jansenists were a living reproach to the licence of the century and the wicked pride of the King. I myself have but little sympathy with their Augustinian and aristocratic doctrine, according to which the Chosen and the Damned have been pre-selected by God. For one thing, I’m far too much in favour of an impartial referee; but I am bound to say also that they were quite right in their denunciations of the hypocrisies of the times and of the compromise understandings which the official divines concluded with Heaven.

“The Abbey of Port-Royal-les-Champs became a rallying point for the discontented and for those in opposition. Louis XIV multiplied continuously the pin-pricks and the vexations which he heaped on the ‘hermits’ and the nuns. And at the end of his life, during the terrible year of 1709, when there remained not more than about twenty nuns, the youngest of whom was over sixty, the great King struck his last wrathful, mean and petty blow against them. He had them excommunicated and then he expelled them.

“They were dispersed to the four corners of France, each under the escort of a policeman. The buildings of the Abbey were demolished; in 1711 even its dead were exiled. Those of them who still had relations alive,

like Racine, the Arnaulds and the Princess Condé, were given a decent re-burial. But the remains of more than three thousand nuns, to which none dared lay claim, were piled into the chapel, hacked to bits by the grave-diggers and then taken to a common grave in the small neighbouring cemetery of Saint Lambert."

*The Nobles, Tamed and House-trained*

"Louis XIV refused to tolerate any centre of interest other than Versailles. He wished to have his nobles round him at Court, and those who stayed away asked in vain for his favour. 'But I never see the fellow,' the King would comment. He wished to have them all under his thumb—yet one more echo of the *Fronde*—censer in hand, children of the Court at the feet of the god. He distributed livings and allowances among them, but the business of government he entrusted to the successful *bourgeois* business men—Colbert, Le Tellier, Louvois, Vauban.

"His aim had been to reduce his nobility to a state of complete servitude in a world of formal frivolity, and he had succeeded completely. But in the same way as the King had cut himself off from his people of Paris by living in Versailles, the nobles, too, had severed their connections with their *châteaux*, which were now being bought up by speculators. The nobility was no longer the sure shield of Kingship, and its scions were sliding rapidly into penury and ruin. In 1669 the King proclaimed that he did not consider that large-scale commercial activities overseas were unbecoming for a nobleman; but to no effect. After all, he himself had set the example of scorning money, and his courtiers preferred haughtily to beg for the royal manna.

"Then again, that lucky and convenient thing, etiquette, allowed the King to effect quite considerable economies. 'He felt that he had not nearly enough favours at his disposal for distribution to make a lasting effect,' said Saint-Simon. 'As a substitute, therefore, he played on people's jealousies and distributed petty little preferments and distinctions in the everyday things of life. The hopes to which these distinctions gave birth and the profits which he drew from them were considerable, and no one was more ingenious than he at thinking out things of this sort.'

"When you realise that there were gentlemen who were willing to pay as much as sixty thousand crowns for the privilege of being present at the *petit coucher*, that is to say, for the privilege of waiting upon His Majesty, sitting, in his dressing-gown, upon the royal commode—a thing he never failed to do, for when nature did not demand it, ceremonial etiquette did, you will appreciate that in this respect he really did show flashes of real genius."

"Yes," said Juliette. "And I think we can say, too, that we have now most adequately descended from those higher realms of history of which you were speaking."

"May I suggest that we return to the level of the royal private apartments? If you would care to step inside."

### *The Amours of the King*

"You know that the great love of Louis XIV's life was Marie Mancini, Mazarin's niece and that, broken-hearted, he gave her up for reasons of State. *Invitus invitam dimissit.*"

"I beg your pardon."

"In spite of himself he sent her away in spite of herself—or words to that effect.

"La Vallière was his second great passion. Picture to yourself a tender and shy young maid, golden haired, with placid, brown eyes, which every now and then sparkled and lit up with joy and ardour. She had a large and generous mouth and beautifully perfect teeth. She was rather slender, and she limped a little. She was one of the successors to *Madame*, to whom the King had been paying court."

"Just a moment," interrupted Juliette. "*Madame*, of course, was the wife of *Monsieur*?"

"From you one can keep nothing hidden," said Chronossus.

"No—I mean to say, of *Monsieur*—the brother of the King?"

"Of course! But a little thing like that didn't worry Louis XIV. Then, one day when someone let slip the fact that La Vallière found him very attractive, he started to court her, too, and quickly discovered that this young girl was a marvel of grace, wit and intelligence; and for once in a way, Louis was shy and tongue-tied in the company of a woman. She resisted him for three whole weeks!

"I think I ought to point out that there was not a single lady of quality who did not aspire to become the King's mistress. Any number of women, married and unmarried, used to say quite dispassionately that to be loved by one's Prince was not an offence in the eyes of either a husband, a father or God. And there were plenty of families, and fathers and mothers and even a goodly number of husbands, who were rather proud of it all. When one thinks of the multitudes of these she-devils who threw themselves at the young god's head, one can't help admiring his moderation.

"Even so, *Madame* still firmly believed that it was she whom Louis loved. She was certainly a charmer, Henriette of England, but not in the eyes of *Monsieur*, her husband. When she heard that La Vallière had succumbed to the King, she cried: 'What! he prefers a little *bourgeoise*

from Tours, an ugly, staid little cripple, to a King's daughter, fashioned as I am! He has neither taste nor discernment!"

"*Madame* complained forthwith to both Queens, Anne of Austria and Maria Theresa; and we were treated to the spectacle of the King's mother and the King's wife jointly reproaching him for being unfaithful to his sister-in-law!"

### *Royal Fun and Games*

"You may be quite sure that *Madame* was not the only one to find herself dispossessed of the King's heart. The Countess Soissons was another—she also called herself Olympe Mancini and was Marie Mancini's sister. She did all in her power to harm the new favourite. She urged Mademoiselle de la Mothe-Houdancourt, one of the Maids of Honour, to try out her charms on the King, which she proceeded to do with complete success.

"In the Louvre, the quarters of the Maids of Honour were next door to the apartments of His Majesty. The King, thanks to Mademoiselle de la Mothe-Houdancourt, was most anxious to visit them. But Madame de Navailles, who was in charge of these young ladies, firmly closed the door to him, and all the King's pleading and raging were of no avail. He therefore summoned to his study his Grand Advisory Council on Affairs of the Heart, which was composed of Péguilin, Guiche, Vardes and Bontemps. Péguilin was well acquainted with the whole lay-out; he had reconnoitred all the lines of approach to the quarters of the Maids of Honour, and he declared that at the moment the only practicable line of advance was along the gutters of the roof, and the only point of entry was through the chimney. The King remarked rather naïvely that he might well find this somewhat novel line of approach to a lady's heart a little embarrassing, but that he would have a try. They agreed to meet at midnight. There did not seem much point in warning the young beauties of their intended visit, for they knew that they had far too great a sense of fun to take offence, even when they were taken by surprise. At the appointed hour the Grand Advisory Council climbed through a mansard window out on to the roof; the path before them was neither very wide nor very secure.

"Give me your hand, Sire," said Péguilin to his master.

"All right—all right, here I am," replied the King. "I think I shall be safer if I carry my shoes in my hand."

"I shouldn't do that, Sire," interposed the considerate Bontemps. "The gutter's very wet. You'll catch cold!"

"Nonsense! Anyway, we'll have a posset of mulled wine when we get back," replied the Sovereign.

"From here," said Guiche, who was acting as advance guard to the

expedition, 'we shall have to creep along the roof itself as far as the base of the chimney.'

"'Damnation!' muttered the King, clinging tightly to the roof as best he could. 'This isn't at all funny!'

"'And there's more to come,'" added Valdes, who was already lowering a rope ladder down the chimney.

"'All present and correct, Sire!' announced Pégoulin. 'Let me lead the assault and be the first to enter the breach!'

"'Very well—but you will do me the favour of refraining from carrying your role of assault troops too far!'

"'Rest assured that I shall do nothing further until Your Majesty has taken up the position he desires.'

"Louis XIV followed Pégoulin down into the ladies' apartments, while Vardes and the King's valet held on firmly to the ropes.

"The King's visit came as a surprise to Mademoiselle de la Mothe, while Pégoulin's visit came as an even greater surprise to the lady whom he honoured with his company and on whom, as he afterwards confessed, he had never set eyes before. Even so, there was no trace of clamour or confusion in the quarters of the Maids of Honour. Peace and silence reigned absolute, for to tell you the truth there is none more sweetly resigned and docile than a lady-in-waiting.

"When the two adventurers rejoined their look-outs on the roof, Louis XIV's knees were scratched, and his hose in shreds.

"'Who cares?' cried the King. 'That was great fun! We must do it again!'

"In this, however, His Majesty was doomed to disappointment. When a couple of nights later, they set out again, they found that their path along the gutters had been barred by a stout iron grille. Madame de Navailles had been warned by her spies of what was afoot.

"These little interludes made no difference to the tender love the King bore for La Vallière, but the latter lacked confidence in her own charm and was frightened lest she should bore the King. To add zest to the pleasures of conversation she co-opted her good friend, the Marquise de Montespan. And it was not long before the latter supplanted her in pleasures of a more personal character.

"Then it was that the timid Louise de la Vallière rose in her wrath and fought with the frenzy of a jealous tigress; and for seven years, from 1667 to 1674, Louis XIV lived 'between these two ladies'. And to reach Madame de Montespan's apartments, he had to pass through those of La Vallière."

"No!" exclaimed Juliette. "And d'you mean to say that she put up with this *ménage à trois*?"

"Actually, it was a *ménage* of four; in one and the same carriage the King the Queen, La Vallière and Madame de Montespan took the air together. To say nothing of a few more pretty little birds of passage. And at the end of those seven years it was in Madame de Montespan's apartments that La Vallière one evening told the King that she was entering a Carmelite convent."

*Love Potions and "Succession Powders"*

"The King watched her departure dry-eyed. The Marquise de Montespan, a brunette with blue eyes, cosseted and enhanced her charms with all the scientific skill of a professional purveyor of voluptuousness. Stretched naked on her bed, she had herself massaged with unguents and rubbed with perfumes for three hours a day. Into the King's food she slipped aphrodisiacs and 'love powders', and poisoned him in this way for seven years on end. It is said that she even went so far as to submit to incantations and black magic spells being cast over her body. In any case, she certainly dominated him and, since she claimed descent from the Dukes of Aquitaine through the Mortemarts, a family of more ancient lineage than the Bourbons, she treated him as a social equal. She extorted innumerable favours and gifts from him, and their progeny—she had eight children by him—formed another link that bound him to her. He withdrew his favour—but without dismissing her—only when he found that she was accused of complicity in the Poison Case."

"Ah!" said Juliette. "The famous Poison Case! I was hoping you'd tell me about that!"

"You know, there was nothing more enthralling about it than about dozens of other cases. The principal figures in it were a woman named Voisin, a quack spiritualist, witch and seller of poisons, and the Marquise de Brinvilliers, convicted of having poisoned her father, her two brothers, her sister and her sister-in-law and God knows whom else besides. They were both executed; but as far as anyone else implicated was concerned, as soon as Louis XIV found out that Madame de Montespan's name appeared on the list of the Voisin woman's clients, he hushed up the whole affair. What he could not hush up, however, was the disclosure that a great number of people of quality had recourse to 'soothsayers', who, under the guise of foretelling the future, provided their clients with 'succession powders'—that's what we used to call the poisons intended for parents or other relatives too tenacious of life. The risks involved were not great, for we were still too ignorant of the mysteries of chemistry to be able to discover the presence of poison by autopsy. One must, however, admit that our soothsayers showed a quite admirable restraint in their methods, and they refused to stuppily any powders until they had tried the effect of

magic by means of a strange mixture of Novena of the Church and black masses, celebrated by a sacrilegious priest over the stomach of a naked woman, during the course of which a new-born baby was sacrificed."

"How horrible!" shuddered Juliette. "You must have been complete savages."

"Wild beasts—as I have already told you! But what about torture on the wheel and by quartering? Are they, do you think, products of a very high order of civilisation? Come, come. We mustn't complain overmuch of the times in which we live. I promise you, we are making progress—albeit slowly."

*The Residence of Kings is a Market Place*

"Louis XIV, of course, towered high above all these dealings. On the other hand, he was perfectly aware of all the activities in which his courtiers indulged, and indeed, encouraged them; and that was certainly a good way of retaining his hold over them.

"Mademoiselle de Motteville used to say complaisantly: 'The residence of Kings is like a great market, to which one is obliged to go and do business, if one wishes to earn one's living and watch over the interests of those to whom one is attached by duty or ties of affection.'

"To have the *entrée* to Court circles was a capital asset in the hands of the middle-man, of which it was only right that he should take advantage. Madame de Montespan and her sister received a share of the profits from the Parisian butcheries. The Marquise also received a contribution of two thousand livres from Monsieur d'Aquin, for whom she had secured the position of Principal Physician to His Majesty the King. The Princess d'Harcourt, one of the biggest business women in Versailles, was given two thousand crowns by the Duchess du Lude for having obtained for her the *entrée* to the receptions in Marly. In 1703, the Maréchale de Noailles received fifty thousand livres from the Saint Gobain Company, the great glass manufacturers, while her daughter, the Duchess de Guise, made twenty-five thousand livres from one single transaction in connection with the farming out of the rights of street scavenging and lighting.

"Amusements and gambling were also good sources of revenue. Dangeau, the composer of letters in verse, made a fortune; but he deserved it for the skill he displayed. Others were merely licenced tricksters, like Gramont, the Princess d'Harcourt and the Duchess de la Ferté.<sup>1</sup> The last-named

<sup>1</sup> She, too, had been compromised in the Poisons Case. The Maréchal de la Ferté intervened at Court to defend his wife. 'It is possible,' he told the King, 'that my wife has fallen into some of those errors of which the husbands are less well informed than those outside; but as for administering poisons, all I can say is that if she were capable of it, I should have ceased to exist twenty years ago!' The argument was accepted as quite convincing.

opened a gambling hell in her own house, where strangers passing through were properly skinned; her tradesmen, too—the butcher and the baker—and her own servants were given the honour of playing with the Duchess and of being thoroughly fleeced by her. ‘I know I cheat them,’ she used to say, ‘but then—they all rob me, too!’

“The expense of living in Court circles was high, and money was scarce. Well—one had to live, and so one might just as well live well. And so it became quite the thing among agreeably presentable gentlemen to allow themselves to be supported by ladies who had the money to do so.”

*D’Artagnan Fitted Out by Love*

“Captain d’Artagnan. . . .”

“Ha! Here he is again!” exclaimed Juliette. “You promised you’d show him to me in a more lovable light.”

“Lovable, loved and loving. He had a tender feeling for a young woman of twenty-two, a widow, rich but virtuous. She had not accompanied him on the Flanders campaign, although all the other Officers had brought their own particular little baggages with them in the baggage train, and the camps and barns were frequently gay with their presence. But d’Artagnan remained alone and poor. His Company was deplorably badly equipped. (You know, of course, that Officers used to buy their Companies or Regiments and were then responsible for clothing and equipping them.) One day, to d’Artagnan’s great joy, his lovely widow came sailing into his quarters. The most wonderful of all happiness he thought, was within his grasp, and he fell on his knees before her.

“The widow remained calmly unmoved. ‘I think you’d better get up, my dear,’ she said, moving over to the window and opening it, ‘and tell me where you’d like all that stuff down there put.’

“In the courtyard stood three large waggons loaded with clothing and equipment of every kind. While the Company tried on the new clothing, she lunched with Captain d’Artagnan in his quarters, allowed him a chaste kiss on the forehead and departed, taking with her her virtue—and a few of d’Artagnan’s socks and shirts that wanted mending.

“All widows were not as virtuous as she, nor all Captains as chivalrous as he. There must have been more than twenty thousand gentlemen in Paris at that time without a penny in their pockets, who lived by gambling, on women and on their wits.”

“All very interesting, no doubt,” said Juliette. “But I am still waiting to hear about the splendours of the century. We entered a Versailles ‘sparklingly new and freshly gleaming’.”

“It did not remain so for long. By tradition, the King’s house was open



to all who cared to enter, and it was quite in vain that Louis did his utmost to preserve the 'cleanliness of the private apartments'. Dirt, however, was no bar to pleasure, and we were expecting to have truly wonderful times in this superb new Palace, when suddenly a mournful boredom descended like a wet blanket upon us. The reign of Madame de Maintenon had begun, and at the zenith of his glory, the *Roi Soleil* had suddenly become devout."

*Bossuet and Father de La Chaise preach to Madame de Maintenon*

"Madame de Maintenon had done all that was required to attract the King, without incurring the slightest threat to her virtue or even the slightest hint of a threat. But Bossuet, the Dauphin's tutor, and Father de La Chaise, the King's confessor, realised how things were, and they went to see her. They explained their viewpoint with skill and great delicacy. Madame de Maintenon grew angry, blushed and protested strongly.

"'There is no need, Madame, for you to apologise,' said Bossuet sweetly. 'For a long time we have been meditating upon the necessity of reaching that compromise which, alas, seems inevitable, between sin and a state of grace.'

"'But, Monsieur, I assure you that your suspicions are wholly without foundation,' replied Madame de Maintenon, and in spite of all her skill her voice trembled a little.

"'I am sorry to hear that, Madame la Marquise,' replied the King's confessor. Here Bossuet again intervened.

"'If we are to lead the King back into the fold,' he said, 'we shall have to go and seek him on the highways and byways of sin. If we are to avoid arousing his passionate resistance, we shall have to walk a little with him along his profane path before we can lead him gently away from it; and he—or she—who walks thus with him will stand in no danger whatever of damnation. It is the intention behind the deed, and not the deed itself that constitutes a sin, and here the intention is pure and illumined by the light of grace. Let us therefore thank Providence, Madame, for having opened the King's eyes to those beautiful and even seductive qualities which you so richly possess; and let us pray to God that you will eventually fall—even though, in accordance with the general precepts of our faith, you should continue for a while to defend yourself!'

"'Remember,' broke in Father de La Chaise, 'that all our hopes rest on you; His Majesty's conscience is still deaf to our more austere voices, piety cannot enter it, except in the garb of wordly sophistication. I beg of you Madame la Marquise, sacrifice yourself on the altar of earthly voluptuousness in the interests of Heaven.'

"Madame de Maintenon replied that she would consult her confessor, Father Gobelin, and then she 'sacrificed herself'.

"An erring woman, armed with the power of grace, could not tolerate in the King's entourage women who exercised a purely profane function. From the moment that Madame de Maintenon immolated herself and reached the highest grade of the royal favour, all the other candidates were ill-fated.

"Little Mademoiselle des Oeillets, a child of sixteen, whom Louis had favoured with a few languishing sighs (sighs which nevertheless had rewarded him with a little daughter), died of despair within ten days. His Majesty had personally chosen a husband for her, and the Court purveyors were just taking a carriage-load of wedding gifts to her, when they were held up by another vehicle emerging. It was the bride to be—in her coffin.

"Very soon, the King's bride was to be Madame de Maintenon, Madame Quatorze, the widow Scarron, that model of a middle-class wife. But she had to pay dearly in order to cover up the little peccadilloes of her youth; and one witness of them, Ninon de Lenclos, worried her particularly. 'Madame de Maintenon, having become all-powerful,' wrote Voltaire, 'suddenly remembered her and told her that if she would but enter the paths of righteousness, she would see that she lacked for nothing. Mademoiselle de Lenclos replied that she had no need of either money or a false mask.'

"They had known each other well while Scarron was still alive. To quote Voltaire once again: 'Ninon had become her greatest friend. For months on end they had slept together, as was then very much *à la mode* as a sign of friendship. What, however, was less *à la mode* was that they both had the same lover and did not quarrel over him.' As far as the lover is concerned there is no proof of Voltaire's statement. As regards her husband, however, it was at the house of Ninon's other great friend, Marion, that she met Scarron, just before a terrible bout of rheumatism bent him double and robbed him of the use of all his limbs.

"Young and without a penny, she nevertheless married this witty and amusing cripple, and they settled in the *Rue Neuve Saint Louis* and called their home 'Poverty House'. 'There,' according to Saint-Simon, 'high society—church dignitaries, members of the royal household and all the most distinguished people in town were their frequent guests.' Among these distinguished people was Ninon; and her own *salon* was even more brilliant than that of the Scarrons."

#### *Ninon's One Great Love*

"I have already told you how Ninon divided up her gentlemen friends into 'paying clients', 'favourites' and 'martyrs' and how for sixty years everybody in Paris who was anybody frequented her house. Yes, except

for one period of three years, during which Ninon had her one great love affair.

"Louis de Mornay, Marquis de Villarceaux was well off, a sportsman rather than an intellectual, Master of the Royal Hunt and an equally bold rider of horses and women. He made the young lady to whom he was engaged his mistress and did not marry her. On the rebound, she became the wife of General de Castelnau; and when that gallant soldier was away on service, she accorded a hearty welcome to Villarceaux in her boudoir."

"Well—it's nice to meet someone who obviously bears no malice," said Juliette.

"Ninon was now thirty-two years of age. She had lost count of the many fancies that had held her. Did she perhaps recognise in Villarceaux the man who could completely dominate and satisfy her, body and soul? In any case he was not a man, nor she, for that matter a woman, to hesitate over long to put theory to the practical test. The results of the test were wholly intoxicating. With a tender smile she took leave of her favourites, her martyrs and even her paying clients.

"Villarceaux took her to his old *château* at Ruel near Meulan, where they enjoyed an idyllic summer of enchantment in a sylvan fairyland. When they returned, he installed Ninon in a flat in the *Rue Richelieu* and, as he could not set up house with her (he had in the end succumbed to matrimony) he took a neighbouring house, the windows of which overlooked the apartment of his mistress.

"While it had lasted, Ninon had always remained faithful to her 'caprice' of the moment; she was not one, therefore, who would be unfaithful to someone whom she loved dearly and tenderly. But jealousy is prone to the most absurd suspicions. One night Villarceaux noticed a lighted candle in his mistress' bedroom. He sent a servant across to enquire whether she had been taken ill. When the man returned and said that she was perfectly well, Villarceaux leapt to the conclusion that she must be sitting up writing to some rival. Furious, he rushed across, determined to surprise her in her infidelities; and in the haste of his passion, instead of his hat, he clapped a silver bowl on his head."

"What do you know? Now that's what I call real passion!" said Juliette.

"When he burst into Ninon's room. . . ."

"Still wearing the bowl?"

"No—he'd snatched it off and scratched his forehead handsomely in the process. Ninon refrained from laughing at him—as well she might; but she refused absolutely to answer his absurd charges.

"Some days later, Villarceaux took to his bed. His servant reported to Ninon that in his delirium he never stopped crying the name of his

mistress. Ninon felt that some decisive gesture was required to reassure him; without a second's hesitation she seized a pair of scissors and cut off her magnificent hair and sent it to her lover as a token of how little she cared for the admiration of other men. The sight of these tawny tresses restored the jealous man's health. He at once wrote to Ninon, begging her forgiveness for his unworthy suspicions and saying that her dear message had at once cured him of all his fevers. She flew straightway to him, slipped into his bed 'and there they remained for eight whole days'.

"It was this episode that gave birth to the *coiffure à la Ninon* and to a little boy. Champagne, the hair stylist, adopted the former and the Marquis de Villarceaux the latter."

#### *A Completely Independent Woman*

"The time finally came when Ninon noticed that the Marquis had become silent and had but little to say for himself—that the time to part had, in fact, come. She offered him her friendship, and when he refused this, she re-opened her *salon*, to which at once all the best people again flocked. 'There was an air of decorum and decency with the like of which even the most punctilious of Princesses had but rarely been able to surround her frailties.' And 'frailty' it must be admitted was not lacking; but the remarkable, the revolutionary thing about Ninon was that she succeeded in combining respectability with absolute and complete liberty of action. Without any sacrifice of her femininity and by sheer force of character and intelligence she succeeded in surrounding physical love with normal, everyday friendship. She stooped to none of the despicable little practices of coquetry which induce jealousy and which are so degrading. Every aspirant to her favours knew that he would have his day and that he would share his day with no one; and in Ninon he found that virtue so rare in women and yet so essentially feminine—security; and security and passion is surely the rarest of all combinations.

"She always remained the valued friend of her ex-lovers. It would be difficult to quote a more striking proof of her tact than that, and society women, far from keeping her at arm's length, were most anxious to cultivate her friendship.

"She had a great sense of humour, a gift for the *mot juste* and the kindly indulgence that is born of great experience. Louis XIV, who was officially precluded from knowing her personally, paid great attention to her judgment on almost any and every subject. 'What does Ninon think about it?' was a phrase that often passed his lips.

"To name all who were her friends, I should have to list most of the great figures of the century. To the great Condé and the future Regent,

to the Dukes of Vivonne, Lauzun, Noirmoutiers I should have to add La Rochefoucauld, Lulli, Mignard, Saint Evremond, La Fontaine, Boileau, Racine. When Molière told her about his plan to write *Tartuffe*, she supplied him with a whole heap of anecdotes; after having read it to the King, it was to Ninon that he read the great comedy, and throughout the five years during which he was struggling to get it produced, it was Ninon and her friends who were in the forefront of his supporters."

### *The Century of Great Writers*

"Isn't that rather an exaggeration?" asked Juliette. "I have always understood that the foremost patron of literature was Louis XIV himself."

"Oh—certainly, certainly. The King had the best possible intentions. He was most anxious to learn—and incidentally had the best possible reasons for being anxious so to do; and he had read out to him all Boileau's works. All this was accomplished with not a little of the pedantry of a self-taught man, which at times can be rather pathetic. He was even prompted to try his hand at poetry, and one day he showed Boileau one of his poems. 'Sire,' said Boileau, 'nothing is impossible to Your Majesty. Your Majesty has desired to write bad verse—and has succeeded.' The King was far too well-mannered to show his chagrin; but Racine, when he heard his friend make this pert remark, all but fainted.

"Writers like Racine and Bossuet owe a great deal to Louis XIV. Even so, I cannot for the life of me understand that process of retrospective sycophantic flattery which asserts that Louis XIV created everything in his century—including its great writers. I do not wish to stress overmuch the errors of taste of which he was guilty in banishing Flemish art, giving an enormous pension to a mediocre poet and cold-shouldering a frivolous young man named La Fontaine. There is, however, one aspect to which I should like to invite your attention. Louis XIV began to reign in person in the year 1661; by then, Corneille was already fifty, Pascal was thirty-eight (he died the next year), Descartes forty, La Rochefoucauld forty-eight, the Cardinal de Retz forty-eight, Molière thirty-nine, Bossuet thirty-three, Boileau twenty-five, Racine twenty-two and La Bruyère sixteen. And of them, La Bruyère, who passed his formative years in the reign of the King, was the most acid of his critics. In fact practically all the great writers of the *Roi Soleil's* reign had already started to write before his reign. He gave them his protection, and it is obvious that the Louis XIV way of life is reflected in the literature of the century; but paramount power has never created a writer."

*The 'Man of Honour'—Masterpiece of the Grand Siècle*

"No, no. You see—the grandeur of this century is by no means all concentrated in this *Roi Soleil*, whose heart was unfeeling, whose intelligence was mediocre and whose pride was incommensurable."

"Even so, he did bequeath Versailles to us," protested Juliette.

"Yes—an imposing *château*, which is also symbolic of his whole reign; behind the splendid façade the walls were shoddy and jerry-built, and as an undertone to all the paeans of royal glory, I hope you have not failed to hear the cries of misery and the champing of the jaws of wild beasts.

"Versailles is also symbolic, however, in another, and wholly admirable way, for it was created out of nothing on an expanse of putrid swamp. Louis XIV ordered trees to be planted and colonades to be built, and on the stench of the century he raised the man of honour.

"Louis XIII, like the good pupil of Corneille that he was, had already tried to elevate his timorous and hesitant nature to the heights of his royal function, but without much success, as we have seen. Louis XIV had much more drive; thanks to his tremendous personal application, the day did come, when he could with justice say:

*'Je suis maître de moi comme de l'univers.'*

"Louis XIV's true glory is the example of discipline which he set to his wild animals. It was, however, far less in the Hall of Mirrors than in the Parisian *salons* that the masterpiece of the century—the man of honour, the ordinary decent man—was fashioned. And for this masterpiece, which in the eighteenth century will come to be regarded as the ideal of European civilisation, we have to thank woman. And that is why I have spoken at such great length about the women of the seventeenth century and why I shall also give them pride of place in the eighteenth."

"You will hear no complaints on that score from me," said Juliette.

"Louis XIV was able to acquire many virtues, but none of those which are the gift of the gods alone. He lacked graciousness and geniality, and he remained always cold, affected and pompous."

"In other words," said Juliette, "the *Roi Soleil* was an iceberg."

"Or, if you like, a pompous pump that distributed cold showers to all concerned. Women were reduced to a state when they no longer dared to speak to a man in public. But as they always have their revenge. . . ."

"And why not, pray?"

"They took their revenge by putting upon life outside the Court—at the Opera, at the various sporting events, on the promenades—the stamp of good companionship. They claimed the right to pay their share, to drink glass for glass with men, to chew tobacco (some ladies of quality

even smoked). And men would have come very close to losing their respect for them, but for the fact that the more intelligent among the women succeeded in taking advantage of this somewhat novel state of equality to free themselves from servitude, without sacrificing those privileges to which their frailty entitles them."

"I say!" protested Juliette. "Do, please, be a little more explicit! One concrete example will tell me more than any number of long, philosophical soliloquies."

"But I have! I've already given you a splendid example! Haven't I shown you Ninon? I could also have shown you Madame de la Fayette, or Madame de Sévigné. Ninon was only one of the many women who contributed to the fashioning of the man of honour. Not alone, of course; Louis XIV had something to do with it, too, and so did several other men.

"He was fashioned out of Mediterranean joyousness, Greek harmony, Roman logic and Christian ethics—in the *salon* of Madame de Rambouillet.

"He has a strong and elegant body; he delights in physical exercise, in the pleasures of the flesh and in the subtleties of good taste and intelligence; he abhors vulgarity, licentiousness and affectation. A music lover and a good dancer, he knows the value of both serious conversation and wittily turned frivolities; he also knows when silence is golden. He appreciates the *mot juste*, clarity of style, vivacity of expression, but not bogus flashiness; portentousness he finds a bore, and he does not shrink from triviality. He is full of kindly understanding, and he forgives easily everything save affectation. Beneath his easy superficiality there is a true and trustworthy friend.

"Commonsense is his guide—but a kindly commonsense, what perhaps might better be called the art of taking life at its proper value. He loves life, and he looks upon death as a damn silly business. But that does not stop him from looking death straight in the eye; nor does he go about the world displaying a flattering fear of death—that would be bad form.

"Ninon's lawyer, *Maitre* Arouet, had a son of twelve, who had composed some verses that were arousing considerable comment in the *salons*. The Abbot of Châteauneuf was the boy's godfather, and he took him to see Ninon about a month before her death in 1705. Ninon found him very intelligent, but how could the old lady have foreseen that this bright-eyed youngster, who did not yet call himself Voltaire, was about to usher in the century of the Encyclopaedia and the French Revolution? Louis bequeathed to his successors a nobility, tamed but eager to exploit the Crown, an upper middle class, unbridled and eager to exploit the country. Ninon left Voltaire a thousand francs with which to buy books."

LOUIS XV A.D. 1715-1774; *Regency and Fleury Ministry 1715-1743; A.D. 1715-1723—Regency of Philip of Orleans. Law's gamble and failure completely upset the distribution of wealth and liquidate the public debt left by Louis XIV; A.D. 1726-1743—The Fleury Ministry. A.D. 1726—Stabilisation of the gold louis, which will remain stable until the Revolution; Personal Government by Louis XV 1743-1774; A.D. 1749—Introduction of a five per cent tax on revenue derived from property. Opposition by the Parliaments; A.D. 1763—Treaty of Paris. France loses India and Canada; A.D. 1766—Acquisition of Lorraine; A.D. 1768—Acquisition of Corsica; A.D. 1770—The Parliaments are dissolved. Abolition of hereditary office, bribery, "perks" and spokes in the wheels; LOUIS XVI 1774-1789; A.D. 1774—Old Parliaments recalled and devote themselves to the defeat of the attempts at reform made by the Turgot Ministry (1774-1776); A.D. 1783—Treaty of Versailles. United States acquire independence; A.D. 1785—Discovery that the potato is edible; A.D. 1789—Re-assembly of the States General; THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY. After its thrashing under Law's System and its recovery under the new broom which swept clean, the louis remained stable. France remained free from invasion for nearly three-quarters of a century. Magnificent commercial resurgence. Construction of a new navy. Increase in number of peasant small-holdings. The population rises by eight million. Men of learning in France evoke the admiration of the whole of Europe. Foreigners flock to the country, attracted by the French way of life of our philosophers and the grace and beauty of our marquises. France never so prosperous or so smilingly content. But the privileged classes refuse to pay their taxes. The Parliaments baptise as "liberty" the privileges enjoyed by the few, defeat every attempt at reform and lead the State to ruin.*



## The Century of Pompadour and the Potato

"IN the vicinity of the Mississippi," continued Chronossus, "there were mountains made of gold, grottoes filled with diamonds and rocks composed of emeralds."

"Well, well," said Juliette. "I never heard that before. And when was all this, pray?"

"Just after Louis XIV's death—between 1715 and 1720."

"Are you trying to pull my leg, by any chance?" asked Juliette.

"Good heavens—no! And I'll prove it to you. I myself made a fortune out of the emerald rocks without budging from the *Rue Quincampoix*; and that, you'll admit was pretty good. It was thanks to a thing called Law's System, which, since at the time we had not yet learnt English, we used to call '*Le système de Las*'. Mr. Law<sup>1</sup> paraded a lot of Red Indians round Paris, smothered in gold; and we all brought our own gold—and that was real gold—in order to buy shares in these fabulous mirages.

"Provincials sold up their land and came flocking into Paris from the depths of the country to buy paper scrip. Women sold their jewels for a song in order to purchase paper shares in this mountain of emeralds. And the throngs in the narrow *Rue Quincampoix* were so dense that grilles had to be put up at each end of it and sentries mounted, who opened them every morning at seven o'clock; otherwise, people would simply have camped for the night in the middle of the road. The ninety-nine houses which composed the street were filled from roof to cellar with scribes who kept record of the transactions effected. And what transactions they were! The volume of paper rose by bounds every day. A sempstress from Namur, who had some business to transact in Paris, took advantage of her visit to drop into the *Rue Quincampoix*. In two days she made over a hundred million francs, bought herself a fine country estate and settled down in the place that had previously been the Archbishop of Cambrai's *hôtel*.

<sup>1</sup> John Law, a Scot, who became Controller General of Finance just after Louis XIV's death.

"Law's coachman became a millionaire (a word we had to coin to describe our indescribable fortunes). One day he paraded two lackeys before his master. 'Will you please choose one of these men to take my place,' he said, 'and I will myself employ the other.' We all adored our Scottish magician, Duchesses kissed his hand in the streets. There was one little hunchback who cleaned up a modest fortune of a hundred and fifty thousand livres by the simple expedient of hiring out his back as a writing desk for busy or superstitious speculators.

"We believed so firmly in these emerald rocks that an expedition set out to find them and sailed up the whole course of the Arkansas."

"Is it possible, in the middle of the Century of Enlightenment, that people could have been such simpletons?" cried Juliette.

"Simpletons? Simpleton yourself, Madame!" retorted Chronossus. "With what but paper do you pay for your pretty clothes? Law had invented credit. And these Redskins, these mountains of emeralds were only his way of saying: 'Walk up, ladies and gentlemen, walk up and buy Three Per Cent Government Loan!' For behind his bejewelled mountains there were, as a guarantee, the riches of the colonies.

"Law, who was no more of a swindler than any modern Minister of Finance, was simply recruiting people to go out and exploit these fertile territories. In this, however, he came up against a certain amount of difficulty, for there were a host of stick-in-the-mud stock-jobbers, who preferred to get rich quick in the *Rue Quincampoix* rather than face the hazards of the Mississippi paradise. And so, some rather specialised press-gangs were organised to recruit 'volunteers'—in the prisons, from the night dives and from the streets. There were also plenty of flighty young wives who seized the chance to rid themselves of a tiresome husband."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Juliette.

"I knew one myself," said Chronossus. "A Madame Quoniam, the wife of a butcher. Monsieur Quoniam lived in the fool's paradise of a betrayed but ignorant husband. Scarcely did he finish his supper, than he used to fall asleep, conscious of a duty well and truly accomplished. In this he was making a fatal mistake. Other duties are expected of a butcher after his supper. If he fell asleep, then misfortune, in the shape of eager suitors, would certainly fly in to take his place. And fall asleep he did, while on the floor above Madame Quoniam gambolled and frolicked. One evening she gambolled to such purpose that she woke him up.

"With his butcher's knife in his hand and with loud shouts of 'Stop thief!' 'Murder!' he dashed into the darkened regions upstairs. A press-gang, which happened to be passing, hastened in to find out what was afoot. 'There's the thief! There's the assassin!' cried Madame Quoniam,

pointing to the shouting man brandishing a large butcher's knife. The press-gang jumped to it. They seized the vociferous butcher and bundled him out; and the next thing he knew was that he was on the banks of the Mississippi.

"Shares in Law's venture rose to such heights that eventually they inevitably began to wilt, and then they crashed and collapsed altogether. The bank dealing with the business had moved to the *Rue Richelieu*. The throng there was even greater than it had been in the *Rue Quincampoix*, but this time they were clamouring to rid themselves of the cursed scrip and get their money back. Barriers were erected and the military were called out to control the crowds surging towards the bank. Not a few were stifled; jammed in the crowd and carried forward with it, they continued on their way, and it was only when they reached their destination that they were found to be dead."

"And France ruined," said Juliette.

"You mean—saved. The State, which at the death of Louis XIV had a deficit of two thousand million francs, suddenly found itself miraculously purged of all its debts. Can you imagine such a thing? The State no longer owed anyone anything! That, of course, was a state of affairs which could not possibly last for long. Fortunately, however, there was another consequence which did endure—an excellent cuisine. We had become very luxury-loving in our habits, and I wonder if you have noticed that the business man is much more fussy about food than the aristocrat? Overnight it became the fashion to keep a chef, and the most wonderful dishes, savoured in a room which was specially reserved for the ceremony and which we called a dining-room, paved the way for the light and gracious frivolities which followed them. Such, then, were the two great finds of the Regency—universal private bankruptcy and the art of good cooking."

#### *A Little Supper with the Regent*

"One can hardly say that licentiousness had been invented. We were simply in an era of gay *insouciance*. No one had shed tears over the hoary despot turned pious in his old age.<sup>1</sup> On the throne we had an infant King of five, and France threw her cap over the windmill.

"I very much doubt whether anyone was bothering to rule the country. The austere Versailles had been closed when the *Grand Siècle* faded. The

<sup>1</sup> When Louis XIV died, the streets were flooded with lampoons. Here is a typical one:

Ci-gît le roi des malotiers,  
Le partisan des usuriers,  
L'esclave d'une indigne femme,  
L'ennemi juré de la paix.  
Ne priez point Dieu pour son âme,  
Un tel monstre n'en eut jamais.

Regent was leading a gay life in the *Palais Royal*. . . I wonder if I dare, in the presence of a well brought up young woman, open the door a crack on one of those famous little supper parties?"

"Risk it!" said Juliette. "Forewarned is forearmed applies equally to women, don't you think? And after all, it is history, isn't it?"

"History at its most licentious, alas," replied Chronossus with a hypocritical sigh. "At about nine o'clock in the evening, when the lights in the Paris windows began to go out one by one, mysterious figures could be seen hastening down the corridors of the *Palais Royal* towards the small apartments. Picture to yourself a small room like a jewel casket, panelled in rose silk, perfumed and embellished with flowers, in which crystal glass and ornate silver glisten in the soft candlelight. Those mysterious figures all bore distinguished names—Noailles, Biron, Broglie, Richelieu—but they left their names and their dignity at the door and came in under the cloak of a pseudonym—The Dancing Slipper, The Doll, The Petrel. The Duchess de Berry, daughter of the Regent, and a daughter, they said, whom he loved only too well, called herself the Princess Joufflotte; his recognised mistress, Madame de Parabère, was The Little Crow at the beginning of the banquet and The Leg of Mutton, the royal morsel of which everyone had his share, at the end. The women were dressed in diaphanous frocks of printed cotton, a material very much in fashion at the time, light and all but transparent; the corsage was cut generously deep, and the frock was held only by a thread at the shoulder, a fickle thing which in due course would allow these revealing veils to fall as the opening act of the nocturnal festivities. Cooks and lackeys were excluded. Each of the ladies prepared a dish according to her fancy. It was quite a sight to see Madame de Parabère beating the whites of eggs, or Madame Sabran frying sausages in a silver frying-pan and passing them round. With the wine—the wines of Chio, Cyprus, Tokay and Champagne—the gaiety and excitement mounted. If the Abbot Dubois were there—that vulgarian turned priest who was prepared to do anything to become a Cardinal and who died at once on achieving his ambition—the Marquise de Simiane would recite her scurrulous quatrain to his face:

'Je suis du bois dont on fait les cuistres,  
Et cuistre je fus autrefois;  
Mais à present je suis du bois  
Dont on fait les ministres.'

"No one and nothing" was spared. They mocked at virtue, justice, religion and the old Court, to which they referred as 'the old rubbish heap'. They put a paper crown on the Regent's head and shouted: 'Long live the King!'

"Then came the moment for Madame de Tencin, a nun expelled from her Order and a masterly organiser of licentious spectacle, to show her talents. She flung open the door and ushered in the most ravishing 'specimens' from the Opera, young men and young women, in a state of nature—and proudly announced—"The Fête of Adam!" Candles were swiftly extinguished, little cries and screams filled the air, everyone ran hither and thither, searching, they said for lights and finding instead much anonymous pleasure. Broglie meanwhile had crept behind a cupboard which had no back to it, but was filled with lighted candles. Suddenly he pushed open the two front panels and 'an unexpected light illumined sights not less unexpected'.

Embarquement pour Cythère

"Well!" exclaimed Juliette. "What with the debauches under the Regent and the *liaisons scandaleuses* at its end, your delicious eighteenth century smells rather high to me."

"And while you're about it, you might also throw the sadism of the Marquis de Sade in my teeth. But the Regent, like the 'divine Marquis', was merely a manifestation, exasperated and at times quite desperate, of the great fear that gripped the eighteenth century—the fear of being bored. We had everything to make us happy. . . ."

"We?" queried Juliette. "By that you mean the wealthy aristocrats?"

"I mean—the whole of the French people. The masses had never before been so prosperous, but we'll talk about that later, for it is obvious that it is to the *salons* of the aristocracy that we must go, if we wish to recall the marvellous graces of the age, those exquisite flowers that the Revolution will later remorselessly mow down with the guillotine. Indeed, yes! we had absolutely everything to make us truly happy; and that, you know, is a very terrible thing! Just think! Nothing left to hope for. It requires true courage to live in those circumstances."

"Stop," cried Juliette, "before you make me burst into tears! Poor darling nobles, poor Dukes and Duchesses! Can you imagine anything more sad than having nothing else to do but to dance the *gavotte*?"

"Sneer, if you will; but mark well that we had our code of ethics. Oh! we were certainly libertines, I grant you; but with decency. We also possessed those inestimable virtues, which are so sadly neglected nowadays, respect for one another, modesty and charity."

"Modesty and charity in an eighteenth-century *salon*? Don't make me laugh!"

"To have respect for one another, to listen patiently to the peevish, to pay compliments without seeming to do so, to tease without wounding,

and to importune no man—in short, to persuade you that you are the most delightful person in the world—isn't that, surely, the very essence of charity? As for sexual morality and decency, we followed the example of the seventeenth century. Marriage was a business arrangement between the families concerned. Madame de Maugiron wrote to her husband: 'I am writing to you, because I have nothing to do, and I am ending, because I have nothing to say.' Love, therefore, flourished outside the home, but with a decorous observance of the decencies. Everybody, for instance, knew about the Countess Dillon and the Prince de Guémenée, and their liaison was regarded as the most natural thing in the world. Whenever Madame Dillon went to stay with her uncle, the genial and wealthy Archbishop of Narbonne, in his *château* at Hautefontaine, Monsieur de Guémenée was also always invited. A fellow guest once said: 'Before I went to stay at Hautefontaine, I knew, of course, that Madame Dillon was Monsieur de Guémenée's mistress. But after I'd been with them for six weeks in the house, I wasn't at all sure.

"Believe me, to meet smiling faces everywhere is a delightful thing. And for the most part, the smiles were perfectly genuine. Bachaumont used to say that he had been born to be happy; and when on his death-bed he was offered the consolations of religion, he said with a gentle smile. 'Thank you. But I do not feel in the least afflicted!' In some cases, however, to smile required not a little courage and some of that modest self-effacement which astonished you so much. In the *salon* of Madame d'Houdetot's sister-in-law, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Egeria, life was always very gay and happy. 'We used to argue—in pairs, in fours and often all together; we used to go for each other bald-headed, but in a friendly way, and we always finished up laughing.' Among the regular frequenters of the *salon* was a young woman who was doomed by a disease of the lungs to die in the full bloom of her young womanhood. One day, she seemed rather preoccupied, and someone asked her what she was dreaming about? 'I was thinking what a pity it is about myself,' she replied with a smile. "She was typical of that happy, heedless, brilliant society of the eighteenth century. In 1717 Watteau painted his '*Embarquement pour Cythère*. Nothing would have been more wholly delightful; and yet in the midst of this graciousness at its very best, one was sometimes conscious of a warning, a little heart stab, that frivolity is very akin to tragedy."

### *The Pompadour of Lunéville*

"The society I have been describing blossomed, of course, in Paris. But the Provinces, too, were not without their refinements. Towards the middle of the century, I had occasion to stay for a while in Lunéville, and

there, I can assure you, they fought most valiantly against boredom. In Luneville there lived a petty Princeling, by name Stanislas Leczinski. Louis XV had married his daughter, Marie Leczinska; Stanislas ought to have been King of Poland, but Austria had been opposed to his succession, and the upshot had been a war, greatly desired by public opinion which was convinced, a century too late, that Austria was our enemy. So we went and fought for Poland."

"A strange thing to do," observed Juliette. "Never mind—off we go to Poland."

"Oh! we didn't go there," replied Chronossus. "We fought against Austria for Poland in Italy."

"Stranger and stranger!" murmured Juliette.

"And in the process we acquired Lorraine!"

"It was really a very pretty stroke of diplomacy. We left Poland to Austria, and Austria left to us Lorraine, where we installed the King of Poland as ruler during his lifetime. On his death Lorraine was to revert to us. And that explains why life in Luneville was so gay under Stanislas, who bequeathed to Nancy a handsome square with railings that have since become famous.

"The Marquise de Boufflers was the moving spirit at the little Court in Luneville. (She had some slight family connection with the country; her mother, the Princess de Beauveau-Craon had had an affair with the Duke of Lorraine, which was nothing to do with the twenty children she bore in legitimate wedlock.) When the King of Poland arrived, he chose the Marquise for the post of Lady of the Palace (and for one or two other, more intimate duties, too). He was already over sixty, while she was barely thirty.

"She gathered round her all who were gay and attractive in Lorraine; and she herself was gay, animated and full of sparkle, and her figure was as delightful as was her power of repartee. She had friends—and lovers—without number. She worked miracles at the Palace, and the jovial old ruler did his utmost to keep pace with her.

"One day, the Marquise was seated at her dressing-table, and the King was entertaining her with gallant flattery, when he suddenly broke off. 'I will leave it to my chancellor, Madame,' he said, 'to finish the story.' As a matter of fact—though whether he was aware of it or not, I don't know—his Chancellor was very much in the Marquise's good graces. After him came a young lawyer named Deveau and nicknamed Pampam. They took an instant liking to one another, had their pleasure of each other and then parted without fuss or regrets. Next it was the turn of the poet, Saint Lambert, and then Voltaire suddenly appeared, accompanied by his imposing Madame de Chatelet, 'Doctor Uranie', with whom he had for

fifteen years been conducting some research into experimental physics—a subject of which he was now becoming rather tired.

“No one knew better how to be the life and soul of a party than Voltaire, although he was already well over fifty; but in those days we had mastered the art of remaining young until death claimed us. There ensued a whirl of fun and games, accompanied by gusts of enthusiastic laughter; card parties, backgammon parties, intimate little supper parties. Madame de Boufflers had already abandoned Saint Lambert in favour of the Viscount d’Adhemar. Saint Lambert thought he would try and rouse her jealousy by flirting with ‘Doctor Uranie’. But Voltaire, alas, had sadly neglected the poor lady. At the very first advance, she became all afire, and Saint Lambert had no option—he had made his bed, and he had to lie on it! The affair culminated in a discreet little flat, placed at their disposal by the *curé* of the parish.”

“Really, Monsieur Chronossus!” cried Juliette. “You’re altogether too outrageous!”

“Not I, Madame,” protested Chronossus. “Blame the customs of our times. We were discreet, as I told you, but we all knew everything that was going on. Except, that is, Voltaire, who, for all his wisdom, suspected nothing, until one day he went somewhat too abruptly into a room, where a *tableau vivant* made plain to him the full extent of his misfortune. At first the philosopher was furious, but then he forgave Saint Lambert and even encouraged him to persevere. Thus a *ménage à trois* came into being (I won’t say a *ménage à quatre*, because the good lady’s husband, Monsieur de Chatelet, was of no consequence whatever). Voltaire wrote a one-act comedy on the subject, Saint Lambert made a short story of it, and Madame de Chatelet rather thought that her contribution was going to be a little baby. In view of the urgency of the matter, the three friends decided to send for Monsieur de Chatelet on the pretext of some urgent business to be settled. When he arrived, they made a great fuss of him, filled him up with good wine and sent him to bed quite fuddled. The next morning they woke him, congratulated him on the fire of his re-found youth and sent him back to the Army. Honour was safe.

“All their trouble, however, proved to have been in vain. Madame de Chatelet died in childbirth. Voltaire, a gallant fellow to his fingertips, wished to remove her ring, the setting of which, he knew, contained his portrait. What, he asked himself, would Monsieur de Chatelet say if he made such a discovery? In point of fact, it was Voltaire himself who made quite a different discovery—his portrait had been ousted in favour of that of Saint Lambert. ‘Just like a woman!’ exclaimed the philosopher.”

“Which shows that he really was a philosopher,” said Juliette. “All this, however, is not serious history, Monsieur Chronossus.”



*Where Women Ruled Over Philosophers*

"Nothing was serious in the eighteenth century," retorted Chronossus. "And certainly the philosophers were not. Or rather, they were, really, but they did not wish to give the impression that they were. To take one's self seriously was a sign of a bad upbringing."

"I know what you mean," said Juliette. "When I read *Candide*, I realised that, although the style was delightfully polished, the author had left it to his readers to discover the deep meaning underlying all his banter."

"I wonder what you would have said if you had found yourself one evening in one of those famous *salons*, where Voltaire, Montesquieu, Diderot, d'Alembert, Marmotel, Fontenelle, Grimm, Marivaux and that jolly little clown with the Machiavellian head, the Abbot Galiani, were lightly and easily exchanging ideas? Like the Marquise de Boufflers, and like Ninon de Lenclos and Madame de Rambouillet before her, Madame de Lambert, Madame de Tencin and others were veritable angels ministering to the needs of society. The most enduring of these *salons* and perhaps the most influential of them was that of a *bourgeoise*, Madame Geoffrin.

"In 1713, at the age of fourteen she had married one of the partners in the Saint Gobain company, a man of forty-eight with little or no interest in culture and literature. Madame Geoffrin, however, loved the society of cultured and intelligent people, and for her own edification she was a frequent visitor to her neighbour, Madame de Tencin. (The same who produced the entertainments for the Regent's little supper party and who made a speciality of entertaining writers. Incidentally, she produced one herself; but she abandoned the child who later was to become the well-known d'Alembert.) 'Do you know what the Geoffrin woman is doing here?' Madame de Tencin used to say. 'She comes here to see whom she can filch from my circle of friends.' And, indeed, by 1749, she had filched the lot. By that time she had developed into the woman whom we knew and respected until she died in 1777. With her imposing figure, her silver hair covered with a kerchief knotted below the chin, and her dignified and decorous bearing, she commanded our respect; and sound commonsense, tempered by kindness and benevolence, won for her our affection.

"Her husband, who officiated as a sort of major-domo in her *hôtel* in the *Rue Saint Honoré*, died about this time. One day, a very distinguished foreigner, who never missed visiting her *salon* whenever he was in Paris, asked her what had happened to that rather nice old gentleman who used regularly to supervise the dinner parties and who now seemed to have disappeared? 'That was my husband,' she replied. 'He died.'"

*Chronossus Encounters Unfair Competition*

"At her place I used every now and then to meet the Count Saint Germain. Do you know him by any chance?"

"I'm afraid not," said Juliette. "I wasn't born then."

"No—of course not. Stupid of me!" Well, anyway, this Monsieur de Saint Germain was the cause of one of the greatest upsets in my life."

"Gracious!" exclaimed Juliette. "And goodness knows, you've seen enough things in your time."

"Exactly. And this gentleman, if you please, claimed to be four thousand years old."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Juliette.

"That's just what I thought. But you'll agree it would have been a little venturesome on my part to have said so. He claimed to have been present at the miracle in Cana. Mind you, lots of people were very sceptical about it all, and one young Marquise swore she'd expose him and got herself invited to a dinner party at which she knew she would meet him.

"As soon as he entered the room, Saint Germain hastened towards her. 'Madame', he exclaimed, 'how delighted I am at last to meet a member of your distinguished family! I was a great friend of one of your grandfather's ancestors; the gallant fellow fought beside me at the battle of Marignan.' And then he went on to tell her a story about a golden cross which the gentleman in question had asked him to take to his wife. The young Marquise gazed at him in stupified amazement.

"'But, Monsieur,' she finally stammered. 'I . . . it is true, one of my ancestors . . . we cherish that cross among the family relics. But I did not know that anyone outside the family was aware of the details.'

"'No one is, Madame, except myself. And I am delighted to know that the precious *bijou* reached its destination safely.' Saint Germain turned away with a deep bow, leaving the Marquise bemused but quite convinced.

"Everybody believed then that he was immortal or quasi-immortal, except me, and I had my own reasons for doubting it."

"As I can well believe," said Juliette.

"He was, of course, an imposter."

"Oh! So he was not like you then?" said Juliette, and there was a little challenge in her voice.

But Chronossus did not appear to have heard.

"One day," he continued. "I was with Saint Germain in the Marquise de Pompadour's boudoir, when she asked him, quite suddenly:

"'What sort of a man was Francis I? He's a King I'm sure I could have loved.'

"'And you would have been right, Madame, for he was a very lovable

person,' replied the Count. He then went on to describe Francis for all the world as though he had known him intimately and to depict the beauty of his Court and to tell us how much more brilliant life had been in the time of Mary Stuart and Marguerite de Valois and, well—you can imagine how furious I became. Then Madame de Pompadour interrupted him. 'Mon Dieu,' she said laughingly, 'It sounds as though you'd seen it all with your own eyes.'

"Saint Germain, too laughed. 'The fact is,' he said (much to my relief), 'that I have an excellent memory and I've read deeply in French history.'"

"And that, of course, isn't the case, as far as you are concerned?" persisted Juliette.

But once again Chronossus seemed not to have heard.

"Anyway I was telling you that it was at Madame Geoffrin's house that I met this fellow," he went on.

### *The Passionate Gavotte*

"Madame Geoffrin was not unduly sensitive, but she had none of the glacial hardness of Madame du Deffand. Grimm, who was a frequent visitor to both houses, drew the following little sketch of Madame du Deffand, aged and practically blind, peering at her old friend and former lover, Pont de Veyle, after the other guests had departed. She herself was seated on the bed, and Pont de Veyle was sprawling in a deep armchair. 'Pont de Veyle!' 'Madame?' 'Where are you?' 'In the corner, by the fireplace.' 'Comfortable, with your feet in the fender, I hope, and completely at home?' 'Yes, Madame!' 'You must admit that there are very few liaisons that have lasted as long as ours!' 'Very true, Madame.' 'Fifty years!' 'Yes, Madame, fifty years and more.' 'And all that long time, not a cloud, not even the vestige of any trouble between us!' 'That is a thing I have always admired so much.' 'But, Pont de Veyle, don't you think it might be because at the bottom of our souls we were indifferent to each other?' 'It could well be, Madame.'

"As you can guess, the effusions of the good Rousseau were not regarded with any favour in these *salons*. That's why they had such a great success at the end of the century—reaction caused a swing of fashion to tears and things pastoral; even Madame Geoffrin invited no women to her dinner parties, because women distracted the guests and confused conversation.

She made but one exception, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, a young woman of high intellect; yet even she became smitten with passionate emotion. Can you imagine it—blatant, passionate emotion, in the middle of a gavotte! For it was while dancing that Mademoiselle de Lespinasse cried out: 'I have so much enjoyed, have been so vividly conscious of,

the joy of life that, if I had to begin all over again, I should ask for nothing that I have not had. To love, to suffer, to experience Heaven and Hell, it is to that that I should like to dedicate myself; that is what I should want to experience, that is the atmosphere in which I should long to live, and not in this temperate humdrum state, amid all the idiots and puppets, by whom we are now surrounded.' ”

*Where Voltaire is Made to Look a Little Ingenuous*

“An impetuous soul of this kind was almost as shocking to a libertine as were the Saint Médard convulsionists to a philosopher. I expect you know all about those frenzied mystics who gave expression to their faith in a kind of Saint Vitus Dance? It all began in the Saint Médard cemetery, where the Deacon Paris, a fervent Jansenist, had been buried in 1727.”

“Really!” said Juliette. “Then Louis XIV hadn’t got rid of them all? There were still a few obstinate dissenters about?”

“They say that miracle after miracle was performed over the tomb of the Deacon, and even when the Chief of Police closed the cemetery, the convulsionists refused to give up their practices, but carried on in their own homes, before an audience of initiates, including the Duchess de Trémoille and the Duchess de Rochecouart, who mingled freely with these fervent dervishes. Most of the convulsionists were young women who, once the frenzy was upon them, called for ‘help’ to ease them of their sufferings—help in the shape of buffets on the head, the stomach and the breasts from cudgels wielded by stalwart young men. One of the outstanding seances was that at which ‘Sister’ Sion, her thirst unassuaged by the cudgel blows, called upon her friends to crucify her (which they did). At the house of Voltaire’s brother three ‘invulnerable’ women gave a fakir-like demonstration; they thrust swords into each other and no blood flowed. It was just about this time that Voltaire himself was pouring vituperation on religion and in the fervour of his rationalism was crying out to high heaven: ‘Let us crush this infamy!’

“These depraved manifestations of devotion, the persecution of the Protestants by Parliament, the execution of Callas and the Chevalier de la Barre against all the principles of justice—these things were more than enough to rouse the champions of tolerance and freedom of thought. And it is greatly to Voltaire’s credit that he waged a campaign for the rehabilitation of these unfortunates.”

“I agree,” said Juliette. “But to imagine that all you had to do was to kill superstition, and commonsense would reign supreme . . . I can’t help thinking that your philosophers were just a trifle naïve.”

... *And a Little Pathetic*

"To have faith in the commonsense of man is, perhaps, the height of ingenuousness; but it is also ingenuousness in its most worthy form. Though he was no atheist, Voltaire refused to let himself be frightened by 'the silence of infinite space'. Where Pascal was magniloquent, Voltaire expressed a passionate desire for a better world, for the best of all possible worlds—'Paradise on earth is where I am!' he wrote. To Pascal, who said: 'If there is a God, then we must love only Him and not His creatures,' he retorted: 'On the contrary, we must love His creatures and love them most tenderly.' And, contemplating the fact that it takes twenty years to make a man, that it took twenty centuries for him to reach some semblance of a man, that it will take all eternity for him to gain some knowledge of his soul—and that it takes but an instant to kill him, Voltaire most earnestly pleaded for tolerance. The elegance and brilliance of his style show Voltaire the man in a false light; but under the superficiality Saint Beuve recognises the pathos of the man, a pathos that was all the more touching for its attempt to remain inconspicuous. 'I shall die laughing—if I can,' he wrote to d'Alembert.

"For Voltaire happiness was a hazardous adventure; for his enemy, Rousseau, it was a human pipe dream, a humanitarian reverie. He waxed emotional over the reformation of the world and he regarded his fears as a virtue. Leave well alone, rely on the inherent goodness of man. Somewhere along this way of thought this sentimental and infuriating fellow makes strangely common cause with the physiocrats, those grave theorists on economic liberalism."

"You certainly serve up some queer mixtures," observed Juliette.

"To sum up the eighteenth century as an era of arid rationalism is an oversimplification; it had its convulsionists, its sorcerers, its mystics, and the vogue enjoyed by people like Saint Germain and Cagliostro speaks volumes for the credulity of this 'enlightened' century. To sum it up in terms of the pastorals of Rousseau and of Marie Antoinette and the tenderness of a Greuze painting would be too facile a paradox. Philosophers and clodhoppers, libertines and aesthetes, we had a mixture of them all, both in the country generally and at Court, where it became clear that Louis XV was more lucid than any philosopher, and that a frail and erring favourite showed wisdom and even heroism."

### *The Century of Pompadour*

"And now," said Juliette, "I suppose you are going to tell me that it was Madame de Pompadour who paved the way for the Revolution?"

"Revolution? The idea of staging a revolution never entered the head of any one of your reformers, except perhaps for a fleeting moment, in a

flash of sheer exasperation at the selfishness of the privileged classes and the weakness of the King. But reforms? That was different. Reforms we certainly wanted, and we hoped very much that we should be granted them by an 'enlightened despotism'. Not only that; everybody knew exactly what was required, and Madame de Pompadour, *née* Poisson, knew just as well as everybody else. The answer was easy—make the rich pay. She did not require the friendship of philosophers to make her realise that. But behind that ravishing face there was nevertheless a brain of no mean philosophic quality. Quesnay, her doctor and the great supporter of the economists, lived in the basement of her apartments in Versailles; and it was in that basement that theory was argued, thrashed out and given shape. The best brains of the century used to dine there together—Diderot, d'Alembert, Duclos, Helvetius, Buffon, Turgot. Madame de Pompadour used to drop in and listen—and sometimes take part in the discussions. Of these men, one of them, Turgot, was later, as one of Louis' Ministers, to introduce desperate measures to meet a desperate situation; and by causing his dismissal, Marie Antoinette was to cast away the last chance of saving the monarchy. If it had been possible to save the régime—and it would have been possible—these were the men who could have done so. Madame de Pompadour gave the King excellent advice. Had he but listened to her alone, then enlightenment—the French way of life, as the rest of Europe called it—would have illumined the Court, and the eighteenth century would have become known as the century of Louis XV. The King certainly listened to her; for she had a most delicious body (and Louis' ideas ran rather along those lines); but to have succeeded, she would have required in addition the head of a Richelieu to crown that lovely body; and that, perhaps, is asking rather a lot of any woman."

"And Richelieu's goatee beard as a crown would rather have spoiled her beautiful ensemble, wouldn't it?" said Juliette.

"It would, indeed," laughed Chronossus. "But, seriously, she did a great deal of good, and with Louis XV out of the running, we could, I think, with some justice call it the century of Madame de Pompadour.

"She gave her patronage to the arts and letters, and she fought to the best of her ability for those ideas which, had they but prevailed, could well have prevented catastrophe. In addition, there was something very appealing about her, you know."

"I know, I know," said Juliette. "A charming mouth, grey eyes, the complexion of a rose."

"Well," began Chronossus defensively.

"Don't apologise," interrupted Juliette. "Of course you found her appealing. And why shouldn't you?"

"It's true that she was the most beautiful woman in Paris, at a time, too, when women were more beautiful than ever. Stop for a moment and have a look at the pastel of her by La Tour, and you'll see that she was truly adorable. 'A morsel for a King,' the family used to say, and they meant it quite literally, and she herself went through all the requisite motions to attract the King's attention. But she had one great quality that was wholly admirable in a royal favourite—real love for the King, for she was quite silly about him. Can you imagine anything more absurd? But with a name like Poisson what could you expect? At Court she was called *La Grisette*.

*The Martyrdom of La Grisette*

"By her husband, the financier Lenormant d'Etoiles, she had had a daughter, Alexandrine, whom she brought up with devoted care. And the King, by one of his mistresses, Madame de Vintimille, had had a son who was the living image of his father. Madame de Pompadour was very anxious to see this son of her lord and master, and she managed to have him brought down to the *château* of Belleville, where her daughter was. Leading the King into a fig-grove in which the two children were playing, she said: 'Look at them! Would they not make a lovely couple?' But the King remained cold and unresponsive. His Bourbon blood revolted at the idea of such an alliance, proposed in such a way.

"She, however, took but little heed of his coldness. Pondering fondly over the idea, she said to her lady-in-waiting, Madame de Hausset—and here you will see how love overrides ambition—'If it had been Louis XIV he would have made the boy Duke du Maine; but it is not that that matters as far as I am concerned. An allowance and a Dukedom is little enough to give his own son, I know. But it is because he is his son, my dear, that I prefer him to all the petty Princelings at Court. My grandchildren will bear resemblance to their grandfather and their grandmother, and that fusion, which I hope to see one day, will put the seal on my happiness.' Tears came into her eyes as she spoke, says Madame de Hausset. Our sweet, sentimental Marquise had an inimitable way of conjuring up *tableaux vivants à la Greuze-Pompadour*.

"With so sensitive a nature, she was poorly equipped to stand up to the rigours of Court intrigue, and very quickly they reduced her to a state of exhaustion.<sup>1</sup> Even after she ceased to be physically attractive to the King, she still remained a kind of habit, of which he could not rid himself. 'It is your staircase that he loves,' said the little Marquise de Mirepoix to her one day. 'He is so used to going up and down it; but if he found some other

<sup>1</sup> She was also tubercular.

woman, with whom he could talk over his hunting and his other activities, he'd forget all about it in three days.' La Pompadour knew that this was true, and she knew, too, all about Louis' rather sullen and cunning character. With regard to a possible rival, she used to say: 'If this very evening he installed her in my apartments, in public he would treat her with a cold indifference—and he would redouble his signs of affection for me.'

"During its last years, her life seemed to hang by a thread. She was then no more than a 'spiritual favourite'; ill and suffering, she grew visibly thinner and thinner, and it was only her will power that kept her going. After reigning for nine years she died, in 1764, at the age of forty-two, with all the elegance typical of her century. When the *curé* of the Madeleine who had come to visit her in Versailles was about to depart, she said: 'If you will wait a moment, *Monsieur le curé*, we can go together.'"

#### *Candidates for the Little House in the Deer Park*

"To retain her position in the affections of the King, the 'purveyor of light pleasures' had done all she could to provide him with acceptable distraction, producing plays in Versailles, astonishing him with her talents as a comedienne and a singer, organising garden parties and condoning Louis' ephemeral affairs with mistresses who caught his momentary fancy. A great number of scandalous stories have been told about the small house in the Deer Park, where a fresh inmate was always awaiting the King's good pleasure—but always only one at a time, for the little house was indeed tiny. It is true that Madame de Pompadour carried complaisance so far as generally to supervise these secret little love affairs, but she never went so far as to engage the requisite recruits herself. For, when all is said and done, it was really nothing more than one of those houses, of which morality disapproves but to which the law turns a blind eye; and the King was a law unto himself. In any case there were plenty of nobles and rich *bourgeois*, who indulged in like amenities."

"Even so," cried Juliette, "that's no reason for snatching young girls from the bosoms of their families."

"Snatching?" queried Chronossus with a grin. "Don't you believe it! There were parents without number who begged His Majesty to accept their daughter. The Police archives in Paris are full of highly edifying letters. Would you like to hear one?"

'Sire,

'A father, a gentleman in the Bishopric of Paris, whose family title goes back two hundred years and whose ancestors have always been worthy of their high estate, comes to you animated by his ardent love



for the sacred person of the King to inform you that he is the happy father of a daughter, who is a miracle of beauty, of freshness, of youth and of blooming health. The enclosed certificates from doctors and surgeons will testify to this, and further statements from two midwives will testify to the virginity of the sweet child.

'Is it too much to hope, Sire, that of your gracious goodness you will consent to the entry of this, my third daughter, Anne Marie de M . . . , aged fifteen, into that blessed house in which are cherished those of her sex who are reserved for the ardent love of our noble King? Ah! Sire, what a sweet reward that would be for my thirty-four years of service in the *Régiment de N . . .*' and for that of my beloved daughter's two elder brothers, one a Naval Officer and the other a member of the *Conseil Supérieur*; my eldest daughter was educated at Saint Cyr and is married to Monsieur de . . . , one of His Majesty's gentlemen in waiting. My other daughter is a nun in the convent of H . . . in P . . . .

'You may perhaps take exception to the already advanced age of this young girl? Let me say that she is still as innocent as when she was born and does not yet know of the difference between sexes. She has been brought up by a mother, a worthy wife, a model of virtue, a chaste woman, who has laboured ceaselessly to make her daughter fit for the pleasures of our beloved King, who will find in her all those estimable treasures which he so richly deserves.

'I shall await your reply, Sire, with eager impatience. If it is favourable, it will spread the blessing of God over a whole family, which will forever remain blindly and passionately devoted to His Majesty.

'I have the honour to be,

'Sire,

'etc.' "

### *The Sublime Order of Lanturelus*

"The Marquise de Pompadour, while she was still little Mademoiselle Poisson, had been a frequent visitor to the *salon* of Madame Geoffrin, whose neighbour she was in the *Rue Saint Honoré*, and she remained good friends with Madame Geoffrin's daughter. For it was this daughter, who had married the aged Colonel, the Marquis de la Ferté-Imbault, who had then been considerate enough to die and leave her a widow and a Marquise at the age of twenty-two. This daughter was now holding a *salon* of her own in the same *hôtel* as her mother—and at her mother's expense. She, however, detested the philosophers and received only members of society; and, as her mother detested that feather-brained crowd with equal vehemence. . . ."

"Everybody," Juliette chipped in, "had to be most careful that they knocked at the right door!"

"The contrast was certainly very marked and was rather symbolic of the society of the century. The mother's *salon* was a seething cauldron of new ideas. In that of her daughter (a round-faced young woman, with large, black eyes) there was all the fun of the fair. She made Cardinals join in the dancing, called the Archbishop of Paris '*mon p'tit chat*' and generally played the clown to such good purpose that she founded one of those fantastic Orders, so numerous in the eighteenth century and by means of which the aristocracy gave ample evidence of the frivolous esteem in which it held itself. She called it 'The Sublime Order of Lanturelus'. The Spanish Ambassador, Russian Princes and German Princes, having completed a novitiate of extravagant whimsicality, were admitted to the Order under the rule of the Marquise, 'Her Most Extravagant Lanturelian Majesty, Founder of the Order and Absolute Arbiter of Folly'. So far afield did its reputation spread, that it even caused some anxiety to the autocrat of all the Russias, Catherine the Great in far off Moscow. The Marquise committed so many extravagances that she was given the name of Miss Topsyturvy. On the other floor, Madame Geoffrin, that woman of wise councillors, had been called by Horace Walpole Madam Common Sense, which, as you know, is the type of sense that is least common and most to be desired. One evening Madam Common Sense's *salon* heard a small boy of nine named Mozart play a piece of his own composition on the harpsicord, while the Lanturelians danced a saraband on the floor below.

"That is all I wished to show you as we stood on the threshold of the Revolution—this mother and daughter, this Madam Common Sense and Miss Topsyturvy, one above the other in the *hôtel* in the *Rue Saint Honoré*. And while the mother was the counterpart of the Marquise de Pompadour, the daughter, the Absolute Arbiter of Folly, was a faithful reflection of the Queen, Marie Antoinette, the one a delightful and empty-headed little clown and the other a Queen whom her brother, Joseph II called 'Scatter-brain'."

### *Two Hundred Thousand Sweethearts*

"I fully realise," said Juliette, "that Marie Antoinette did France a great deal of harm. But her fate was so tragic that we cannot but have pity for her."

"I agree absolutely. In misfortune she was great; but in good fortune she was a spoiled little child.

"The day she made her official entry into Paris<sup>1</sup>—she was then still only the Dauphine—the Parisians went mad with enthusiasm. All the houses

<sup>1</sup> In 1773. She had already been in Versailles for three years, but the Parisians had never seen her.

were festooned with flowers, and hats flew into the air by the myriad. In the Tuileries gardens, into which the Dauphin and his Dauphine emerged to take the air, they were all but suffocated by the crowd. For three-quarters of an hour they were unable to move an inch, either backwards or forwards. 'Madame,' the Duke de Brissac told her, 'there you see two hundred thousand people—and every one of them in love with you.' Moved to tears, the Queen wrote to her mother, the Empress Maria Theresa of Austria: 'How lucky we are, in our position, to have won the affections of a whole people at so small a price. Than that there can be nothing more precious. I have experienced it, and I shall not forget it as long as I live.' Alas!"

*But Never a Husband*

"She had but one excuse—her husband. At the great banquet on the evening of their wedding day (it was in the spring of 1770 and she was then fourteen and the obese, dull-witted Dauphin fifteen) the Dauphin as usual stuffed and gorged himself with food. Louis, watching with some misgiving, leaned across to his grandson.

"I shouldn't eat too much tonight, if I were you,' he said.

"'Why not?' retorted the bridegroom. 'I always sleep better when I've dined well.'

"The next day Louis wrote in his private personal diary the one word: 'nothing'—and he could with equal justice have made the same entry day after day for the next seven years, until, indeed, the day when Joseph II, while on a visit to Versailles, persuaded his brother-in-law, the Dauphin, to have the courage to let himself be circumcised.

"If only, during those seven whole years he had abstained absolutely! But no! This 'indolent husband', on those occasions when he did not at once fall asleep, worn out by hunting or his exertions as a locksmith (those were his two passions)—invariably went up the small private staircase which connected his own apartments on the ground floor with those of the Dauphine; and in the privacy of her boudoir this well-meaning clod did his utmost, much to the distress of the poor young girl; these two young innocents would so dearly have liked to put an end to the sneers of the Court and of all Paris! Then he would go away and sleep, leaving Marie Antoinette awake, aroused and unsatisfied. Don't you think, then, that in the circumstances, she cannot be blamed for plunging headlong into pleasure, into every and any pleasure that presented itself, short of being unfaithful to her husband? And if, later, she fell in love with the grave and handsome Fersen, is there any woman who would not forgive her?

"You have seen portraits of her. They portray her character which is

written in the graceful and noble poise of the head, the disdainful little pout on her lips, the—we might as well be quite honest—the essential arrogance of her outlook. But none of them does justice to her resplendent fragrant freshness and the caressing sensuousness of her carriage. Her figure, which was but a promise when she married, blossomed into the generous proportions which were then the fashion; her waist measurement was twenty-three and a quarter inches, and her bust forty-three and a half.”

“Bravo!” cried Juliette. “Now that’s what I call precise and accurate history!”

“I had it from her dressmaker,” said Chronossus. “But I was talking about her amusements. She threw herself headlong into one incessant round of gaiety and amusement. This was quite charming while she was still the Dauphine, but less appropriate when she became Queen. Louis XV was a disappointment to us, but Marie Antoinette scandalised us. Calumny, of course, had a great deal to do with it, but unfortunately she exposed herself very readily to shafts of calumny.”

### *The House of France*

“And yet, in spite of it all, how we French loved our Kings! We have just seen those two hundred thousand in the Tuileries, all in love. Louis XV was not mourned when he was gone, but the first half of his reign had been an idyll, and to France he was her Prince Charming; the bad things that were said of him later can be attributed in no small measure to the resentment of disappointed and disillusioned love—and also, perhaps, because the first historians were the philosophers and the Jesuits. Louis detested the former and flung the latter out of France. Louis XIV, too, you will remember, was buried midst general rejoicing; but it had taken nearly thirty years of continuous reverses and misery to alienate the affections of his people.

“I have already told you that our Kings belonged to the people and lived in public for all to see. Now, just before the downfall of the monarchy, I should like to give you some idea of the lengths to which this familiarity was carried.

“You could enter the King’s palace whenever you liked. ‘I’ve just been to the Louvre,’ wrote an Italian in 1665. ‘I strolled about as I wished, through the various guards until I came to that door which is opened as soon as you tap on it—at once and as often as not by the King himself. It is the King’s desire that all should come and go as they please.’

“When the Duke of Burgundy, the son of the *Grand Dauphin*, was born in 1682, an immense crowd flocked out to Versailles. Louis XIV appeared. “The crowd went almost mad,’ wrote the Abbot of Choisy.

'Everyone took the liberty of embracing His Majesty. The crowd carried him all the way from the apartments of Madame la Dauphine to his own, and he willingly allowed himself to be embraced by anyone who desired to do so.' The Marquis de Spinola in the ardour of his zeal bit the King's hand so hard, when kissing it, that His Majesty cried aloud. 'Sire!' exclaimed Spinola. 'I beg Your Majesty's forgiveness; but had I not bitten you, Your Majesty would not have even noticed me.'

"When there was a Court Ball, barriers were erected all along the walls of the ballrooms; omnibuses—some called *carabas* and others called *pots de chambre*—brought hundreds of Parisians, eager to rub shoulders with the Dukes and Duchesses. Entry was free for all; the palace was a veritable fair-ground,<sup>1</sup> filled with a thousand quite intolerable stenchcs. In Louis XIV's reign, there was but one solitary *cabinet à l'anglaise*<sup>2</sup>—a water closet—in the whole of Versailles, and it was reserved for the use of Their Majesties; for the others there were the balconies, the door lintels and the space under the staircases. When making their way to the Queen's apartments, the ladies were forced to hold their skirts high.

"It was the privilege of the *harengères*—the fish wives from *Les Halles*—to 'harangue' the King whenever the spirit moved them. In September 1725 they naturally went to offer their congratulations to young Louis XV on his marriage to Marie Leczinska. The good dame, Gelle, carrying a large basket, was their spokeswoman: 'Madam, I brings to Yer Majesty the best truffles wot we've got, eat lots of 'em, Mum, and make the King eat 'is fill too; they're very good to help generation. We wishes yer good 'ealth and we 'opes yer'll make us very 'appy.'

"These good women laid great store by 'generation'. When they saw how Marie Antoinette was making them wait for an heir to the throne, they went to Versailles and reproached her pretty bluntly for having failed to do her duty. At the end of those seven years, Marie Antoinette—or

<sup>1</sup> The resemblance to a fair-ground became complete when one found animals in the Hall of Mirrors; the Princes and Princesses of the blood royal "and certain otherfavoured personages" had the right to have cows, goats and she-asses brought right into their apartments, so that they could always have fresh milk.

<sup>2</sup> And, of course, the *chaises percées*—the commodes; but the use of "retreats" or "courtesy chambers", which had been prevalent in the Middle Ages, had been discontinued, as had also the habit of taking a bath. Louis XIV never entered a bathroom except on medical advice. The beauties of the eighteenth century recaptured a taste for personal cleanliness and even resuscitated the custom of receiving visitors in their bath (half-filled with milk, for modesty's sake). To them also we owe the refinement of the invention of the *violon de faïence*—sometimes called a *bidet*. But of "retreats" or even latrines—not a sign. Monsieur de Sartine, Police Superintendent of Paris, anxious to see the city cleaner than Versailles, put barrels at street corners for the convenience of passers-by. He may have got the idea from a fellow who used to parade the streets with a sort of plastic bag, crying: "Everyone knows what he has to do!"—and charging his customers four sous a time.

rather Louis XVI—having decided that duty must be fulfilled, the *accouchement* took place in public, as was then the royal custom.

“A curious crowd filled the room, jostling each other and even knocking over the screens round the Queen’s bed. Two Savoyards, who had clambered on to some piece of furniture in order to get a better view, started to squabble. ‘Let me have air!’ the Queen kept on crying. The windows were fastened with strips of gummied paper (as they always were from All Saints’ Day till Easter to keep out the draught). The Queen was suffocating, and then she fainted. The doctors bled her in the foot, and when she came to again, the crowd was already following in the wake of the howling infant Princess, who was being taken into another room.

“When Marie Antoinette at last gave birth to a Dauphin, the joy of France was akin to that of one large family. People stopped each other in the streets, strangers laughed and hugged one another with glee; and the quack dentists on the *Pont Neuf* offered to extract teeth free of charge for three whole days.

“Very soon we were to incarcerate this same Dauphin in the Temple prison and guillotine his mother. But do not forget that we were eager and ready to love her on the day she became our pretty Queen.”

### *We Are Too Young to Reign*

“On May 10th 1774, at a quarter past three in the afternoon, the light of a candle which was burning in a window of Louis XV’s room was extinguished. The King was no more.

“Marie Antoinette had been waiting the end of his suffering in her own apartments. Her husband, the Dauphin, was with her, pacing up and down the room with long, nervous strides. Suddenly, ‘a terrible noise like a clap of thunder was heard’. It was the concourse of courtiers, hastening through the Hall of Mirrors to come and salute the new King.

“Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI trembled; and when the concourse burst into their apartments, they found this young Queen of eighteen and this young King of nineteen both on their knees, weeping hot tears. ‘Oh God!’ they repeated again and again, ‘Dear God, take us into Thy care, we are too young to reign.’

“Less than a month later, the Queen of France was receiving the official condolences. All the ladies of the Court, dressed in black, were there to make their curtsies to Marie Antoinette; the ceremony dragged on interminably; one of the younger ladies-in-waiting, the Marquise de Clermont-Tonnerre, complained that she was very tired and sat down on the floor, taking cover behind the rampart of the voluminous panniers of the Queen’s

dress. The latter at first made no comment. But the young Marquise kept up a running commentary of witty and roguish remarks which caused Her Majesty suddenly to burst out laughing under the very noses of all the solemn, sexagenarian old Duchesses and Princesses, who had come to offer their condolences."

"H'm. Very, *very* naughty!" said Juliette. "But hardly enough, surely, to start a revolution?"

"To start a Palace revolution—yes. And that, mark you, after she had been on the throne just one month! Later after having put up with seventeen years of insolent disdain, Paris was to sing a great deal more."

### *The Queen of Fashion*

"Her great ambition was to become the Queen of Fashion. Several times a week, her dressmaker, Rose Bertin, used to appear at Versailles, escorted by a bevy of girls, carrying enormous hat and dress boxes—some of them five yards and more in circumference—from which emerged creations bearing the most delightful names—*Indiscreet Pleasures*, *Stifled Sighs*, *Masked Desires*. But Fashion's great triumph was the *coiffure en échafaudage*, the *pouf aux sentiments*, that piling of Pelion upon capillary Ossa in every form and shape imaginable. On the morrow of Louis XV's death, smart women wore a sprig of cypress and a cornucopia in their hair—signs of mourning for the King and of high hope for the new reign; or a rising sun as a symbol of Louis XVI (whom they little knew). One morning the Queen appeared with a whole English garden on her head, complete with its lawns, its hillocks and its silvered streams.

"The Duchess de Lauzun, for whom a possible headache held no terrors, arrived one evening at Madame du Deffand's house with a coiffure representing a landscape in relief. There was a man taking aim at a wild duck rising from a sheet of water ruffled by the breeze; on one of the hills stood a mill with a sprightly Abbot making love to the miller's wife, while the miller himself, a model of good manners, was making off with his donkey in the direction of the Duchess' car!

"Mademoiselle Rose Bertin was all but toppled from her throne by a certain Sieur Beaulard, who invented mechanical coiffures. You pressed a button, and a rose opened! There was also another variation, a real gadget, called *à la bonne meunière*—a figure which rose and fell by means of a little windlass concealed in the chignon.

"Frivolity was completely *de rigueur*. Marie Antoinette would have blushed to grace her mind with anything but 'funny' stories."

"Perhaps with the object of bucking up Louis XVI's ideas a bit?" suggested Juliette.

"Conversation between people who knew each other well was laced with pretty broad wit."

"For example?"

"Well, one day, for example, the Queen asked an old Field Marshal, who could talk of nothing but his two chargers, which of the two he preferred? 'Madame,' he replied, gravely, 'On the battlefield, if I were riding my piebald, I would never dismount in order to ride the bay; and if I were riding the bay, I would never dismount to ride the piebald.' A moment later the conversation turned to two very pretty ladies at Court.

"'Monsieur,' said the Queen, maliciously, turning to one of the company, —I think it was de Lauzun—'tell me, which of the two do you prefer?'

"'Madame,' he replied in tones as grave as those of the Marshal, 'if on the battlefield I happened to be riding. . . .'

"But the Queen laughed and bade him say no more. There was, of course, no evil intention behind all these gay goings on. But frivolity becomes dangerous when it involves fast and absurd expenditure—the Queen, for example, referred to a necklace worth, in today's money, fifty million francs as a 'bagatelle'."

"Was that the necklace in the famous Necklace Case?"

"Good heavens no! That one was worth one million, six hundred thousand livres—more than three hundred million of today's francs! I can't tell you the whole story—it would make a complete whodunit. Briefly, however, a certain adventuress, a Madame de la Motte (incidentally she was an authentic descendant of the Valois who had fallen on evil days and as a child had actually begged in the streets) had succeeded in persuading the pompous Cardinal de Rohan (who was in disgrace at the moment) that the Queen would be very grateful if he would buy the necklace for her."

"What—just like that—as a little gift?"

"No, no. Madame de la Motte, who had never seen the Queen, told him that the Queen hoped that the Cardinal would act on her behalf in the matter. She first gave him a letter bearing the forged signature of Marie Antoinette; then she arranged a rendezvous in the Venus spinney in the Versailles Park, where the credulous Cardinal fell at the feet of the Queen (it was actually one of the Palace wenches who was rather like her). Well, the Cardinal placed the order, and after some time had passed and he received no money to settle the account, the affair became known and created a great scandal. Not of his making, mark you, for all he wanted was the money to pay the bill, and he was quite prepared to hold his tongue. No, it was all the Queen's fault. The year was 1785, and on August 15th, which had become a great day of celebration at Court from the time



that Louis XII had placed the Crown and Kingdom under the protection of the Virgin, the Cardinal de Rohan was to celebrate mass at Versailles. He arrived in surplice and scarlet cassock, and was escorted straight to the King's study. In vain he explained everything that had occurred. Marie Antoinette was adamant and demanded that he be arrested, in front of the whole Court, as soon as he left the study. He was, of course, acquitted later, and Marie Antoinette became the laughing stock of public opinion. 'What a nice little bit of dirt on both crosier and sceptre,' exclaimed one member of Parliament gleefully."

*'I Foresee Nothing But Disaster in Your Life'*

"It had been Marie Antoinette's pride that had caused her humiliation. She had been determined to make a stir, and the King had acquiesced. The King always gave way to her, and when speaking she always referred to him as 'the poor man'. Her mother, the Empress, was horrified and wrote to Mercy, her Ambassador: 'My daughter seems to be unable to avoid hastening to her doom. What an attitude! What an astonishing frame of mind! It all only confirms my worst fears—she is heading straight for disaster, only too content to do so, provided that, in ruin, she can still preserve some semblance of the dignity due to her blood.'

"She, however, had no thought for anything but her own good pleasure; her mother, the Ambassador and her brother, the Emperor Joseph bombarded her ceaselessly with appeals for prudence: 'Why, my dear sister, do you allow yourself to become involved in the dismissal of Ministers, in fighting one man's battles against another, in putting the burden of further heavy expense on your Court? Have you ever asked yourself by what right you interfere in the affairs of the government of the French monarchy? Have you made a study of any particular aspect? Have you acquired any knowledge which allows you to presume that your opinion is of any value, particularly your opinion on matters which demand so wide a field of knowledge? You, a delightful young thing, with no thought for anything but frivolity and pleasures of the moment, you, who do not spend a quarter of an hour a month in serious reading or discussion, who, I am sure neither reflect nor meditate nor weigh the consequences of the things you say and do!' And Joseph concluded: 'Dimly and fearfully, I foresee nothing but disaster in your life.'"

*The Louis d'Or and the Potato*

"In actual fact, he foresaw, dimly or otherwise, exactly nothing of what was going to happen. No one foresaw the Revolution. There was a large number of us who wanted 'to see a change', because we felt 'things just

could not go on like this'; but not one of us thought for a moment that we should lose our King in the process."

"I know you were none of you Republicans," said Juliette. "Didn't you say that the monarchy really came to grief as the result of some sort of financial failure?"

"Historically that is strictly correct," replied Chronossus.

"But you also said that the country was on a wave of prosperity. I am quite prepared to take your word for it, but couldn't you show me a little of how it all worked?"

"Certainly—if, that is, you are prepared for me to fire off a lot of facts and figures at you."

"Go ahead!"

"First and foremost, one or two facts which will seem quite incredible to any Frenchman of the twentieth century. Under Louis XV and Louis XVI, for nearly three-quarters of a century, France did not suffer invasion, and her currency was not devalued!"

"Astounding!" exclaimed Juliette.

"That alone, I think, is enough to show that we were prosperous. But here are a few details. Prices rose consistently—and that is a sign of real wealth, provided that the currency does not at the same time decrease in value; the price of corn doubled, that of iron rose by thirty per cent, that of textiles by fifty-five per cent; overseas trading increased by five hundred per cent, and had risen, on the eve of the Revolution, to one thousand one hundred and fifty-three millions—a figure it would not approach again until 1835. Heavy industry had been started in the Creusot works in 1781. Industrialists were beginning to use those machines which were to lead to a revolution even bigger than the French Revolution. Millions were pouring into the limited companies; and in this guise the Princes and the Dukes consented at last (and with what enthusiasm!) to engage in commerce. The revenue received from the *ferme générale*—that is to say the contract made by the State with the financiers to whom they farmed out the rights of collecting indirect taxation—rose from ninety to two hundred and fifty millions. In 1788 the Finance Minister, Necker, estimated that France held one-half of the total currency of Europe."

"That disposes of the wealthy," said Juliette. "But what about prosperity among the poorer classes?"

"Sign number one—they started having more children. Between 1770 and 1789 the population rose from nineteen to twenty-seven million. There were still some classes, however, or rather, some categories who were still very badly off—those whose incomes did not go up with the general rise, the *rentiers*, the factory hands, and such of the farm labourers who

were not paid in kind. A textile worker, for example, who earned twenty-six sous a day and had to spend eighteen of them to feed himself, was thoroughly discontented; and so, of course, there were strikes, primarily in Lyons. That is the sombre side of the picture; but these shadows will become infinitely more widespread in the nineteenth century, in which the advent of machines was to crush the masses.

"As regards the peasants, their situation varied from district to district and I can't even begin to go into details. Let me content myself with saying that we had one agricultural revolution in the eighteenth century—the almost total elimination of fallow land."

"Ah!" said Juliette knowingly, "Fallow land—ye-es!"

"You know, of course, what that is?"

"To be honest—I haven't a clue!"

"Well—land is said to be lying fallow when, say, once in two or three years you plant nothing and give it a rest and time to recuperate. It was in the eighteenth century that we discovered that this was not necessary and that it sufficed to alternate crops which did not require the same chemical elements and the roots of which went down to different depths. Forgive these technical details, but this discovery did enable us to increase the area under cultivation by anything from a third to a half. And at the same time, we made two major acquisitions."

"I know," said Juliette. "Lorraine and Corsica."

"I was referring to the potato and the turnip. We knew about them, of course, but it was only the Béarnais, I think, who dared to eat potatoes. But Parmentier, when he came back from captivity in Prussia, assured us that the Germans ate masses of potatoes and were none the worse for it. Louis XVI himself set the example, and we all took the potato to our stomachs."

"The eighteenth century—the Century of Pompadour and the Potato," said Juliette.

"Exactly! And you can take my word for it that during this frivolous century the number of small-holdings in the hands of the peasants was quadrupled. And to come to the end of this statistical survey—when the Revolution came, the French peasants possessed more than half of our soil; the nobles held thirty per cent, the clergy six per cent, and the State and the *bourgeoisie* divided the rest between them.

"There were, of course, any number of contributory reasons for this happy state of affairs. But the most obvious and potent reason was that we were left to work in peace."

*For the King of Prussia*

"Hey!" cried Juliette. "What about Fontenoy? 'Gentlemen—have the

goodness to fire first!' and the Chevalier d'Assas? Have you forgotten them?"

"Of course not. The War of the Austrian Succession (1741-1748) and the Seven Years War (1756-1763) resulted in the disastrous Treaty of Paris. But they made no great impression either on our countryside or our towns, for they were not fought on our territory. In the former we fought with Prussia against Austria; in the latter against Prussia with Austria and Russia. In the former, the King of Prussia let us down; in the latter Russia abandoned the cause; and in both our philosophers applauded Frederick II as the prototype of an 'enlightened despot', without even suspecting that there could be anything in the nature of a Prussian peril. But Louis XV himself saw the danger, and he was about the only man who did. In 1757, for example, in the middle of the war and the year of the defeat at Rosbach, the various Parliaments actually encouraged the people not to pay their taxes.

"At the same time we were fighting the English—in India under Dupleix, and in Canada under Montcalm. The Treaty of Paris robbed us of both, but the people took it all very calmly and cared as little as Voltaire himself for the loss of 'these few acres of snow' and of 'territories so far away'.

"Choiseuil, a friend of Madame de Pompadour, undertook to restore our fallen fortunes. He gave us a new Navy, reorganised the Army and completely renovated our artillery. The Navy gave us the chance to take our revenge when the American colonies revolted against England—a revolt in which the 'French way of life' played every bit as big a role as La Fayette himself. The English, in fact, were defeated by the thing they detested most in all the world—new ideas; and the irony of it is that we had originally filched these new ideas from them! And the new artillery enabled us to pay the Prussians back in their own coin at Valmy."

### *Peasants and Men of Learning*

"The average Frenchman, the peasant, lived in a golden age in the eighteenth century. I wish you could have seen, in the establishment of old Restif de la Bretonne, the huge dining table, laid for twenty, with the master near the fire and his wife, Barbe, beside him and within easy reach of the various dishes, which she served with her own hand; then the children, seated according to their ages—fourteen of them; then the senior ploughman and his comrades, the cowman, the shepherd and the workers in the vine-yard; and finally, as the end of the table, the two servant girls. They all ate the same fare and the same white bread. But I need say no more. They lived more or less like those others whom you saw in another happy age at the time of the Renaissance on the old Squire of Gouberville's estates; and you can still see many like them today in some parts of the Vendée.

"I wonder if you know that on the eve of the Revolution quite a number of the nobility had turned 'progressive'. In their own way, they rediscovered their ancestral function and returned to the land; and great nobles, like the Duke of Rochefoucauld-Liancourt could be seen working hard at the scientific improvement of our methods of agriculture. The main impetus to these nation-wide efforts was given by our savants. You cannot imagine the tremendous enthusiasm with which the Frenchman of the eighteenth century leapt at this novelty—scientific knowledge. *La Spectacle de la Nature*, by the *Abbé* Pluche, was one of the best-sellers of the century; people fell over each other to attend courses in experimental physics; writers like Montesquieu, Diderot, Voltaire and d'Alembert prided themselves on being first and foremost men of science, and their Encyclopaedia was first and foremost a precious work of scientific documentation. I need only mention Lalande, Lagrange, Carnot and Lavoisier, the father of chemistry who, in 1793, at the moment when he was about to be guillotined, asked (without success) for a brief respite, to enable him to complete a certain experiment. Our Academy of Science evoked the admiration of the whole of Europe."

### *The Wall of Money*

"At that very moment, when France was active and flourishing, when Paris was gorged with wealth, the King was on the verge of bankruptcy, simply because the vast concourse of privileged persons refused to pay their taxes.

"Louis XVI left matters entirely in the hands of his Minister, Necker, a magician, so they said, who raised loans with such rapidity that out of a budgetary expenditure of six hundred millions, three hundred million went in paying the interest on the national debt! But everybody was perfectly happy, because he imposed no new taxes. Even the masses applauded this banker, the fellow who did exactly nothing to make the privileged classes pay their taxes!

"That was the crux of the whole question. Things like feudal rights and Church tithes were annoying and were absurd survivals which irritated the peasants, but did not crush them (they represented perhaps ten per cent of a peasant's income). Administration and the judicial system were terribly complicated, because France had been made up of bit after bit snatched from the old feudalism, and each fragment had preserved its own customs. All that, however, could easily have been cleared up and co-ordinated; and Louis XIV's and Louis XV's administrative officers could easily have done it. But the impassable barrier, the obstacle on which the monarchy foundered, was the wall of money. You remember Henry IV?"

"And how!" exclaimed Juliette. "The fellow who leapt over city walls wouldn't have been bothered much by a wall of money!"

"No—I don't suppose he would. But you will also remember that I told you how he had sold appointments by agreeing that they should become hereditary?"

"Yes, so you did! I'd forgotten that. I was thinking more of the *Vert Galant*."

"Well, anyway—as a result of that, there had sprung up in France a whole cohort of people who thought they could do exactly as they liked. And most of them were to be found in the various Parliaments."

"I know, I know," said Juliette. "And you'll be telling me next that the absolute monarchy was in reality a parliamentary régime."

"Not altogether, perhaps. But by resisting every type of reform, these parliamentarians, who were nearly all barristers and lawyers—in other words, all *bourgeois*—were pursuing but one object, a return to the good old days of feudal monarchy. When they babbled about 'parliamentary régime' what they really meant was feudalism; and the people, seeing them oppose the King, acclaimed and applauded them, without in the least having grasped the fact that when they talked of 'liberty' they meant 'privilege'. The whole world was upside down, and our little Fairy Princess Topsyturny, the Supreme Arbiter of Folly, had but little time left in which to flutter to the gentle air of a minuet.

"These parliamentarians—and there was a Parliament in every Province—were hereditary Judges, and nothing more. Gradually, however, they arrogated to themselves the right to disagree with the King and to prevent the collection of taxes and the implementation of royal edicts. In fact, they were for ever putting a spoke in the wheels.

"In 1749, Louis XV had decided to impose a tax of five per cent, on revenue (less those sums paid out in wages) derived from property. There was a general howl of protest, the various Parliaments adopted tactics of systematic obstruction and roused public opinion in the name of 'liberty'. Louis XV waited patiently for twenty years and then at the end of his life, he got a bit of a jolt. One fine day in 1770, his Chancellor, Maupeou, decided that the time had come to sweep away these rascally lawyers."

"What—just like that? Did he wake up one morning and say: 'Right! I'll do it today!' " asked Juliette.

"Not quite. But if you like, I'll give you the detailed story of the struggle between the King and the Parliaments."

"Heaven forbid!"

"Very well—then let me just say that Louis XV was extremely intelligent, knew exactly what he wanted, but laid very great store on his own peace and quiet."

"Everybody, of course, knows his famous words: '*Après moi, le déluge!*'"

"Which he never said. Anyway, he decided to support Maupeou by the simple expedient of dissolving all the Parliaments, relieving the members of their duties and packing them off to the country for a change of air. He replaced them by selected and salaried magistrates; and to ensure their independence he made their appointments permanent; but the appointments could not be bought and they were not hereditary. He then invited his new judicial officers to get on with their jobs without charge, for, he said (and you can imagine what a revolution this was) justice would henceforth be dispensed free of charge! And that, of course, put an end to all the little 'perks' and the spokes in the wheels."

"And everything was tidied up and taken care of?"

"For the moment. But in 1774 when he came to the throne, the very first thing that blockhead Louis XVI did, egged on, of course, by the aristocrats at Court, was to dismiss Maupeou and recall the old gang. 'What,' he asked idiotically, 'did my nobles, the Provincial States and the Parliaments do to deserve dismissal?' And if he really didn't know, he jolly soon found out.

"One thing I have never understood, however, is what on earth possessed him to send at once and at the same time for that really honest reformer, Turgot. Not that it mattered much, for he was dismissed two years later, in 1776, at the instigation of Marie Antoinette, who, if she had had her way, would have flung him into the Bastille, if you please!

"Still—there you are! The road to revolution is paved with good intentions. At the slightest sign of any attempt to make the privileged classes pay their dues, the Parliament in Paris thundered, the clergy screamed that 'even in a country whose people are plunged deep in the shadows of idolatry, the property of the Church is sacred', the Courtiers in Versailles yelled and squealed—and Louis XVI begged everybody's pardon.

"In 1787, when the court was on the brink of bankruptcy, when *La Reine Déficit* was being hissed off the stage at the Opera, Brienne made a last attempt to reduce the scandalous allowances being paid to the Queen's favourites. and the foremost of these gentlemen, Bisenval, fired off the following masterpiece at Marie Antoinette:

'Madame,

'It is terrible to live in a country in which one is not certain of possessing tomorrow what one went to bed with today. Such things can happen only in Turkey.'

"Such things—and more—were about to happen in France, too. Very soon there was cause to mourn for those flighty heads, flying off before a tornado of fury and torment."

*The reform movement which started in good will burst into Revolution which then degenerates into the Reign of Terror.* THE REVOLUTION. THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY. May 5th A.D. 1789—*Opening of the States General*; June 17th A.D. 1789—*The Third Estate transformed into The National Assembly*; June 20th A.D. 1789—*The Jeu de Paume oath*; July 14th A.D. 1789—*Storming of the Bastille*; August 4th A.D. 1789—*Abolition of privilege*; October 5th–6th A.D. 1789—*The King brought back to Paris*; July 14th A.D. 1790—*Fête of the Federation*; June 20th A.D. 1791—*Flight of the King. Varennes*; THE LEGISLATURE 1791–1792. August 10th A.D. 1792—*Fall of the Crown*; September 2nd–5th A.D. 1792—*September massacres*; September 20th A.D. 1792—*Valmy*; THE CONVENTION 1792–1795. September 22nd A.D. 1792—*Proclamation of the Republic*; January 21st A.D. 1793—*Death of Louis XVI*; July 27th A.D. 1794—*Thermidor 9. End of the Reign of Terror*; *The Republic annexes Belgium and the estuary of the Scheldt. An intolerable situation from the English point of view. Bonaparte, Master of War, in spite of himself, chases from victory to victory, after peace. Waterloo.* THE DIRECTORY 1795–1799. A.D. 1796–1797—*Bonaparte, Italian Campaign*; A.D. 1798–1799—*Egyptian campaign*; November 9th A.D. 1799—*Brumaire 18*; THE CONSULSHIP 1799–1804. A.D. 1801—*Treaty of Luneville with Austria*; A.D. 1802—*Treaty of Amiens with England*; THE FIRST EMPIRE 1804–1815. December 2nd A.D. 1804—*Napoleon becomes Emperor*; A.D. 1805—*Austerlitz, but also Trafalgar*; A.D. 1806—*Jena. Blockade of Continent*; A.D. 1812—*The Russian campaign*; A.D. 1813—*The campaign in Germany*; A.D. 1814—*The campaign in France. Napoleon to Elba. First Treaty of Paris*; A.D. 1814–1815—*First Restoration*; A.D. 1815—*The Hundred Days. Napoleon to Saint Helena. Second Treaty of Paris.*



*La Carmagnole and La Marseillaise*

"FOR our New Year's gift in 1789 Louis XVI made us a present of the Revolution. He didn't know what he was doing, of course, nor did we. No one doubted that things would be satisfactorily settled—why, the King had even convened the States General! In Arras, a local lawyer, Robespierre, was shouting from the roof-tops that Louis XVI was a godsend; there were touching scenes, much mutual embracing and torrents of tears *à la mode* Jean-Jacques Rousseau."

"As a prelude to the shedding of torrents of blood," observed Juliette. "All those heads!" she added with a sigh.

"Two thousand eight hundred in Paris," said Chronossus with the air of a precise statistician, "and fourteen thousand in the provinces."

"Sixteen thousand eight hundred poor little aristocrats," said Juliette with a shudder, "what a horror!"

"What an error!" retorted Chronossus. "As you will probably find the tumbling of commoners' heads less painful to contemplate, let me tell you that details of the social status and professions of twelve thousand of those executed were carefully kept; seven thousand, five hundred and forty-five were labourers, farm hands, artisans and small shopkeepers. But you, Madame, have eyes only for Marie Antoinette."

"And the Princess de Lamballe," said Juliette.

"Practically the only great name among the eleven hundred massacred in September '93. The vast majority were poor devils taken haphazard from the prisons."

"Tell me this," said Juliette sharply. "Were all aristocrats suspect or not? Was a title a sure pass to the guillotine?"

"How could it have been otherwise, since the aristocracy was the symbol of privilege and oppression? Even so, that held good only during the Reign of Terror from October '93 to July '94. That, I grant you, was a very ticklish period. I was suspect myself. I certainly saw some deplorable sights. But—put yourself in my place! I had lived in Paris under the

alternating tyrannies of the Armagnacs and the Burgundians; I had seen the Black Death, the Saint Bartholomew's day massacres and the massacre of the Albigeois. And after all those horrors, your Revolution was like a Church Bazaar squabble."

"But you can't deny that it was the greatest event in the history of France?"

"Nonsense! Of course it wasn't! Believe me, it was just a little blood-letting, and nothing more."

"And what about the Declaration of the Rights of Man—didn't that reverberate throughout the world?"

"And how! To such purpose that its reverberations, unfortunately are audible to this day!"

"All right! Now tell me how everything happened."

"It all happened during five rather humdrum years with a few high lights—a few red-letter days."

"And you yourself, the suspect, the *ci-devant*, what did you do during all that time?"

"I just went on living."

"In terror of your life?"

"Good lord, no! You know, you've got an *idée fixe* on the subject of terror! As a matter of fact I didn't fare too badly. I'll tell you what I saw, if you like."

"I'm certainly most curious to know," said Juliette. "Well—what did you see?"

"Nothing to speak of," replied Chronossus.

### *They Took Me to the Bastille*

"I saw some tumbrels. I was in the front row of the stalls. I had taken refuge in the *Rue Saint Honoré*, close to the corner of the *Rue Royale*—I beg your pardon—the *Rue Nationale*, where they used to turn to get to the guillotine, the two red arms of which towered upwards in the *Place Louis XV*—dear me, again I must beg your pardon—I mean, of course, the *Place de la Révolution*, which we now call the *Place de la Concorde*."

"To remove the traces of blood," said Juliette.

"From a little window on the first floor—it was Number 404 and I think it still exists, with a quite unmistakable depressed archway—I was just on a level with Marie Antoinette's head when she was taken to her execution."

"Tell me about it," said Juliette.

"All in good time. For the moment she is still in Versailles, while I passed my days in the house of my draper friend, a very agreeable little

widow, incidentally. Oh! I ought to have said that after the taking of the Bastille I had found myself without a roof over my head."

"D'you mean you—"

"Were put into the Bastille? Oh yes, rather! But for very trumped up reasons, as a matter of fact. I was head over heels in debt, like so many gentlemen who were not well in with the Court, and my creditors had got me on a *lettre de cachet*. Oh, I don't complain. In those days, a gentleman could always find someone willing to lend him money, particularly in the Bastille, where the Governor was there just for that purpose; I took a few bits and pieces of furniture with me to make my room look presentable, and we used to play cards, entertain each other to rather *recherché* little supper parties and discuss new ideas with the Marquis de Sade—quite freely and without fear; for in prison, of course, one was quite safe from persecution.

"At the end of June, we heard that the Third Estate had sworn to give France a constitution and that the States General had been transformed into a National Assembly. Everything seemed to be going very well. And then, quite suddenly, the people of Paris began to get really excited. Why? you'll never guess! Because the King had dismissed Necker! Yes—Necker, the banker who had led our finances into bankruptcy and who had not dared to impose taxes on the rich! The Parisians adored the man, and they actually paraded through the streets carrying his bust, draped with black crepe! We heard, too, a rumour that the troops commanded by Besenval had been ordered to 'wipe out the patriots' and that they had been stoned in the *Place Louis XV*.

"In the gardens of the *Palais Royal*, which had become a sort of open-air club under the protection of the Duke of Orleans (the future *Philippe Egalité* and at the time Grand Master of the Freemasons and leader of the opposition), Camille Desmoulins stood on a chair and shouted: 'To arms! To Arms!' The crowd then rushed off to the *Invalides*, where they stole rifles and cannons; but they could not find enough powder, for the stocks had been removed to the fortress of the Bastille. That, then, was how the first of those Parisian riots started, which led to the French Revolution. The rest you know.

"On July 14th 1789<sup>1</sup> I found myself out on my ear in the street."

"Poor Monsieur Chronossus!" said Juliette. "I can sympathise. I know what it is to be without a roof over one's head. But do tell me about the Bastille."

"Well, I went back there the next day. But my quarters, alas, had already been transformed into a builder's yard. There was a fellow there

<sup>1</sup> Storming of the Bastille.

named Palloy, a builder and a very slick talker. I had noticed him the day before. He had picked up a red bonnet with a bullet hole through it and stuck it on his head, and while the Parisian mob was waxing delirious over the head of our good Governor, which had been mounted on a pike, the wily Palloy had been casting an expert eye over the building. When next I saw him, he was back there at work with his men, gathering up a mass of building material—without any authority, of course, but just off his own bat. When he was asked what he thought he was doing, he replied that his name had been inscribed at the *Hôtel de Ville* on the list of the six hundred who had taken part in the assault—which was perfectly true, except that he had only joined the gallant six hundred after it was all over. (The Bastille, you know, was taken in forty-five minutes.) He had produced his battle-scarred bonnet and had at once been given authority to demolish the Bastille. So back he had come—this time with eight hundred workmen. Even then, however, he wasn't satisfied. With great solemnity he asked Mirabeau and Beaumarchais to cast down the first stones from the battlements; his builder's yard became one of the sights of Paris, and all the Parisians deemed it an honour to go along and be allowed to dislodge a few stones for Palloy. From some of the stones he had rough models of the Bastille cut, and these he graciously presented to the various Municipalities, which declared themselves delighted to be the recipients of these 'remnants of barbarism'.<sup>1</sup>

"All this long rigmarole is only my way of telling you that my little linen draper was very kind to me and had offered me board and lodging."

### *The Revolution is Ended*

"But, tell me," said Juliette. "As a *ci-devant*, one who had been flung into the Bastille, weren't you fêted as a popular hero?"

"Don't talk about it!" cried Chronossus. "There were only seven of us in the Bastille. Yes, really! that's all there were, and of them four were mad and were quickly re-incarcerated. With my own peculiarities, I was very frightened lest my own particular brand of immortality should get known and I be shut up again—and this time not in a prison *de luxe*! But public imagination was disappointed in us, and we very rapidly passed into oblivion. I was soon able to go out again and once more go to a café—that was another eighteenth-century invention which I haven't mentioned before. There were six hundred cafés in Paris, and they were most useful for the propagation of new ideas and false news. When I did not

<sup>1</sup> With some of his loot he built himself a mansion in Sceaux. It is still there—No. 35 Rue des Imbergères. Every bit of it is guaranteed to be genuine, right down to the bolts on the doors and the stone table, which had stood on "the tower of liberty" (so called, because the prisoners were allowed to take the air there and could admire the fine view).

bother to go as far as the *Procope*, the literary café on the left bank, or to the *Régence*, the haunt of the philosophers and the chess players, I used to go to a little place beside the Saint Roche church, where they made you feel very much at home. It was when I was there, three weeks after the fall of the Bastille, that I heard that our Deputies of the nobility and the Church had spent the night of August 4th stripping themselves of the privileges which had caused all the trouble—the accumulated harvest of centuries of feudalism all swept away in a moment of exuberant enthusiasm.”<sup>1</sup>

“What—just like that, in a single night?”

“Just like that. The taking of the Bastille was a powder train that fired emulation all over the countryside, where the local Bastilles, the *châteaux*, were stormed to the accompaniment of quite a number of conflagrations and bonfires of feudal charters. Driven to it by ‘supreme fear’ the privileged classes, as such, committed *hara-kiri*, casting all their privileges to the slaughter in one single night—even to the right of one Breton noble to disembowel two of his vassals when returning from the hunt, in order to ease his fatigue by laving his feet in their bleeding entrails! The human boot-muff had been abolished—and a good job too! And the Revolution was ended.

“At least, the Parisians thought so. Meanwhile, however, Mirabeau was saying; ‘When one gets mixed up in running a revolution, it is not the starting of the thing that is difficult, but keeping it within bounds once it has started.’”

### *Respectful Tokens of Affection*

“There had been study groups more or less all over France to get it started. They were composed of enlightened people, fired with new ideas, who met to discuss liberty.”

“Freemasons, weren’t they?” asked Juliette.

“Many of them were—but by no means all. They were the progressives who had been saying for years that things would have to be changed. They based their demands, very properly, on logic and reason, but it was by public passions that they were put into effect—and with rather more thoroughness than the planners had bargained for!

“While we ordinary folk enjoyed the refreshing sweetness of the autumn, others were getting really worked up, and as 1788 had been a very bad harvest year, there was not overmuch to eat in Paris in 1789;

<sup>1</sup> After they had calmed down again, they tried to draw a distinction between the rights which had been suppressed and those which could be re-purchased; but the course of revolutionary events swept away these pretensions, and the collapse of our paper money finally buried them.

then, one fine day in October, a horde of women set out to fetch bread from Versailles and came back with 'the baker, his wife and the baker's little boy'. It was a strange procession of bawling, howling, bare-breasted harpies that escorted Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette to the *Tuileries*.

"Now they were in the very midst of their people, and the next day Louis XVI issued a proclamation saying how pleased he was to have come to the capital 'to receive the respectful tokens of the affection and fidelity of its inhabitants'. This time, the Revolution really was ended."

### *The Revolution's Brief Hour*

"As far as I myself was concerned, I'd finished with the Revolution, and finished, too, with the short coat, knee-breeches and white socks. I put on my round hat, my frock coat and satin pantaloons.

"As for the women, they had adopted a sort of uniform, all tricolour. There were no more panniers, but simple dresses that fell straight and were fluted in red, white and blue, or were generously garnished with little red, white and blue rosettes. Very soon, the *costume à la Constitution* and the *négligé à la patriote* made their appearance. You would have been regarded as being most improperly dressed, if you had appeared in colours *cheveux de la reine* or *caca dauphin*.

"Otherwise, there was plenty of fun to be had. The theatres were full, though the audiences were not of very high class. In one theatre I saw a notice: 'Gentlemen are requested to remove their hats and to refrain from relieving themselves in the boxes.' (That, after all, was only an old established Versailles custom.)

"On July 14th 1790 we had a great celebration, the *Fête de la Fédération*, that is to say, a fête given by the municipalities elected in '89 and the National Guard, who had been amalgamated into '*fédérations*' for 'the defence of the country and liberty'. There were about fifty thousand of them. Where they were all to be housed nobody quite knew. But it was all good for business and particularly good business for the ladies of Cythera, who swarmed in the arcades of the *Palais Royal*. Whether it was a publicity stunt or really a measure designed to protect the yokels' purses, I don't know, but the fact remains that there were street criers, some of them little urchins of seven or eight, who proclaimed the 'tariffs of the girls of the *Palais Royal* and neighbouring districts and other places in Paris', complete with their names and addresses. Actually, there were only seventy-two names on the list, which leads me to the conclusion that its primary object must have been publicity. Madame Dupeyron charged twenty-five livres; Victorine asked six livres and a bowl of punch; the same price held good for la Paysanne, but prospective clients were warned

that she spent most of the night fast asleep; la Bacchante was a superb girl with a flashing eye, a body quivering with nervous energy and a luxuriant mass of hair, but she was very weak in her adherence to the principles of equality—her charge was six livres for lads of eighteen to twenty and twelve for the old 'uns.

"That day, I really did believe that Louis XVI had taken Mirabeau's warning to heart. 'There is no doubt that a complete revolution is essential,' declared Mirabeau, 'and the nation undoubtedly has rights and is well on the road to obtaining them all.' The Crown, by tradition, had always placed its trust in the people and had defended them against feudalism. 'The indivisibility of the monarchy and the people is in every Frenchman's heart,' Mirabeau had added. Had Louis XVI forgotten that? He now swore that he would respect the constitution, and the citizens embraced each other and assured one another that the Revolution was at an end."

#### *Liberty, Equality and Fraternity*

"The constitution corresponded very closely to our aspirations and very obviously embraced everything that we had been hoping for. I, who had seen so many examples of royal wisdom in kingly dealings with the masses, simply could not conceive that Louis XVI had not understood. But alas! after Louis XIV the Bourbons seemed to have lost all contact with the public pulse.

"You were talking a moment ago about the Rights of Man. The essential principles, which have spread over the whole world and according to which we regulate our lives to this day, were enunciated between '89 and '91 by the Constituent Assembly. They were: a sovereign State which enacts laws and controls finance; liberty, of thought and of speech for the individual; justice free of charge; universal taxation; office under the State open to all, and so on. The King reserved the executive power and the right of veto.

"For the people there still remained much to be done. For the King too much had been done already. Even so, it is quite possible that he would have kept his oath of fidelity to the constitution but for the legislation which nationalised the Church (Church property was sequestered by the State and the clergy were to be paid by the State). For when it came to deporting recalcitrant priests, the pious Louis XVI found himself face to face with a problem of conscience and imposed his veto. Then realising his own impotence and regarding himself as a prisoner, he fled with his family on June 21st 1791. He was arrested in Varennes and brought back to Paris amid a volley of hoots and jeers."

"And was then shut up in the Temple prison?" asked Juliette.

"No, not yet. You see, our *bourgeois* Assembly did not yet dare to go as far as that. After the Assembly had completed its work on the constitution but before it went into recess, the King very cleverly managed to patch up a reconciliation and came forward, prepared to renew his oath. Everybody firmly believed in this reconciliation. 'The Revolution is at an end,' declared the King. 'Let the nation resume its happy character!'"

*The Crown Falls in a Pool of Blood*

"It was just this 'happy character' that was destined to precipitate matters. From that moment events galloped ahead, and we galloped after them in a vain attempt to keep up. The country slid to the left with the speed of an avalanche, and those who went to bed staunch revolutionaries awoke the next morning to find themselves flabby reactionaries. When the Legislative Assembly re-assembled in the autumn of 1791, the Girondins were at the extreme Left. Very soon the *Commune* overtook and passed them and then overthrew the monarchy on August 10th 1792. The massacres in September 1792 were provoked by Danton. And in the Convention elected in the same month, the Girondins found themselves once more on the extreme Right. Very soon we shall see Robespierre sending the Girondins like the 'indulgent' Danton to the guillotine. And Robespierre himself. . . ."

"Ah!" exclaimed Juliette. "We haven't seen much of him yet."

"Well, you see, the guillotine had only just been tried out at that very moment, on April 25th 1792 by Doctor Guillotin. He had popped up just in the nick of time. No guillotine, no Robespierre. Honeyed words and a clean cut were his speciality. Street fighting, pikes and lusty exchanges of sabre blows were dog-fights in which our little lawyer did not feel at all at ease; but he was first class at fomenting them behind the scenes—in the clubs which he used for 'working up hatred' among the people. Talleyrand would have put it more elegantly—'rousing the people before making use of them'.

"That tenth day of August, which marks the decisive turning point of the Revolution, had had its broad counterpart on June 20th. On that latter day, in the *Tuileries* into which the mob had burst, Louis XVI had donned a red bonnet and drunk a toast to the nation with the rioters; but he had stuck to his guns and had refused to withdraw his veto on the law against recalcitrant clergy. The *Commune* and the Jacobins roused their factions and called in confederates from the provinces—mostly from Brest and Marseilles. The latter brought with them a battle-hymn which they called the *Marseillaise*. Robespierre printed the petitions which the confederates wished to present and in which they demanded the dismissal of the King. Immediately afterwards, on August 1st, two days after the *Marseillaise*,



there arrived the famous manifesto from the Duke of Brunswick, the Prussian Commander-in-Chief, which declared that any Frenchman 'who dared to defend himself' against the invaders would be punished as a rebel, that should the King again be subjected to indignities in the *Tuileries* Paris would be subjected to 'military execution' and 'total subversion'. To rodomontades of that kind there could be only one possible answer. The Jacobins gave it. They cut the bridges and they chopped off heads.

"On August 10th 1792 the mob, in a frenzy of fury, broke down the railings, massacred the Swiss guards, poured into the *château* and broke up everything they could lay their hands on. Men were hurled alive out of the windows to become impaled on the pikes below; naked bodies were piled in heaps on the pavements, set afire and grilled like cutlets; from among the Swiss, the Palace servants and pages there were nine hundred corpses.

"It was then that the King, who had taken refuge in the Assembly, was incarcerated, with his family, in the Temple prison. The Crown had fallen, and the Revolution found itself involved in a merciless civil war.

"You will probably find it hard to believe, but even these great upheavals had no effect whatever on our gay and carefree life. Two days after the riots I was walking in the *Tuileries*; the gardens were just as clean and just as full of well-dressed, smiling people as before.

"Three weeks later we had the September massacres."

"And it was then," interrupted Juliette, "that the Princess Lamballe. . ."

"Yes," replied Chronossus. "And that was one of the most atrocious spectacles of the whole Revolution."

### *Release Madame!*

"For as long as they continued to do these unfortunate wretches to death within the prison walls, we didn't think much about it. As a matter of fact, nearly all Parisians thought that it was probably the right thing to do, for Danton had filled their heads with stories of royalist plots being concocted in the prison cells—and the people firmly believed in them. Take my landlady's little apprentice, Victoire, for example. Victoire was a delightful child of thirteen, and she was terrified out of her life at the thought that the royalists were about to burst out of prison and murder her. Throughout the three days during which the massacres continued, from September 2nd to September 5th, she became visibly more and more relieved and went more and more happily about her tasks. The weather was delightful. Ah! If only she had been a little less innocent, if only she had had a taste for blood like those fishwives. If she had gone with them to the spectacle staged in the Abbaye prison in Saint Germain-des-Prés, she would have seen the prisoners emerging one by one under the impression

that they had been released, only to find themselves hounded between two hedges of killers recruited from the slaughter houses and armed with vicious knives. Benches had been put out for the convenience of the female spectators, for it was the women who were the most avid to witness this gruesome spectacle, and when darkness fell, a small light was fixed on the head of each victim, so that nothing should be missed of the beauty of the sight."

"And the Princess Lamballe?" asked Juliette.

"She was in La Force prison, and was arraigned before a court improvised in the prison itself.

"Who are you?"

"Marie Louise de Savoie-Carignan, Princess Lamballe,' she murmured and fainted.

"Guards roughly revived her.

"Swear that you will love liberty and equality and take an oath of hatred against the King, the Queen and the Crown.'

"The former I will gladly do,' replied the Princess, 'but the latter I cannot do, for it is not in my heart.'

"The President of the court rose and smiled.

"Release Madame!' he ordered.

"That was the euphemistic formula—'release Madame'. The Princess was dragged out into the street—a street piled high with a mountain of horribly mutilated corpses. 'Oh! how horrible!' shuddered the poor woman. A sword struck her on the back of the neck. She tottered and all but fell. Then she was dragged forward, staggering, until she crashed to the ground pierced again and again by the pikes and the knives of the mob. At once the disembowellers got to work. They stripped off her clothing decapitated her, tore out her heart and wrenched off her sexual organs. Three of them seized these three poor pieces of bleeding flesh and stuck them on pikes, while a fourth fashioned for himself a handsome moustache from tufts of her hair. Two robust and jovial rascals, having gleefully smeared themselves in her blood, then attached themselves to the truncated corpse, and the whole joyous band set out for the Temple prison to show the Queen what remained of her friend. On the way they forced a barber to dress the hair and powder the face of the severed head. At the Temple prison the guards succeeded, albeit with difficulty, in preventing this gruesome masquerade from being seen by the Queen.

"Next the band set off towards the *Palais Royal*, where the Duke of Orleans, the Princess' brother-in-law, the fellow who now called himself *Philippe Egalité*, lived. The poor corpse went bumping over the pavement. Philip was at the table with his mistress. Attracted by the yells and shouts,

they came out on to the balcony and found themselves literally face to face with the Princess' head. Philip, pale with terror, raised his hand in salute. The poltroon's turn would come, however, in spite of all his cowardly wriggling, after he had cast his vote in favour of the death of his cousin, the King."

*Joliclerc, a Volunteer of '92*

"In the meanwhile, the Assembly had declared 'the country in danger'. Danton launched his slogan; '*De l'audace, encore de l'audace, toujours de l'audace!*' To invent royalist plots in the prisons in order to be able to massacre a whole concourse of innocents was certainly audacity—of a sort; but on the frontiers there were soldiers who displayed audacity of a much more admirable character.

"You have heard of the victory at Valmy on September 20th 1792? I myself did not then know that at that very moment Marie Antoinette was writing: 'We have no longer any resources other than the help of foreign Powers. They must at all costs come to our rescue.' And, indeed, she called for help from her Austrian family."

"It is true, then, that she did betray France?" asked Juliette.

"There is no doubt about it," replied Chronossus, "and she did so continually from 1790 onwards. There you have the last example of that old idea that originated with Clovis—that the King owned his kingdom in the same way as any landowner owned his land; and when your serfs revolted, you called on your cousin in the neighbouring *château* to come and give you a hand.

"The soldiers of Valmy, however, had just evolved something else, patriotism. While the politicians were abandoning themselves to the most heart-rending demagogy, the best elements in the country had taken up arms under the leadership of Carnot, the 'organiser of victory'. My little friend Victoire had an admirer in this army, who wrote her some really jolly letters. She was very proud of them and sometimes gave them to me to read. Here are the sort of things which he wrote:

"It is a family characteristic of us Joliclercs that we walk "with a broad and rolling gait". As far as I am concerned, I must thank nature for the fact, for without my bandy legs I should have been lost. A bullet, which killed the man just behind me, passed between my thighs and did me no more harm beyond a slight graze on both thighs just above my knees. That's why I am here now. I have been evacuated from the hospitals in Lille and Arras and was brought to this place in a carriage. But I don't expect to stay here long. I am well on the road to complete recovery, and I expect to rejoin the battalion within a few days.'

“And later, ‘We have covered four hundred leagues from Landau to Dunkirk and from Dunkirk to Amiens, and I myself have done about sixty leagues more in various detours. In spite of it all I feel fine. I have a tremendous appetite, and my rations slip down like a single mouthful.’

“Another time he wrote very cheerfully:

“‘A bullet has given me a smack on the nose. As the darn thing was always a bit too bulbous, I’ve been relieved of what was superfluous, and as far as I can see, I shall finish well up on the deal. From a shop I took a pair of hose, two shirts and a pair of stockings, and when I get back from this place I shall take another pair of stockings, a pair of shoes, some gaiters, a shirt, a coat and a waistcoat. I shall need these for the winter. I also ought to have a hat.’ And he finished up with the delightful sentiment: ‘Good old Nation—I’m waxing fat on it!’”

### *The Death of Louis XVI*

“On September 22nd 1792, two days after the battle of Valmy, the Republic was proclaimed, and very shortly afterwards the Assembly passed a resolution condemning Louis XVI to death. The Convention—that was the name given to our new Assembly—debated for seventy-two hours before voting on the resolution.

“The public galleries were full of Parisians, who really seemed to have no idea of what it was all about. The end of the hall had been transformed into boxes, and in them sat the ladies, dressed in their most charming *négligés*, eating ices and oranges and drinking liqueurs. The Deputies strolled from box to box, greeting their lady friends, and the Assembly attendants assumed the role of ushers in a theatre, obsequiously opening the doors of the reserved galleries and gallantly ushering into their places the mistresses of the Duke of Orleans, all gaily decked out in tricolour ribbons. Although the public had been expressly forbidden to give vent to any expression of either approbation or disapproval, the Amazons seated on the *Montagne* side—as the place occupied by the extremists was called—among the Jacobin ranks growled a long and disappointed ‘Ah!’ whenever the word ‘death’ failed to reverberate through the hall.

“The upper galleries, which were open to the general public, were well patronised by foreigners from all over Europe and from all stations of life, drinking and chatting, and giving the place the air of a jovial smoking-room. In the neighbouring *cafés*, betting *touts* had set up shop and wagers were being briskly laid.

“One after the other, the Deputies advanced to the rostrum. When it came to the turn of the King’s cousin, even the harpies paused in their knitting and were silent. From his pocket he pulled a piece of crumpled

paper and read aloud: 'Actuated solely by my sense of duty and convinced that all those who in the past have criminally opposed the sovereignty of the people, or who may intend to do so in the future, deserve to die, I cast my vote in favour of death.'

"The Assembly listened in stupefied silence. Then an angry and scandalised murmur filled the hall. When Philip had regained his place, Danton turned to Robespierre.

"'The miserable wretch!' he exclaimed in tones of icy disdain, 'Of all people he at least could with impunity have refused to vote, and he did not dare to do so!'

"Of the seven hundred and one Deputies present, three hundred and fifty-one voted for an *unconditional* death sentence,<sup>1</sup> and the King was condemned to death by a majority of one—the vote of his own cousin.

"Louis XVI was taken to his execution on January 21st 1793, in a Paris that had been filled with troops."

"Was he, too, taken in a tumbrel?" asked Juliette.

"No. They at least did him the honour of driving him to the guillotine in a carriage. An air of gloom and dejection hung over the streets, and the journey from the Temple prison to the *Place de la Révolution* took an hour and a half. Drums beat continuously to drown the voices of those here and there in the crowd who had the courage to cry out: 'Have mercy! Reprieve him!' They continued to beat as the King, having mounted the scaffold, wished to speak. 'People! I am innocent,' we heard, but the rest was drowned in the rumble of the drums.<sup>2</sup>

"In the cafés the logicians agreed that, when all was said and done, he was only a man like everybody else, but equally everybody was now agreed that he was a good man. It is true that he was but a man, but he was

<sup>1</sup> Twenty-six others had voted in favour of death, but with a proviso that sentence should be deferred.

<sup>2</sup> It is here appropriate to take up once again the story of the Templars. It will be remembered that the Grand Master had pronounced a curse and that forty Templars, taking the secrets of their order with them, escaped to England, where they were responsible for the birth of the Rosicrucians and of Freemasonry.

Freemasonry came to us from England in 1730, and its members worked indefatigably to bring about the downfall of the monarchy. In 1771 *Philippe Egalité*, who was then Duke of Chartres, was elected Grand Master. It is said that at his initiation, in a grotto containing a small assortment of bones, he was called upon to stab a puppet and then to cut off its head. The puppet was said to represent Philip the Fair, and the bones were those of Jacques de Molay.

As far as Robespierre, the main instigator of Louis XVI's execution, is concerned, he was known as Rosati in Arras and was probably a Rosicrucian. (In this connection it is interesting to note that in the list of Rosicrucians in Arras, only one page has been torn out—that containing the names beginning with R.)

Finally, when Louis XVI's head rolled into the basket an unknown man in the crowd shouted: "That is Jacques de Molay's vengeance!" These facts, alas, have never been proved, but they at least give food for thought on the longevity of a dream.

also the rallying point for twenty-seven million other men, and France was dumbfounded and stricken deep with grief."<sup>1</sup>

### *The Spring of the Reign of Terror*

"On that day, people crept quietly about, hardly daring to meet each other's eyes. The few intervening weeks passed, and spring was upon us, the spring of the Year of Terror and one of the most delightful springs that I can remember. The *Champs Elysées* presented a charming sight; aristocrats, *bourgeois* and little working girls abandoned themselves to the caresses of the balmy zephyrs, with never a thought for the guillotine, which raised its great arms to the sky at the bottom of the handsome avenue.

"Even so, life was rather difficult. . . ."

"Especially for those who were guillotined," observed Juliette. "You use some queer expressions, Monsieur Chronossus."

"I know, I know. But I was thinking rather of those of us who were alive. In February, we queued for sugar; in May and June we had to queue for bread; and the bread queues continued into August, because it was so terribly hot that there was not enough water to turn the mills. And at the butchers' shops there were queues all the time, because the peasants of the Vendée had risen in revolt."

"They certainly had!" interjected Juliette. "For the moment I thought you must have forgotten that they rose as soon as the King had been executed."

"Me—forget them? The people who used to send us six hundred head of cattle a day and then suddenly sent us exactly nothing? Rather not! I certainly haven't forgotten the war in the Vendée. Particularly as the 'Vendéens' also included the Bretons, and Lyons, Bordeaux and Toulon were in the hands of the Federalists, that is, the Girondins, those revolutionaries who were now moderates, who had carried out the first phase of the revolution and whom Robespierre was about to liquidate."

### *Charlotte Corday of the Pink Silk Scarf*

"Before that, however, it was one of the most ferocious of all the *Montagnards*, the extremists, who was among the first to depart from this world. On the evening of July 13th 1793, a young *Girondine* knocked at Marat's door—Marat, the man who was called 'Friend of the People' after the name of his newspaper, in which he vociferously demanded social equality and screamed out threats of death. Marat was in his hip-bath, his head swathed in vinegar compresses, attending to the skin disease which

<sup>1</sup> Mourning took unexpected forms. Royalists painted their furniture black. In the Midi, cypresses were planted in a semi-circle, with seats where one could sit and meditate. (A mausoleum would have been compromising.)

was ravaging his body. Charlotte Corday, on the pretext that she wished to disclose the details of a Girondin plot, succeeded in persuading him to receive her in the bathroom.

"Charlotte was a great niece of Corneille. She possessed great beauty, but beauty of a grave and resolute kind, worthy of the heroine of one of her great-uncle's epics. For the accomplishment of her act of self-sacrifice, she had prepared herself as Judith had done for Holophernes. Dressed in a spotted frock, she had placed green ribbons in her hat and had thrown a pink scarf around her shoulders; a coiffeur had dressed her ash-blonde hair most beautifully, and now she found herself face to face with 'that monster athirst for blood'. Gently, she used her fan in the malodorous air of the bathroom. Her knife was concealed in her pink scarf.

"Marat demanded to know the names of 'the enemies of the *patrie*'. Quite calmly, Charlotte gave him the names of a number of her own friends—so certain was she that when she left him, he would no longer be alive!

"'Good,' grunted Marat. 'I'll have the whole lot guillotined as soon. . . .'

"His voice rose to a scream and then sank to a death rattle as the knife plunged to its hilt into his chest, severing the carotid artery. A gush of blood tinged the water of his bath and spurted over the floor and walls of the bathroom.

"Charlotte withdrew the knife, placed it on the side of the hip-bath and unhurriedly left the room. But she did not get far.

"The neighbourhood had been alerted, and the mob rushed into the *Rue des Cordeliers* (now the *Rue de l'Ecole de Medicine*). In Marat's own apartment, two of his friends interrogated her.

"'You will lose your head on the scaffold, you wretched woman,' cried Chabot, a defrocked and lascivious Capucin.

"'That I know full well,' replied Charlotte in a steady voice.

"Her hands were tied behind her back. Chabot noticed a piece of paper protruding from her corsage. When he tried to grab it, the young girl made an involuntary movement which undid the laces of her bodice. She had a feeling of nakedness and, lowering her head so that her hair should veil her breasts she asked that her hands might be freed to enable her to adjust her dress. Chabot agreed. Her wrists had been so tightly bound, that the cord had bitten deep into her flesh.

"'If I thought for a moment that you cared what I suffer before I go to my death, gentlemen,' said Charlotte, 'I would ask you to allow me to turn down my sleeves or put on my gloves, before you replace the bonds you have prepared for me.'

"The citizens ('gentlemen') gaped at her open-mouthed. With the

utmost serenity, she turned down her sleeves and donned her gloves.

"Hébert was present at this scene, and the next day I read what he had to say about it in his paper, *Le Père Duchesne*: 'She had all the gentleness of a cat, which withdraws its claws before it scratches. She showed as little concern as though she had done a good deed,' he wrote. His intention, of course, had been to deliver a crushing condemnation, but to me his words conveyed much more an expression of admiration and homage.

"In the evening I went out to get a breath of fresh air on the *Boulevard de la Comédie Italienne* with Suzanne. . . ."

"Suzanne?"

"My little linen draper. A breath of fresh air isn't a very accurate description, and it was terribly hot and the throng was dense, for the evening promenade on the boulevards had become very much the fashion. I listened to what people were talking about, but Marat was not even mentioned. We went and had a coffee at the *Café Italien*—women were now allowed to sit in the cafés—and then we went home to bed.

"I had worked it out that Charlotte's tumbrel would pass my window at about seven o'clock in the evening. A noisy crowd filled the streets. The people laughed and shouted greetings to each other, just like a holiday crowd waiting for a Shrove Tuesday procession. At the window of a neighbouring house I caught sight of Danton and his friend, Camille Desmoulins, who were waiting expectantly. On the other side of the road, in the house opposite, three young girls were having tremendous fun.

"A thunderstorm was brewing. Black clouds were scurrying across the sky, and the wind was raising eddies of dust in the street. A little after seven o'clock a tremor of turbulent agitation passed like a wave over the crowd, and then a great cry went up: 'Here she comes! Here she comes!' The whole street was thronged with curious spectators, and in the distance, against a murmuring, rumbling background of sound, the strains of *La Carmagnole* became audible; the murmuring increased in volume, rose to a huge clamour as shouts and cries mingled and rose to the sullen, slate-coloured sky. Heavy raindrops began to splash on the pavement.

"At last I caught sight of the approaching tumbrel, surrounded by gendarmes with drawn sabres and *sans-culottes* armed with pikes. The tumbrel itself was painted red, and Charlotte, standing upright in it, was dressed in the red garb of a regicide. There was a great flash of lightning, and then the rain came pouring down in earnest.

"Fists were shaken, the harpies screamed in their raucous, drunken voices, but Charlotte did not deign even to glance at them. In the long, red gown which the rain had caused to cling to her figure, she looked truly superb. So calm was her beautiful face that she might well have been a



statue. She passed below my window, and I watched as she slowly drew away in the pouring rain, a solitary noble figure, encased in a steel square of sabres and pikes. And behind, following the procession, went the harpies, holding hands, singing and dancing.

"A little later a great roar went up. Charlotte's head had fallen. That evening, in the little café beside the Saint Roche church, I was told that one of the executioner's assistants, an individual named Legros, had picked up the head by its hair and had slapped its face. Well—those very same people who had screamed their demands for Charlotte's death now insisted that this Legros should be flung into prison. They were connoisseurs of heroism, and Charlotte's courage had evoked their admiration. For myself, I must confess I was in love with Charlotte for at least eight days."

### *Hercules and the Angry Cat*

"Did you see Danton that day?" asked Juliette.

"I did—that day and on many other days as well," replied Chronossus. "You could see him as often as you wished; all you had to do was to go either to the Convention or to the *Café Procope*. I saw him less frequently, of course, than I saw Robespierre, who lived only three doors away from me."

"You were actually a neighbour of Robespierre's?" cried Juliette.

"Why, yes," said Chronossus. "There's nothing very extraordinary in that is there? I lived at Number 404 and he was at 398. His room still exists you know, and you can go and see it, if you like. It is inside the courtyard, a little building which joins the portion of the house on the street side to the building at the back. At that time the house had only one floor, with a loft, and, at ground level, a doorway between two small shops; one was a jeweller's and the other a little restaurant where I sometimes used to go for a meal."

"Phew!" exclaimed Juliette. "Fancy having Robespierre for a neighbour! Weren't you terrified?"

"Whatever of?" replied Chronossus. "I was just as good a *sans culotte* as the next man, and I always donned my cocked hat in the hall before I went out. And then Robespierre, you know, wasn't interested in men—in the individual man in detail, that is. He had one annoying feature, however, which Mirabeau had been quick to observe—he always believed everything he said."

"And what used he to say?" asked Juliette.

"Well—for example: 'Terrorism is the outcome of virtue', and as, when he said 'virtue' he meant himself, you can see how dangerous that was."

"But very useful, too," observed Juliette.

"The thousands of innocent people whom he sent to the guillotine, were sent simply to strengthen Robespierre's morale. His 'virtue' had gone to his head. He wore his hair powdered in the old style, and he most meticulously polished all his speeches according to the old rules of rhetoric; he knew that his attributes were meagre, and he had no great faith in them. He was courageous, and he feared no man, except, perhaps, himself. But he was as suspicious as a mongrel cur. He saw traitors everywhere, as Danton was to find out to his cost."

"Do you mean by that that Danton, in your opinion, was not a traitor?" asked Juliette.

"Well," said Chronossus, "he'd picked up a few perks, of course, but that's nothing very extraordinary for a politician in troublous times (or in other sort of times, for that matter). No—the fact is, Robespierre found Danton far too moderate. The fact that he had organised the massacres of September '92, was not, in Robespierre's eyes, a sufficient passport. And then, Danton himself had been remorseful about it, for, though you may find it hard to believe, he was what is called a kind-hearted man. He was, in fact, far too strong a man not to be good, and Robespierre was far too weak a man to be anything but evil. Nevertheless, Robespierre was, perhaps, nothing more than an inhibited sentimentalist.

"Duplay, the miller in whose house he lodged, had four daughters, and Robespierre was like a brother to them. I rather think the eldest of them was in love with him. Quite a number of times, during that summer of '93, I saw him and the whole family, laden with baskets going gaily off to have a picnic in Meudon.

"Danton's passion was angling, in the River Aube, at Arcis. He was a great, noisy colossus of a man, with sparkling eyes deep set beneath thick, black eyebrows, heavy jowls and a mouth twisted in a perpetual grin; and his hideous face was ablaze with audacious insolence and *joie de vivre*. He loved women—I mean, his own wives (of whom he had two); the violence of his despair when his first wife died was equalled only by the love which he lavished on his second. He was the perfect husband, and he was frequently heard to boast in public of his marital exploits. He believed in friendship. It is no exaggeration to say that he was generous. He forgave the blows he received as readily as he forgot those he gave.

"When Robespierre sent him to the guillotine on April 5th 1794, he had one brief moment of weakness on the scaffold. He groaned. 'Beloved', he said with a sob, 'I shall never see you again!' At once, however, he recovered his poise. 'You will show my head to the people,' he ordered the executioner. 'It will be something worth seeing.'"

*A Sans-culotte, sans Shirt*

"By and large, then, you think the Reign of Terror was quite a natural proceeding?"

"The truth is, you know, that one can accustom oneself quite easily to the death of others. We were intoxicated with blood and sonorous, high-sounding phrases, and that gallant soldier of the Year II, Joliclerc, wrote to his Victoire:

'Cholet.

'January 25th 1794 (old style)

'Pluviôse 6th of the Year II of the Republic.

"The army is concentrating here, and we are going to march in fourteen columns to ravage the *Départements* of Sèvres and the Vendée. We shall go there armed with fire and sword, with a rifle in one hand and a firebrand in the other. We shall put them all to the sword, men and women. All must perish, except the little children. We must make an example of these *Départements*, to deter others who may be thinking of joining in the revolt. We have already burnt down some seven leagues of the countryside. Some of our fellows have already amassed a fortune. It has been just one long pillage. For myself, though, I have not even picked up a change of shirt, but my turn will come.

"I feel fine. Everybody grumbles, but I seem to go on in the same quiet way. Anyway, there's plenty to eat—and drink; and I do myself proud in both directions, and that's what keeps me fit. Wine is my tippie, and wine I must have. When I'm in a beer or cider country, I feel half dead. Hoping that this will find you as it leaves me. . . .'

"In the spring he wrote again:

"I must tell you that today, a carnival day, we have had the most horrible show that the battalion has ever had since it was raised. We lost fifty-two men, whom we found when we came back after dinner, lying on the road with their skulls bashed in and their bodies pierced by bayonets.

"If I were to tell you about all the acts of cruelty committed—by both sides—in the Vendée, it would make your hair stand on end; still, I think the war will soon be over. There remain now only a few peasants in the forests, scattered, isolated and lacking even the bare necessities of life.'

"Victoire was very proud of her soldier. She showed his letters to all her friends. She was now fifteen and a typical little Parisienne, with her white coif, her laces and her ribbons. She was, however, rather under-fed; on Sundays my landlady used to put seven or eight pounds of meat on to boil in a pot, and that had to last the whole establishment for the week. And when some relative in the country sent a pot of butter or jam, it was a red-letter day in the house."

*Citizen Fructidor, Citizeness Rhubarb*

"At the risk of appearing frightfully cynical, I'm going to make a confession. The thing that really worried us—much more than the deaths of other people—was the new code of good manners introduced by the new patriots. It was now regarded as very bad form (and it was also a bit risky, too), to address anyone as *Monsieur* or *Madame*; in the clubs, in the assembly halls and in the various municipal offices there were large notices: 'The only status recognised here is that of Citizen.'

"Marriage ceremonies were now performed in the Town Hall, and when the laws governing civil marriage were being drawn up, laws governing divorce were drafted at the same time. For the moment, however, we did not think much of divorce; we preferred to stick to the well-tried custom of the old régime of making the best of things when once we had become man and wife.

"The churches and convents had been completely looted. In the old junk shops you would find chasubles hanging side by side with an old pair of breeches, crucifixes and syringes jumbled together, and altar cloths draped over commodes.

"Now that it had been established that 'Saints had done as much harm as Princes', the Saints were abolished. *Saint Cloud* became plain *Cloud*, *Saint Cyr* in Loire-et-Cher became *Cinq Bougies*. There was one township which found its name to be a source of great embarrassment. It was called *Saint Syphorian-sur-Sèvre*; but there were no half measures about a change-over, and it became *Phorien-sur-Sèvre*.

"If you were a true patriot, you called your son Brutus, Lycurgus or Epaminondas; but you had to be a dyed-in-the-wool Jacobin before you indulged in such names as Chiendent, Canard, Pissenlit for boys and Cow, Carrot and Rhubarb for girls."

"And what about the tumbrels?" asked Juliette.

"People didn't even bother to turn round and look at them," replied Chronossus. "In the delightful words of Fouquier-Tinville, the Public Executioner, 'heads tumbled like slates off a roof.'"

*Founded on Justice and Reason*

"To accelerate matters, the 'terrible law of Prairial', as Mathiez called it, was passed. This did away with the necessity for any investigation of a case of interrogation of the accused and thus legalised assassination. The Committee of Public Safety expressed the opinion that to appear in the defence of an accused person was tantamount to conspiracy against the Republic. And it was undoubtedly on this account that Robespierre, in putting the law to the vote, felt justified in saying: 'Examine this law.

You will see at once that it contains no provisions which have not already been adopted by all men of liberty, that it contains not one single article that is not based on Justice and Reason.' As a result, one day, when the Clerk of the Court went, on the authority of this law, to one of the prisons to fetch the *ci-devant* Duchess de Biron, he found that there were two ladies of that name and he reported accordingly. 'That's all right,' said Fouquier-Tinville. 'Bring 'em both along. I can take care of them.' And, indeed, they were both 'taken care of' the very next day.

"On another occasion one of the juries reported that they had just sent a number of people to the guillotine, but that they did not know why. 'The only thing we can do now,' they added laughingly, 'is to send someone quickly after them to find out.' Fouquier thought this a tremendous joke and he roared with laughter and rubbed his hands in glee.

"Another woman was arrested by mistake. 'It wasn't you we wanted,' Fouquier said to her almost apologetically. 'But since you're here, we might as well get it over today as wait for tomorrow.'

"A woman named Charbonnier was denounced for having declared in her father's house in Orly that they wanted a King. This turned out to be incorrect. It was not a '*roi*' that she said she wanted, but a '*rouet*' (a file). Well—that was just too bad; and to correct her faulty peasant accent, they sent her to the guillotine.

"In Messidor (June-July '94), the last month before Thermidor, the zealous Prosecutor of this 'Bloody Tribunal' dispatched seven hundred and ninety-six suspects and set up a new record month's bag. He was a man of rigid professional conscience. He was also a truly Christian soul and he wore round his neck a medallion of the Virgin."

#### *The Last Prison in which People Were Able to Chat Freely*

"Not everybody could hope, of course, to be as virtuous as the guillotiners, and those who were guillotined took it all light-heartedly enough. It was even regarded as one way of cheating death."

"You mean that by laughing at their misfortune, they triumphed over it," said Juliette.

"What I was actually referring to was the fact that pregnant women were not sent to the guillotine, and more than one woman in prison had recourse to this quite agreeable form of delaying action."

"But that's horrible!" cried Juliette. "That a woman should bring her baby into the world and then be at once separated from it and have her head cut off!"

"I agree," said Chronossus. "But at least it meant a respite of nine months, and as the Reign of Terror lasted less than a year, more than one

poor woman saved herself in this manner. The prisoners were not shut up in cells. During the day they were allowed to walk about the corridors and courtyard of the *Conciergerie*, and I don't think you would have seen anywhere in Paris, during the Reign of Terror, a more elegantly dressed concourse of women than in the courtyard of the *Conciergerie*.

"In the mornings when they first appeared, they wore *négligés*, but they very soon retired to their rooms and about midday they would emerge again, beautifully dressed and very *soignée* in every way; in the evenings they appeared in dishabille, in elegant dressing-gowns, that is, and the courtyard of the prison looked like a carpet of flowers in a basket of iron.

"They talked gaily on any and every subject and poked fun at Robespierre's sacerdotal pretensions. Then we would split up and saunter into the shadows to flirt and kiss a little."

"We," queried Juliette. "So you, too, were in prison?"

"Er—yes. In the end I, too, got myself arrested."

"I bet you did!" said Juliette. "And I bet you were up to your neck and in the thick of all those counter-revolutionary plots!"

"Plots? What plots? Between August 10th and Thermidor 9th there was not one single serious plot, unless you call Jacobin propaganda a plot. No, no, there wasn't any trouble. I had been seen wiping away a tear on the day Marie Antoinette passed beneath my window."

"Marie Antoinette—Isn't she dead yet? I always thought that she had been guillotined before Danton."

"Well, if you know everything, I'd better shut up," said Chronossus crossly. "I only told you about Danton out of his turn because you asked me about him. He was guillotined on April 5th '94, and Marie Antoinette on October 16th '93."

"I'm sorry," said Juliette. "But you might at least show me the Queen. And that won't be any bother to you, since you were at your window, anyway."

### *Worse than Regicide*

"Speaking of the condemnation of Marie Antoinette, Napoleon said that here was something worse even than regicide. And I'm bound to say I agree. It was an act of sheer atrocity; but don't forget that Fouquier-Tinville with his own hands sent nine hundred women to the scaffold; and that, too, is an atrocity."

"But—good heavens above! What was the use of it all?" cried Juliette.

"Well," said Chronossus, "Marie Antoinette's death was perhaps the only death of which the revolutionaries might with justice claim that it

served a purpose. France had been invaded, and the Austrians, upon whom Marie Antoinette had called for help, had threatened to exterminate us, if anyone so much as touched a hair of the Queen's head. Her condemnation to death was the nation's way of saying: 'We shall fight to the death.' And, if you find that reason insufficient, there were other reasons of a sentimental nature. Marie Antoinette possessed to a high degree the art of making herself hated, and she represented the last vestige of that Royalty which had, at all costs, to be destroyed."

"But surely—wasn't Louis XVI's head enough?"

"They would have had the heads of all the Capets if they could. And as they couldn't have their heads, they grabbed their hearts. You know, of course, that the royal tombs in Saint Denis, Val de Grâce and the church of the Great Jesuits were rifled. The hearts of the Kings, Queens and Princes were sold to two painters; one, named Saint Martin, took the hearts of Louis XIII and Louis XIV, the latter's being the biggest of them all; later, however, he returned them, practically intact, to Louis XVIII."

"Intact? But what on earth were they going to do with them?"

"Make pigments from them! It seems that thanks to the aromatic unguents used in the process of embalming they were of great value for the purpose. The second painter, Martin Drolling, bought a large number and used them particularly in his painting *A Kitchen Interior*, which is in the Strasbourg Museum, and to which the royal hearts are said to have given 'a marvellous sheen'.

"As regards the little Dauphin himself, Louis XVII, before whom Marie Antoinette knelt and saluted with the title of King on the day that Louis XVI was decapitated, the revolutionaries had undertaken to make him forget that he was a King. They entrusted his upbringing to a cobbler named Simon. When he was first separated from his mother he cried for two days. After that he found things with which to console himself.

"One day, in the Temple prison, he was playing ball in a room underneath the apartments occupied by his parents. His mother and his aunt Elizabeth dragged some chairs across the room, making a considerable noise above his head.

"'Haven't those damned... been guillotined yet?' exclaimed the little King wrathfully—a lurid light on what they had done to Marie Antoinette's 'darling little love'. So, you see, it was inevitable that she should die.

"It was rather chilly on that October morning. A light autumn mist hung like a powdered wig over the city. A far-off murmur came from the direction of the *Rue Saint Honoré*. On the steps of the Saint Roche church the harpies, red bonnets on their heads and pikes in their fists, were screaming

hoarsely. Then I caught sight of the tumbrel. It looked like a dung-cart, and as it bumped and rattled over the cobbles, it creaked and groaned as though it were about to fall to pieces at any moment. At first I could see only the Queen's back. She was seated on a plank, facing backwards, her hands tied. The streets were black with a silent, motionless crowd. Many of them who pretended to be smiling would far rather have wept tears. I heard one mother say to her daughter: 'Whatever you do, don't cry when you see her, or you'll have us all guillotined.'

"The tumbrel came creaking slowly forward, surrounded by gendarmes, mounted and on foot; behind them came a mass of men armed with pikes. The Queen wore white and a very tall bonnet, from beneath which protruded strands of her white hair, roughly shorn by the executioner. She appeared to be completely unmoved and she had preserved her regal dignity. As the tumbrel passed beneath my window, some woman—if you can call those harpies from the fish market women, shouted: 'Death to the Austrian!' Marie Antoinette heard the shout. She turned and looked at the woman, and for a fleeting moment there was an expression of infinite scorn in her eyes, and then it was gone at once. Her Majesty, I thought to myself will remember that harpy.

"In bygone days, as a young Queen of twenty she had often passed through this very street on her way from the opera in her carriage drawn by eight white horses! On that October day it was just midday when her tumbrel turned the corner into the (ex-) *Rue Royale*. I followed close behind. The Queen maintained her air of absolute serenity. When the cart reached the *Place*, she turned her head and gazed at the *Tuileries*. Her face became paler than ever. Yells, shouts and bouts of hand-clapping burst forth, but she kept her eyes fixed on the end of the long drive, on the façade of that *château* where 'two hundred thousand lovers' had acclaimed their gracious young Dauphine.

"The tumbrel stopped. Rapidly and refusing all assistance Marie Antoinette descended. Then she turned and saw those two sinister great arms stretching upwards and supporting that heavy triangle of steel. She crossed the narrow gangway with such speed and bravado that she lost one of her prunella shoes. When she reached the platform, she inadvertently stepped on the executioner's foot. Later I heard that she had turned to him and said: 'I beg your pardon, Monsieur. I did not do that on purpose.'

"Her gaze swept round this same vast square, in which hats were now being thrown into the air to herald her death, just as they previously had been flung in loving greeting.

"The executioner's assistants advanced on her. With a swift movement she discarded her bonnet. When they dragged her towards the upright



plank to which she was to be bound, she closed her eyes. At last the plank was lowered to the ground, but there was still the gruesome business of securing the heavy wooden collar round her neck. There was a sharp click and a great shout. One of the assistants picked up the bleeding head and to the applause and shouts of approbation of the mob, held it aloft and marched round the scaffold with it.

"I must confess that when I got home I found that the splendour of the Queen's bearing had driven all thought of her wanton impertinences out of my mind. I asked the confectioner who occupied the basement of the house who the woman was who had insulted the Queen. I thought he would be able to tell me, as I had sometimes seen them chatting in a friendly way together. He could not tell me her name, but he said that the shrew had previously been a servant in Versailles and that now she had become the mistress of one of Robespierre's bodyguard, of whom everyone in the neighbourhood was terrified. I have always thought, though I was never able to confirm, that it must have been this woman who denounced me.

"The day after the execution, Robespierre, Saint-Just, Barère and another fellow went off together to enjoy a special dinner in a private room in one of the most famous restaurants of the age—*Vénua's*. They were all a little more loquacious than usual, and Barère declared that 'the ship of revolution could not make harbour save through a sea flecked red with blood', while Saint-Just's contribution was that 'the nation could be re-born only upon a mountain of corpses'. Such were their pleasant topics of conversation over dessert.

"Not content with wading knee-deep in blood, they felt the need to indulge sententiously in high-falutin' phraseology. Do you know how Saint-Just defined the Republic? 'The thing that constitutes the Republic is the destruction of everything that is opposed to it'—his very words, whatever they may mean. 'If you show pity for those arrested you are guilty in the eyes of the Republic. If you reject virtue you are guilty in the eyes of the Republic; and you are guilty if you do not support the Reign of Terror!'

"The Inquisitors of old, in the name of dogma, had used much the same jargon. But what, in heaven's name, is democracy, if it is not the indisputable right of the minority to express its viewpoint in opposition to the majority? This same orator, Saint-Just of the cherubic face and the golden ear-rings, spoke—perfectly seriously, mind you—of 'the despotism of liberty' and went on dramatically to declaim: 'For the enemies of liberty there is no liberty!' This it was that caused Madame Roland, who also had a great dramatic sense, to utter her historic words when, on the

scaffold, she found herself face to face with the statue of Liberty, which had replaced Louis XVI's statue. She exclaimed: 'Liberty! what crimes are committed in thy name!'

"As far as I myself was concerned, Fouquier-Tinville fortunately forgot all about me and I remained snug in prison till the Deputies, tired of trembling for their lives, decided to take the initiative and send Robespierre himself to the guillotine."

### *Our Lady of Thermidor*

"You realise, of course, that it is a woman whom we have to thank for putting an end to the Reign of Terror?"

"And why shouldn't it be? When men make asses of themselves, it's always the women who have to step in and sort things out again."

"Too true! But women also have a great taste for blood, you know. Among those yelping round the guillotine there was invariably a pack of women in the front rows. Even so it is to Madame Tallien that our thanks for Thermidor 9 must go. Anyway, she was the cause of it all.

"In Bordeaux, Tallien, an influential member of the National Convention, had had a beautiful prisoner in his charge. She was named Theresa Cabarrus and was the daughter of a Spanish banker and the *ci-devant* Marquise de Fontenay. Tallien's prisoner had become his mistress, and she had then exerted all her influence to try and save her persecuted friends. Tallien was denounced and recalled to Paris. She followed him and was arrested on Robespierre's orders; and she would certainly have perished on the scaffold, had not Tallien formed a conspiracy against Robespierre in order to save her.<sup>1</sup>

"The members of the National Convention, terrorised out of their lives, were just longing for some such opportunity. The 'Incorruptible' had earned the accumulated hatred of the venal. To his right, Danton's friends had never forgiven him; to his left the 'madmen' had not by any means been appeased by the death of Hébert; and finally, all of them of left and right, all rationalists of the eighteenth century, had watched dumb-founded when Robespierre aped the Pope at a Fête of the Supreme Being.<sup>2</sup>

"Two days after this grotesque ceremony, Robespierre had forcibly extracted from them the iniquitous Law of Prairial 22, which delivered

<sup>1</sup> The grateful Parisians, with that delightful irony peculiar to them gave Madame Tallien the title of Our Lady of Thermidor.

<sup>2</sup> It was at this fête that Robespierre officiated on the *Champs de Mars*, dressed in a blue coat with red revers. for that day he was the Pope of the Revolution—and even more than that. One *sans culotte* shouted: "The bastard isn't content with being the master . . . he wants to be God Almighty Himself!" Seven weeks later, on July 27, he was guillotined.

them helpless into the arms of the guillotine. And do you know how he accomplished it? Simply by telling them with his usual emphasis that they were 'at the mercy of any assassin's sword'!"

"The 'sword' in question was the little pocketknife of Cécille Renault. I forgot to tell you that Robespierre was very annoyed, because a certain Admirat had fired two pistol shots (which missed by a mile, incidentally) at his colleague and great rival Collot d'Herbois, and the Assembly was about to transform the latter into a national hero. That was on the eve of the famous fête, at which Collot was going to play the part of Pope. But the Supreme Being was looking after Robespierre. The daughter of a paper merchant expressed a desire to see him, and was flung out and created such a scene that she was arrested. On her person was found a tiny pocketknife. Hence the 'sword', the 'foreign conspiracy' and then a furious tussle between Robespierre and Collot for the role of victim of attempted assassination.

"Robespierre had no sooner got his law through the Convention than he celebrated the event with a 'tumbrel-load of conspirators'. Fifty-four random prisoners, pitched pell-mell into the pot with Admirat and the young girl, Cécile, were produced as the architects of the conspiracy and were condemned to death without being allowed to open their mouths. And, to add the ridiculous to the odious, they were taken to the scaffold in the red garb of regicides.

"Nor was that the end of it. For six further weeks heads continued to fall, until the danger that threatened his mistress made Tallien decide to attack. I need not tell you about Robespierre's last moments—the details are already only too well known. What is perhaps less well known is the fact that his supporters abandoned him to his fate on the fateful night in the *Hôtel de Ville*, because they had realised that in the man who had sent Hébert to his death they were faced with a reactionary all too skilful in enveloping social injustice in the smoke and fumes of *bourgeois* rhetoric."

*Gaiety—in the Army, and in Civvy Street*

"And what about Victoire?" asked Juliette.

"All was going very well with Victoire," said Chronossus. "She had been saving hard and had now realised the dream of her life and set up shop on her own. With her sister she had taken a little linen shop in the *Faubourg Saint Denis*. The only thing she lacked was goods to sell. But Victoire was much more resourceful than Suzanne. She got hold of a few dozen sacks, stuffed them with straw, wrapped them up in gaily coloured paper and marked them 'Holland broadcloth', 'Embroidered Bonnets' and so on.

"Public confidence, you see, was slowly returning. We had not yet come to the stage of counter-revolution, but the Jacobins were jettisoning their ballast. Very soon, thought our little draper, Joliclerc's armies will win their victory, and he himself will win his Victoire. He still wrote to her in the tones of a cheerful philosopher:

"Josselin

"'Germinal 16th, Year III of the French Republic.

"'Today, Good Friday, two or three Masses have been celebrated in this place for the first time. It's about two years since I attended Mass. The event has restored the good spirits both of us soldiers and of the civilians.'"

### *In Search of Peace*

"Victory was a phantom that Joliclerc was destined to pursue for twenty-three years, from 1792 to 1815. The revolution had given us liberty, equality and (if you shut your eyes to the guillotine) even a measure of fraternity. It had swept away all the privileges, to which those who had enjoyed them had clung so tenaciously, it had unified France and, by depriving it of its political aspirations and its financial prerogatives, it had rendered signal service to the Church. These were all things which the decadent monarchy had shown itself incapable of doing, because the Crown had forgotten the Capetian tradition of a King, whose strength against the feudal nobility was built on the love of his people.

"The Revolution had also brought us war—a war in which the outcome became hopeless from our point of view as soon as we annexed Belgium and the estuary of the Scheldt. England would certainly not tolerate a France sitting firmly opposite the Thames. For twenty-three years she will continue to incite Europe against us, while Napoleon, going from victory to victory, is destined to final defeat at Waterloo. These will prove to be twenty-three years of glory, which will extend our domination to the dimensions of Charlemagne's empire and restore for us the frontiers of 1789. Napoleon. . . ."

"Don't speak to me about Napoleon," said Juliette sharply. "I told you I don't like great men. They're the ones who make widows and orphans, and if Napoleon had not been so great a Captain. . . ."

"We should have been beaten round about 1800 instead of in 1815," interposed Chronossus. "That, of course, would have meant a great saving of French lives; but what a glorious period it was, for all that! The victories of Carnot and the Republic—Valmy, Jemmapes, Fleurus; Bonaparte's victories—Lodi, Castiglione, Rivoli. . . ."

"Oh yes—it sounds grand enough, I grant you," said Juliette. "But. . . ."

"But two naval defeats (Aboukir and Trafalgar) invalidated all Napoleon's victories even before he had gained them—at Ulm, Austerlitz, Jena, Friedland, Wagram. And after each one of them Napoleon hoped that it was the last battle he'd have to fight and stretched out his hand in friendship—to Prussia, to Russia and, better still, he asked Austria for the hand of Marie-Louise in marriage."

"Marie Antoinette's niece!" exclaimed Juliette.

"Yes," said Chronossus. "A real looping the loop; the French were to have as their Empress the niece of the Queen whom they had guillotined.

"You can see for yourself the distance we had covered—and at what a pace. 'Napoleon was in a closed carriage, which he fondly imagined that he was driving,' wrote Chateaubriand. In actual fact he realised more fully than anyone else that he was not driving, for a heritage of conquest had condemned him to the hazards of continuous war. Robespierre's successor, had become Emperor thanks to royalist plots, but once he had dug the bloodstained trench of Vincennes between the royalists and himself<sup>1</sup>, he had no ambition that was nearer to his heart than to 'bring peace to France and effect a reconciliation between the Jacobins and the Aristocracy'.<sup>2</sup> And in this respect, Napoleon was as admirable as Henry IV had been with regard to the religious wars.

"It was in 1810 that Napoleon married Marie-Louise. He was then at the zenith of his glory, and when the King of Rome was born, he felt that he had safeguarded his dynasty. But Spain persisted in her opposition, and Russia gave a twist to the screw of Continental blockade. Napoleon, having raised an army of 600,000 men, plunged into the vast plains, intent on teaching the Russians a lesson. 'Within a month,' he said, 'we shall be in Moscow, and within six weeks we shall have peace.' Moscow he certainly took. But the Governor, Rostopschin, set fire to the city. Then came the retreat through the grim winter of 1812, from which the *Grande Armée* emerged a mere twenty thousand strong.

"That year, too, Napoleon was defeated at Leipzig; the next year, in spite of all the skill he displayed on the home political front, he was forced to abdicate and was sent to the island of Elba."

"From which he escaped," said Juliette. "to regain power during the Hundred Days, only to be finally defeated on the mournful plain of Waterloo, everyone knows that."

<sup>1</sup> The Duke d'Enghien was shot on March 21 1804. On March 27 the Senate invited the First Consul to accept the crown. The Revolution sought refuge from the Royalists in the port of monarchy.

<sup>2</sup> The Concordat of 1801, which was a "triumph for none, but a reconciliation between all", restored religious peace. It was the First Consul's "Edict of Nantes".

"When Louis XVIII restored the Crown, he found things very different in his kingdom."

"Have we already got as far as the Restoration?" asked Juliette. "I must say, you fairly take the bit between your teeth when you get going. Why, I hardly even caught sight of Napoleon!"

"I will show him to you in some detail—not in his role of prodigious genius whom all the world knows, but a rather more intimate Napoleon—and Napoleon, the man, is well worth looking at. Let me first say that as far as foreign policy is concerned, the Revolution and the Empire saw eye to eye. For the rest, Napoleon left us a vast balance of glory, some remarkable mahogany furniture with gilded embellishments and a wholly admirable Civil Code. Stendhal used to read a few articles of this whenever he felt the need to sharpen his wits. If you feel the same urge, by any chance. . . ."

Juliette smiled. "I feel no urge at all, I'm afraid," she said. "If you don't mind, we'll talk about the Civil Code some other day."

"In that case, there is nothing much I have to tell you about the Empire, except, perhaps, for one fact, namely, that in carrying the Revolution one step further forward it destroyed it. In point of fact, the Revolution had been doomed to destruction since 1797, when Babeuf, the father of communism, was executed."

### *The Land Belongs to No One*

"Babeuf, who was born in 1760 of a poor family in Saint Quentin, had been one of the conquerors of the Bastille. This he had regarded as the first blow in the cause of social revolution, whereas in reality it was, of course, no more than a liberal revolution. He became a follower of Robespierre, without realising that Robespierre was nothing more than a *bourgeois* and religious revolutionary with a happy knack of disposing of the essence of a problem in a couple of sentences. 'Riches,' cried Robespierre, 'which lead to corruption are more harmful to those that possess them than to those who do not.' In other words, blessed are the beggars for they alone shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Jean Jaurès saw through him, when he wrote: "There is, to my mind, rather a disagreeable combination of sycophancy and trickery in a man who tells some one: "You are virtuous, because you are weak, you are disinterested because you are poor, and you are pure because you are impotent" and by this means tries to reconcile him to eternal misery by extolling his eternal virtue. To redress the social balance by ascribing all vice to the wealthy and all virtue to the poor is either an illusion or a piece of deliberate falsification, either pure naïvety or calculated roguery."

"Babeuf was not nearly so subtle. In his *Manifeste des Egaux* he pulled no punches:

"Equality is the basic law of nature! Man's primary need and the fundamental law of all legitimate intercourse! We want not merely that equality which is defined in the Rights of Man; we want equality in our very midst and under our own roofs! To achieve this we will consent to anything and everything; we will be prepared to sweep away everything and cling to that equality alone! Let all the arts perish, if need be, provided only that real equality remains with us! No more individual ownership of land—the land belongs to no one! We desire and we demand a universal enjoyment of the fruits of the earth, those fruits which belong to each and every one of us. Once and for all those revolting distinctions between rich and poor, between great men and humble, between masters and servants, between the governors and the governed must disappear! The time has come to found the Republic of Equals!"

"He then proceeded to conspire against the Directory. 'The Revolution,' he asserted, 'is not finished.' But they very quickly showed him that it was—at any rate, as far as he was concerned, by promptly sending him to the guillotine."

### *The Fashionable World*

"Even so, gaiety, a carefree frame of mind and free and easy morals by no means sufficed to resuscitate the gracious way of life of the eighteenth century, which had been swept away with the Court and had taken wing with the *émigrés*. These latter, when they returned, no longer recognised their own country and felt as though they were in a foreign land.

"The women wore light, diaphanous dresses which were quite transparent and left nothing to the imagination. Transparency and the sincerity of a classical statue were now the fashion, and the waist-line raised to just below the bust gave elegant women on the *Champs Elysées* the opportunity of exhibiting their beauty.

"It was Madame Tallien who introduced the postiche to the fashionable world and women started changing the colour of their hair ten times a day. Their opposite numbers, 'The Incredibles' (or perhaps I should say, 'The Incwedibles', because with them the gweat thing was to wepweess the wolling of their R's), wore little royalist medallions in their cravats. If you would care to take a look at an Incwedible, here's a contemporary thumb-nail sketch of one: 'Take a hunchback, or, anyway a man who does his best to look like one, comb his hair like a dog's, hanging down over his ears, but brushed upwards at the back and held in position by a comb, dress him up in a frock-coat of loud checks or a gaily coloured coat with

long tails and plenty of pleats at the back to make him look round-shouldered, twine an enormous cravat round and round his neck, compress his legs into a pair of shapeless trousers, clap a cocked hat or a hat with a very broad brim on his head, put golden ear-rings in his ears and a stout cudgel, known as the "executive power", in his hand, and there you have him.' For this darling of the ladies was also a redoubtable and hectoring gangster. A republican, seeing one of these young bloods wearing a black collar—a royalist badge—asked him: 'For whom are you in mourning?' 'For you, my friend,' replied the charming young man and shot him dead on the spot.

"At that time the Republic was playing the very devil with the value of our paper currency. The gold louis, which was worth seventy-five paper livres in the middle of 1794, was quoted at two thousand in October '95 and at eighty thousand in 1798. The rich became poor, the *nouveaux riches* were by no means sure that they would still be so on the morrow. But Paris just didn't care. After the Terror, all she wanted to do was to dance and be merry.

"There were three hundred dance halls in Paris. Madame Hamelin wagered that she would walk from the *Luxembourg* to the *Champs Elysées* stripped to the waist—and won her bet. To put a little more spice into the general rejoicings, a certain measure of macabre reminders became very popular. The *mise à la victime* had a great success in Paris night life; all a pretty woman had to do was to put on a dead white face and wear a blood-red ribbon at the appropriate place round her neck.

"The *Directeurs*, the men in power, set an example in debauchery and corruption. General Bonaparte, First Consul, then Consul for life and then Emperor, restored order in the political field. But while his soldiers were covering themselves with glory in battle, the gay life went on. His dictatorship—and he was most certainly a dictator—ceased to hold sway on the threshold of My Lady's boudoir. The Emperor of the Frenchmen never succeeded in becoming the Emperor of the French women."

#### *That Little Bastard Frightens Me!*

"You're a bit of a simpleton, aren't you, Monsieur Chronossus?" said Juliette. "You don't really think that we had to wait for your Revolution to organise our little personal liberties, did you?"

"No, rather not," replied Chronossus. "You were all far too shrewd. So shrewd, in fact, that if it had depended on you women, we should never have had the Napoleonic epic."

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that Napoleon was wholly devoid of charm," began Juliette, "but. . . ."



"Of course he wasn't," interrupted Chronossus, "but I think it is fair to say that he was much more of a man's man."

"I know. 'Soldiers! I am pleased with you!' declaimed Juliette. 'From the summit of these pyramids forty centuries look down on you! Bla . . . bla . . . bla . . .' Anything else?"

"No one could resist him."

"Except the women. You said so yourself."

"We'll deal with the women later, if you don't mind. First of all—the Old Guard; they were grumblers, every one of them, like all old soldiers; and yet—well, you know the way he electrified them! During a battle the same full-throated roar of 'Long Live the Emperor!' greeted him wherever he went, and even the sorely wounded struggled somehow to their feet to salute him. If I had time to give you all the details of Napoleon's battles, you would be amazed at the prodigious efforts to which he was able to inspire his troops, and which they made gladly and to the very limits of human endurance. But it was not merely those electrifying proclamations which he made to his troops of the Army in Italy: 'You are now the equals of my Army of Holland and my Army of the Rhine; but as yet you have really accomplished nothing, for there still remains much to be done!' On the eve of Austerlitz: 'Now for the second time the question whether the French infantry is the best or the second best infantry in Europe will be decided!' On the eve of Jena: 'You must not fear Death; when you do not fear him, you drive him into the ranks of the enemy!' On the morning of the battle of the Moskova, to men who had already covered thousands of miles on their flat feet: 'Men! this is the battle which you have desired so eagerly. Bear yourselves as you did at Austerlitz, at Friedland, at Smolensk, and posterity shall say of you—"He was in the great battle beneath the walls of Moscow!"' "

"So what—who cares, anyway?" said Juliette.

"Doesn't that do something to you, doesn't it move you? Well, let me tell you it certainly did something to those men. They had tears in their eyes, and they felt themselves uplifted by a sublime courage that made them invincible.

"His personality was equally magnetic in private. While he was still only General Bonaparte, General Augereau, who had but little love for him, went to see him, accompanied by a number of other Generals, 'in order to pulverise him', as he himself put it. The interview duly took place, and during it Augereau remained as docile as a mouse. When they emerged he turned to Masséna. 'I don't know what came over me,' he said. 'But that little bastard frightens me!'

"Perhaps nothing that Napoleon did was more audacious<sup>1</sup> than his landing in the Gulf of Juan before the Hundred Days and his 'eagle flight from steeple to steeple to the very towers of *Notre Dame*'. At Laffrey he marched boldly and alone up to the troops who had orders to arrest him and stood with outstretched arms before them. 'If there be one among you who wishes to kill his Emperor,' he said, 'here I am.'<sup>2</sup> The men flung themselves on their knees before him. 'He invaded France single-handed,' said Chateaubriand."

### *A Cowardly Ruffian*

"A few months earlier, when he was on the same road and on his way to Elba the fallen Emperor had experienced real fear.<sup>3</sup>

"He had said his pathetic (and, you may be sure, theatrical) farewells in the courtyard of the *château* of Fontainebleau, and his carriage went bowling southwards. But Provence had remained royalist to the core. In village after village cries of 'Down with the tyrant! To the gallows with him!' were hurled at them as they passed. In Organ he saw himself being burnt in effigy, women stormed round his carriage, screaming 'Give us back our sons!' and a hail of stones broke the carriage windows. Napoleon, deeply shaken, obtained permission from the senior escorting Officer to assume the role of his own courier and, dressed in a shabby blue riding habit, he preceded his carriage by an hour.

"In Saint Canat, a little before Aix, he drew rein in front of the long façade of a waggoners' tavern. Dismounting, he went into the bar parlour and, giving out that he was a British Officer, Colonel Campbell, directed that a meal be swiftly prepared for 'the ex-Emperor and his suite'. The innkeeper's wife declared that she 'hated the idea of preparing a meal for a monster like that'.

"'You hate him very much, this Emperor, don't you?' said Napoleon. 'What harm has he ever done to you?'

"'What harm? I'll tell you what harm he's done! The monster has been

<sup>1</sup> Nor more criminal. At the Congress of Vienna Louis XVIII and Talleyrand had obtained quite unexpectedly favourable terms. After the Hundred Days adventure the whole of France was invaded and treated without pity. Napoleon, however, had been conscious of the ridiculousness of finishing his days in the little kingdom of Sancho Panza. "How could you expect him to accept sovereignty over a cabbage patch?" asked Chateaubriand. After Waterloo the 'heroic comedian' had played his fifth and last act—and so much the worse for France.

<sup>2</sup> Another theatrical gesture, worthy of Clovis himself. But he had taken the precaution of sending ahead two officers with his proclamations and with orders to try and shake these outpost troops from their purpose.

<sup>3</sup> Thus, both at the beginning and at the end of his career, he experienced the same fear—fear of a crowd. On Brumaire 18, when the Deputies were shouting like wild animals, he lost his head and almost fainted.

the cause of the death of my son and my nephew and all the other young lads. I hope they drown him!

"An hour later, the carriage and escort arrived and found the 'former Sovereign of the world sitting with lowered head clasped between his hands'. 'At first I did not recognise him,' said the Prussian Officer. 'And when I went towards him, he leapt nervously to his feet at the sound of my footsteps, and I caught a glimpse of a face suffused with tears.'

"A large crowd had gathered in front of the inn. The Emperor decided to leave in disguise at midnight. He put on Koller's uniform, borrowed the Order of Maria Theresa from the Austrian, donned the helmet of Count Waldbourg-Truchsess and wrapped himself in the cloak of the Russian representative. Thus disguised in all the colours of the Holy Alliance, he consented to emerge from the inn and make his way through the confused crowd, which was at tremendous pains to try and spot 'their tyrant'.

"Two days later, standing on the bridge of the British frigate as it sailed from Saint Raphael and gazing at that coastline which he had seen rising over the horizon fifteen years before on his return from Egypt, he turned to Koller, the Austrian Field Marshal.

"Two days ago I behaved like a cowardly ruffian,' he said.

"He, who had shown no fear on the bridge at Arcole, had trembled with terror in a village tavern.

"I am a man, whom men may kill, but do not outrage.'"

#### *Napoleon Frightened by Women*

"You know," went on Chronossus, "that a crowd is feminine."

"I have heard it said," replied Juliette. "But I don't see why."

"Perhaps because the crowd is often fickle, and he who puts his trust in it is stupid indeed. And that, I think, probably accounts for Napoleon's fear of women.

"When he first arrived in Paris the young, famous, but very shabby General found to his bewilderment that 'there were women everywhere'. At first, at least, he had no cause to complain. Madame Tallien, moved to pity at the sight of threadbare and tattered garments, presented him with a complete new uniform, while Josephine, Viscountess Beauharnais, gave him a first coat of French polish.

"But the polish soon wore off. Napoleon's conception of woman was essentially provincial and, indeed, fiercely Corsican.

"Madame de Staël, that redoubtable blue-stockings, hurled herself impetuously at his head and overwhelmed him with compliments on every possible occasion. Though it takes two to make a conversation and Napoleon would not play, the lady always returned to the charge.

“General, who is the woman you could love most?”

“My wife.”

“Yes, of course. But I mean, what type of woman would you most esteem?”

“The one who is most efficient in running her household.”

“Yes, I see that, too. But—how shall I put it?—who for you would be the foremost of all women?”

“The woman who bears the most children, Madame.”

“And the General, who believed, or pretended to believe, that she had had no children, turned on his heel, leaving Madame de Staël dumb with mortification at having received so brusque a snub in front of a hundred witnesses. That was how she came to join the ranks of the opposition and make the world reverberate with her truly comic fury.

“As an Emperor, he had, of course, to fill his Court with women. But he treated them in the same way as he treated his grumbling old soldiers. They were all but marched through the *salons* of the *Tuileries* as though they were on parade; and a *soirée* at Court was very like a ceremonial parade—with female troops. Napoleon, his hands clasped behind his back, advanced with his rather ungainly waddle. The women trembled with fear; while he, to cover up the bashfulness of any soldier dressed up in silks, hurled the most uncouth insults at them.

“For the most part, the wretched women made no attempt to answer him, but went straight home and cried their eyes out. Sometimes, however, they hit back, particularly if they happened to belong to that section of the old nobility which had rallied to the Empire. To the Duchess de Fleury, who had returned to France from exile and whom he knew to be a very flighty young woman, he said bluntly:

“Well Madame, and do you still like the men?”

“Yes, Sire, I do,” she replied, ‘provided, of course, that they have decent manners!’”

### *Pauline, Frail and Beautiful*

“His sisters were equally mutinous. I am not referring to the ambitious Caroline, in whom he recognised genius as great and as enterprising as his own. She had married Murat and had joined him in his treachery immediately after the first reverses in Germany.

“But Pauline, the beautiful, brilliant, statuesque and sensuous Pauline, the darling Pauline of his youth, was a complete rebel. It was quite in vain that he thundered against her extravagant follies. She paid as little heed to her Emperor brother as she did to some casual, passing lover.

“Napoleon, who was well aware of her passionate nature, had married

her very young to General Leclerc. She had gone with him to San Domingo, whence she had also returned with him, but she as a widow and he in his coffin. The widow quickly dried her tears, took up residence in the magnificent *Hôtel Charost* in the *Rue Faubourg Saint Honoré* (now the British Embassy) and set out on a career of free love which drove her brother to fury. Pauline, he decided, must marry again and at once.

"He chose Prince Borghese, who was the perfect 'Incredible', but quite inadequate as a husband—at least as a husband for Pauline. I could fill a whole volume with her amorous adventures."

"Did she live to a very old age?" asked Juliette.

"No," replied Chronossus. "As a matter of fact, she died when she was forty-five. The most lovely woman of the Empire era was not at all fastidious and she distributed her statuesque favours to all comers. As she was rather fond of writing romantic poetry, she suddenly conceived the idea that it would be rather fun to have some of her verses set to music. Caroline recommended Blangini, a singing master, who wrought havoc among his pupils. When Pauline sent for him, he hastened to obey the summons and found her in her boudoir, lying on a couch and surrounded by a bevy of most ravishing beauties. Graciously she bade him be seated and started to ask him questions. Blangini, however, was capable of only stammering, incoherent reply. Beneath her voluminous wrap, which was but very tenuously fastened and from which protruded two admirable arms adorned with gold bracelets, Pauline was quite naked. The sight took the good Blangini's breath away.

"The door opened to admit a magnificent negro.

"'Oh,' said Pauline. 'It's Paul. He's come to fetch me for my bath.'

"She rose, slipped indolently out of her peignoir and stood naked before her guests. The huge negro advanced, picked her up in his brawny arms and carried her into the adjoining bathroom. No one showed the slightest sign of emotion (except Blangini) and conversation flowed on quite tranquilly until Pauline re-appeared, alone and draped in a different and diaphanous wrap. A page came in, carrying a bowl of varnish and proceeded to tend the Princess' toenails. When he had completed his task, Pauline dismissed him, and Blangini found himself the sole and terrified member of his sex in the midst of this gilded cage.

"'Oh! How cold it is!' shuddered Pauline. 'My feet are frozen! Madame Chambaudouin, do, please, come and warm them.'

"'With pleasure, Princess,' replied the lady-in-waiting, and slipping out of her wrap, she stretched herself on the floor at the Princess' feet, while the latter proceeded to slide them (her feet) round the lady's bare throat.

"The conversation continued.

"Which form of entertainment do you prefer?" asked Pauline.

"Tragedy," replied Blangini.

"So do I," chipped in the lady-in-waiting, over whose recumbent form Pauline's feet were still gliding luxuriously. "I prefer tragedy because it is so elevating to the soul."

"As Blangini took his leave, with beating heart and ears afire, Pauline murmured softly: 'Tomorrow evening!'"

"The singing lesson was arranged for nine o'clock. It lasted till dawn. Thanks to it, Blangini's head was in a complete whirl, and Pauline was long and loud in her praises of her new singing master. One evening at the Opera one of his friends, who wished him well, whispered in Blangini's ear, 'You really must be a little more discreet, my dear fellow. Just think what would happen if the Emperor found out.'

"Blangini blanched. He'd forgotten all about the Emperor! What would happen, eh? Why, he might well be packed off into the depths of Spain, like one of his predecessors, Achille de Septeuil, who left a leg there. After that, every time the maestro emerged at dawn from the *Hôtel Charost* he drew his hat well down over his eyes and crept along in the shadow of the walls in great fear and trembling. He laid great store by his leg!

"Then suddenly Pauline announced that she was ill, and her doctors ordered her to Aix for a cure. The maestro breathed a sigh of relief. Pauline departed—but not to Aix, but straight on to Nice. There she missed her singer and sent word to him to come and join her. With alacrity he obeyed, to plunge into long and blissful love-making on the shores of the *Baie des Anges*. It was an enchanted life that they led, but also a life strictly according to programme. At three o'clock a drive round the countryside or a trip on the bay; on their return, music until dinner; after dinner, more music; and after more music, yet another duet.

"One day Pauline told him that the Emperor had asked her who this Choir Master (for such was his official function) was? Blangini all but worked himself into a state of collapse. From that moment his only thought was to hide himself in the villa and to indulge in no more drives, no more trips across the bay. Pauline, however, was inexorable and dragged him with her wherever she went.

"Next, quite unexpectedly a courier from the Emperor appeared. Blangini already saw himself exiled, forcibly pressed into the army. But no—Napoleon had decided to set up a province on the other side of the Alps and had appointed Prince Borghese as Governor. The Prince was coming to fetch his wife and take her with him to his province.

"There were floods of tears and scenes of fury from Pauline, who loved but one place in the world—Paris. And Blangini, with the comforting feeling that he himself would soon be safely back in the capital, took her in his arms and swore that he would cherish for ever the blessed memory of her.

"Don't you worry, Felix, said Pauline. 'I'll see to it that you can come with us.'

"Blangini, then found himself booked for Turin. But—Ah! happy chance! When the arrangements for the move were being made, they forgot all about him. Full of hope, he slipped into the Princess' room and begged to be allowed to return to Paris, 'since he had not been granted the honour of being included in the persons of her entourage proceeding to Turin'.

"Pauline was furious. 'They've done it on purpose—just to annoy me!' she cried. 'But just you wait and see! I will not abandon you, never fear.'

"So off they went to Turin, not, however, without incident en route. In the hostelry in Tende Her Highness was seized with colic and demanded instant treatment with the pancreatic juices of a calf. Blangini hastened forth, searching the countryside for a calf, which, when found was forthwith immolated and had the honour of contributing its pancreas to clean the intestines of Her Highness Princess Pauline.

"After a while in Turin, he felt he could continue no longer. He fled and returned to Paris, where he went to earth.

"After the fall of the Empire, whenever anyone spoke to him of Pauline he used to tremble at the recollection of these hazardous amours."

"All that long yarn, just to show me that the Little Corporal<sup>1</sup> was defenceless when confronted with women," said Juliette. "You have, I think become sadly confused, Monsieur Chronossus."

"Perhaps. But Pauline in her boudoir is, I submit, enough to confuse anyone," replied Chronossus.

### *Conscription—for Girls*

"In order to reign over women, Napoleon even went so far as to use his administrative machine. One day in August 1811 all the Prefects of the Empire received from the Ministry of Police a confidential dispatch, which at the stroke of a pen transformed them into matrimonial agents. They were requested to submit forthwith statistics with regard to unmarried girls of fourteen years of age and of good family (of families, that is, with an income of more than forty thousand livres). The Ministry was also interested in their education and the charms they possessed. The official

<sup>1</sup> Not so little—he was over 5ft. 6in.

return was required to show, in separate columns, the physical attributes, the cultural talents, the deportment and the religious principles of each maiden. Was she as fresh as the dawn—or was she pock-marked? Did she play the harp, the pianoforte? Did she paint? And what of her religious devotions? The object behind all this was nothing less than a recruiting of young girls for the purpose of finding wives for those who had served the Emperor well.

“Among the conscripts there were not a few deserters. The Duke de Croy, having been secretly warned by the Prefect, who was a friend of his, that he would the next day receive an order from the Emperor to marry his daughter to a certain General, had her married that very same evening to her cousin, Fernand, who happened to be on the spot. A gentleman of the old régime, when called upon by Baron Dupin, the Prefect of Deux Sèvres, to give his daughter in marriage, replied: ‘You have already taken all we possess, and now you are trying to steal our honour—get out!’ ”

#### *The Economic Ogre*

“Well done!” observed Juliette. “That’s exactly the sort of answer Napoleon deserved! I can well understand why French mothers called him ‘The Ogre’.”

“Ogre he may have been,” replied Chronossus. “But he was an ogre with a tender heart. Nor must you forget that the greatest Captain of all time hated war and only waged war because he was forced and constrained to do so by England. You will remember that I told you that the whole of Napoleon’s history was pre-written that day in 1792, when the Revolution annexed Belgium, and that his downfall was inevitable after the blow he received at Trafalgar!”

“I don’t care what you say,” retorted Juliette. “All I remember is that it was Napoleon who said, as he contemplated the carnage on a battlefield: ‘One night in Paris will replace the whole of this lot.’ ”

“Yes,” replied Chronossus. “But Napoleon was not really a cynical man. It was also he, remember, who wrote to Josephine after the battle of Eylau: ‘The countryside is covered with dead and wounded. It distresses and oppresses me deeply to see so many victims.’ On the day after Wagram, he went in person over the whole field of battle to make sure that all the wounded had been collected. Wherever he found a wounded man, he stopped and talked to him and ensured that help was at once brought to him.

“He sometimes flew into a terrible rage. His outburst to Talleyrand on the day he realised that the latter was betraying him, has become famous:



'You are a silken sack, filled with dung!' But there you are—he was a shrewd man and a realist.

"Once his anger had evaporated, he forgave generously. There was only one section of the community which found no favour in his eyes—the bankers and wholesale purveyors. He was mercilessly unjust to Récamier, whom he could have saved, as he well deserved to be saved, from bankruptcy; and to the very day of his downfall he carried on an epic struggle with Ouvrard the banker. On one occasion he spat at him: 'How I wish I could string you up as an example on a gallows so high that all France could see you!' Ouvrard lowered his gaze and smiled secretly; every time Napoleon put him in prison, he was forced to release him, for this financier was the only man who could equip an immense army that had been stripped of everything. Ouvrard paid his ransom, emerged from prison and returned to his large-scale pilfering activities.

"Napoleon acted in the same way towards another man of the same class, Séguin. But Séguin was a bit of a character. Tired of being flung into prison and having to pay a ransom to get out again, he elected to remain in prison, 'to safeguard himself,' he said, 'from being ruined'.

"Napoleon scrutinised the State finances as minutely as any woman scrutinises her cook's account. And in his own household, of course, he found someone who thwarted him with far more vigour than any rascally purveyor—Josephine. That lavish squanderer of his money had a wardrobe consisting of four hundred and ninety-eight chemises, one hundred and fifty-eight pairs of stockings, five hundred and twenty pairs of shoes, six hundred and seventy-three dresses and . . . two pairs of drawers!"

#### *The 'Old Soldier' at the Treasury*

"Among all the rascals in the Empire, however, Napoleon did succeed in finding one honest man; and he presents so remarkable a picture, that I must show him to you.

"This phenomenon was named Boinod. He came originally from the canton of Vaud. He first met Napoleon in '93 at the siege of Toulon and followed with the army into Italy, where he became Quartermaster General. He at once distinguished himself by the way in which he suppressed waste and pilfering, and a delighted Bonaparte rewarded him forthwith with a grant of a hundred thousand francs. This the affronted Boinod refused to accept in the following terms: 'I do not recognise your right, Citizen General, to dispose of the Republic's money in this manner. The army is suffering hardship, and I have used the sum to meet some of its requirements.'

"On another occasion Napoleon himself completed a deal for army

stores and on thinking over the contract, he realised that the contractor had made far too large a profit. But he had signed, and there was nothing he could do about it. Then he had an idea. He sent for the contractor. 'If you don't give me a rake off,' he told him, 'I'll have the contract cancelled by my Quartermaster General.'

"'Right!' replied the contractor. 'I'll give you thirty thousand francs as soon as my bills have been paid.'

"When he presented his bills to Boinod, the latter wrote across them: 'Pay—less the sum of thirty thousand francs, which the contractor has undertaken to pay to the Citizen General and which belong to the Republic.'

"When it was proposed to hold a plebiscite, by which the people were to express their wishes on the accession to the Imperial throne, only one man raised his voice against it.

"'Who is the man?' asked Napoleon.

"'The Quartermaster General, Boinod.'

"'Aha! I know him,' laughed the Emperor. 'I'll give him a Legion of Honour!'

"In 1810 Boinod was in Italy as Administrator General of the country. At that time requisitioning in occupied territories was the order of the day. A group of rich Milanese, who wished to be exempted, asked for an interview with the Emperor and offered him a sum of seventeen millions to release them from their obligations. When Boinod in Milan heard that they had set out for Paris to make their proposition, he jumped into a diligence, travelled post haste night and day, ruining quite a number of horses in the process, and arrived in Paris forty-eight hours after the audience had taken place. Napoleon was on the point of accepting the offer.

"'I have come,' said Boinod, 'to prevent Your Majesty from making a grave mistake. Let me take over these negotiations, and I'll get double for you.'

"'Very well. I will grant you plenipotentiary powers.'

"Accompanied by the Milanese, the Administrator General set out on the return journey and bargained furiously with them all the way. By the time they reached Milan he had their promise to pay thirty-two millions!

"This time, Napoleon, full of admiration, obliged him to accept a hundred thousand francs. Boinod took them . . . and paid them into the Treasury!

"He followed Napoleon to Elba. After the Hundred Days, he would have been reduced to absolute penury, if Louis XVIII had not found a minor post for him in connection with food supplies. This post he held for

fifteen years until the July monarchy restored him to his previous grade and conferred on him the Order of Commander of the Legion of Honour.

"In Saint Helena Napoleon frequently used to think about him. 'If all my subordinates had been men of his stamp, I should have been able to raise the name of France to the pinnacle of honour. I would have made it an object of respect to the whole world.'"

### *The Rascals*

"Napoleon's Marshals, who owed everything to him, lost no time in betraying him. But there were some, too, who loved him and whom he loved.

"General Rapp was fond of saying: 'There is no one more sincere, no one more constant in his affections than Napoleon.' Of all the comrades of his younger days, Marshal Lannes was the only one who continued to address him with the familiar 'thou'. During the campaign in Poland they once had a lively discussion in front of the troops.

"'And I say the blood of one Frenchman' cried Lannes, 'is worth more than the whole of Poland!'

"'If you're not happy about things—get out!' retorted Napoleon.

"'That I won't,' said the Marshal, 'because you have need of me!'

"Lannes' death at Essling was a grievous blow to Napoleon. The Marshal lingered for eight days, and, bowed down though he was with other anxieties Napoleon visited him morning and evening, every day. When he finally died, Napoleon embraced him and wept. 'What a loss!' he exclaimed, 'for me and for France.'

"He had been equally distressed when Desaix was killed at Marengo. After the battle had been won and people were asking him why he remained so sombrelly pensive, tears came into his eyes and he said sadly: 'Yes—but Desaix! If only I had been able to embrace him after the battle, how splendid a day this would have been!'

"When he heard that Duroc had been seriously wounded, he turned to those who were waiting for his orders for the battle and said: 'Everything must wait till tomorrow!'

"'When he emerged from the house where Duroc lay dying,' said Caulincourt, 'hot tears were streaming from his eyes and fell unheeded on his coat.'"

### *Prize-giving Day*

"Of these same men, whom he loved so much, he had, it is true, a sufficiently low opinion to assert that they had to be kept happy with 'baubles'. 'You may be quite sure,' he used to say, 'that you can keep men

happy with absurdities far more easily than with sound ideas!’ But there you are; therein he showed the same worldly wisdom as Louis XIV.

“If only you could have seen the puerile joy of his old comrades on that March 1st 1808, the day on which he dished out a whole cartload of titles. At one stroke, he created thirty-one Dukes, three hundred and eighty-eight Counts, more than a thousand Barons, to say nothing of a host of Knights.

“This new nobility had nothing of the poise and presence of Napoleon’s brothers and sisters, for the whole of the Bonaparte family had breeding, and the fashionable *Faubourg Saint Germain* gloated over the spectacle of Murat (an innkeeper’s son), d’Augereau (the son of a bricklayer), Ney (the son of a cooper), Masséna (a baker’s son) and Junot (the son of a timber merchant) being suddenly rewarded with these high-sounding titles taken from the battles in which they had distinguished themselves.

“That day the *Tuileries* was like a school playground on prize-giving day. Madame Junot was on duty in one of the *salons* of the *Pavillon de Flore*, when she espied Savary coming towards her.

“‘Give me a kiss!’ he bade her. ‘For I have had good news. I am now a Duke and my name is the Duke of Rovigo!’

“He was so puffed up with joy, that he might at any moment have risen into the air like a balloon.

“‘And if he had told you at the same time that you, too, are now a Duchess,’ said Rapp, taking hold of both of Madame Junot’s hands, ‘I’m sure you would have kissed him as you are now going to kiss me! And, by jove, you’ve got the loveliest name of the whole lot—you are Madame la Duchesse d’Abrantès!’

“At that moment Madame Lannes arrived.

“‘And what name have you got?’ the new Duchess asked her.

“‘A delightful name—Montebello. That and your own are the two most pleasing names in the whole list.’

“Never had the *Tuileries* Palace been the scene of such joyous excitement. From the Marshal of the Palace to the humblest servitor, they were all hoping with beating hearts to receive one more feather to stick in their caps. And yet, we were still quite close to the day on which the then First Consul, desirous of rewarding merit, had created the Legion of Honour and had encountered such widespread and general hostility—for the French had only recently been smitten with the idea of equality. The insignia of the Order were not made until two years after the Empire, even then those decorated only consented to wear them when they saw sentries presenting arms to the gallant pensioners and women stopping

the gallant Captain Coignet in the streets to ask permission to give him a kiss; and when the owners of the cafés round about the *Palais Royal* announced: 'Order what you like! Members of the Legion of Honour are served free here!'

"If that held good today," said Juliette objectively, "most of the Paris cafés would quickly go broke!"

"It was in connection with the Legion of Honour that Bonaparte one day said in the Council of State: 'They call these things "baubles". Baubles they may be, but it is with baubles like these that you draw men close to you.'"

"Which exactly bears out what I was saying," said Juliette, "namely that really he held men in very poor esteem."

"Perhaps he did. But he also said: 'There is nothing which you cannot call upon the French to do by dangling the bait of danger before their eyes. It seems to give them spirit.'"

### *The Lucky Star*

"Though he may have had a poor opinion of men, though he was possessed of all the arrogance of genius, yet he had also a measure of modesty. 'Never,' he said, 'has a man owed more to circumstance than I.' He believed implicitly in his 'star'.

"And it must be admitted that it had caused him to be born at a most propitious moment. What, I wonder, would Napoleon have become, if he had lived at the time of the Third Republic? Or under the old régime? A mixture, perhaps of a Colbert and a Condé, at the very most. The Revolution came just at the right moment to deliver France into his hands. And if Corsica had not become a French possession a year before his birth, Bonaparte would probably have never been anything more than an underground resistance leader—or a British subject.

"He was superstitious. On any and every occasion he was liable to start talking about his star. One day Cardinal Fesch was remonstrating with him on the subject of the unfortunate war in Spain. 'Scarcely had the Cardinal opened his mouth,' Rapp reports, 'than the Emperor drew him into the alcove of a window.'

"'Do you see that star?' he asked.

"It was in the middle of the day.

"'No,' replied the Cardinal.

"'Good!' said Napoleon. 'For as long as I am the only person who can see it, I shall follow my present course, and I will tolerate no interference.'

"After Waterloo, Napoleon was on the *Ile d'Aix* and was hesitating whether to try and break through the British blockade and make for

America or surrender to them, when a little bird flew in through the open window. General Gourgaud caught it.

"'Let it go,' said Napoleon. 'There are already quite enough unhappy creatures as it is.'

"Gourgaud obeyed, and the Emperor continued:

"'Let us watch the portents!'

"The bird circled and flew away to the right.

"'Sire! It's making straight for the British cruiser!'

"Napoleon wasted no time. That very same day Las Cases and General Lallemand were sent on board the *Belléophon* under a flag of truce. The Emperor had been unable to resist the sign given to him by the portents.

"He was a typical man of the latter part of the rationalist eighteenth century in which flourished the convulsionists, the Rosicrucians, the Prophets and a host of other Cagliostro's."

### *Napoleon's Double*

"One day this magician found someone who was every bit as great a magician as himself. He was a Swiss named Jomini. This young man had one mania—strategy; and by deep and incessant book work he had acquired a species of second sight. After trying in vain for a considerable time, he at last succeeded in obtaining an interview with Napoleon. That was in September 1806, on the very eve of the Prussian campaign, and on that day he had a conversation with Napoleon, which the latter never forgot, even when he was in Saint Helena.

"The Emperor, who felt in an expansive and communicative mood, started to chat lightly about the coming campaign—the campaign destined to end with the battle of Jena. He very quickly realised that in this young man he had found someone who grasped his ideas as quickly and as completely as himself. With an entire change of tone he said sharply: 'For the time being, you will remain with me on my General Staff.'

"Jomini showed no particular emotion at this sudden stroke of good fortune.

"'If your Majesty will permit,' he replied quietly, 'I will rejoin Your Majesty in four days' time in Bamberg.'

"The Emperor started violently.

"'Who the devil told you I was going to Bamberg?' he demanded angrily.

"'The map of Germany, Sire—and your own plan of campaign at Ulm and Marengo. To do to the Duke of Brunswick what you did to Mack and Melas, you will have to march on Gera, and to get to Gera, you will have to advance via Bamberg.'

"In fact, that young Swiss strategist had guessed correctly the plan upon which Napoleon had secretly decided, details of which he had divulged to no one.

"'Very well,' he said at length. 'Be at Bamberg as you suggest; meanwhile do not say a word about it to a soul—not even to Berthier.' (Berthier was his Chief of Staff.)"

"I suppose you are quite sure," said Juliette, "that it was Napoleon himself who won all Napoleon's battles?"

"I think you can assume that he did," replied Chronossus, "for, having made all this fuss of young Jomini, Napoleon tucked him away in some corner of the General Staff and forgot all about him. The result was that Jomini in a fit of pique went over to the Russians, and the Tsar made him a General. But even there he had no luck, for the Allied Generals made no use whatever of this remarkable strategist. Just as well, I think; for it would have been particularly galling if Napoleon had been beaten by his own double!

"However, I mustn't go on and on about this devil of a fellow, whom I admire so much, but whom you obviously do not like."

"I certainly do not," said Juliette. "He sent far too many people to their death."

"He mobilised one million, six hundred thousand Frenchmen—a mere bagatelle in comparison with 1914-18; and he led us through the most prodigious adventure of modern times. What a distance there is, and at what an intoxicating speed it was covered, between the shabby little General and the man who resuscitated the Empire of Charlemagne! It is difficult for any Frenchman to remain indifferent to the glory of his achievement. Then again, let me invite your attention to an actual fact. Round about 1800 the problem of European unity had been solved, just as it had been solved round about 800. I'm not suggesting that we want another Charlemagne or another Napoleon; but I do think that they may perhaps have made some contribution, which in the end will help us to achieve European federation."

"Don't try and confuse the issue," said Juliette obstinately. "All I see, and all I want to see, is the Ogre who devoured the conscripts."

"Very well," replied Chronossus. "As the epic aspect leaves you cold, I hope that you will at least show some pity for the Ogre delivered into the hands of women."

### *Napoleon no Match for the Women*

"Oh, I grant you, he made more than one conquest in the gay cavalier

manner; but of the three women who counted in his life, there was but one who remained faithful to him in his hour of misfortune, the one who gave herself to him from a sense of patriotic duty—the Countess Walewska.”

“What had patriotism to do with it?” asked Juliette.

“In January 1807, when Napoleon, the conqueror of the Prussians and the Russians, entered Warsaw amid scenes of delirious enthusiasm, his eye was caught by a slim and fragile young woman with a sweet, pale face and blue eyes. He sent her an imperial and peremptory summons, which she ignored. Thereupon Prince Poniatowski and the other leaders of a resurgent Poland begged her, for the sake of her country, to accede to the Emperor’s wishes. She consented. She surrendered to the Emperor and proceeded to fall truly and deeply in love with the man. Further, by giving him a son she confirmed that he was not to blame for Josephine’s sterility. It was this latter fact that made him resign himself to repudiating Josephine.”

“In short,” said Juliette, “a love story in which everybody was prepared to resign themselves to everything.”

“The fact is—and Napoleon himself has said so—that Josephine was the woman whom he loved most dearly. ‘I was brought up with her,’ he said, ‘and then, she was a true woman and the one I chose.’

“He had made his choice in the *salon* of Barras, whose already mature and somewhat bored mistress Josephine was. She was then thirty-three and Napoleon twenty-seven. But Viscount Beauharnais’ widow was full of a worldly graciousness which delighted the little Corsican, and the Creole in her had intimate charms which completely captivated him.

“Napoleon was wrong when he said that he had chosen her; it was she who had chosen him. . . .”

“Obviously,” interrupted Juliette. “It always is, as you know full well. Except, of course, in cases where a marriage is arranged by the families.”

“It was not, however, primarily a question of marriage, but of love. Only Bonaparte, simpleton that he was, confused the two things.”

“Let’s say he indulged in a private marital revolution of his own and leave it at that,” said Juliette.

“Actually,” continued Chronossus, “the whole thing occurred simply because Ségur one day said to Josephine: ‘That little General may become a great man one day.’ As far as Josephine was concerned the situation was not confused in any way, and while Bonaparte was going from victory to victory across the plains of the Po, she was being unfaithful to him in a



most open-handed manner, both with Murat and with a handsome roisterer named Hippolyte Charles.<sup>1</sup>

“Bonaparte wrote her ardent letters. He complained about her coldness towards him (but not about her infidelities, of which he remained ignorant). Josephine hardly bothered to read the letters, and she never responded to the violent love which he bore for her. At last Bonaparte came to realise that he could not expect over much from this frivolous Creole. When he was in Egypt, he fell for a comely little blonde with the delightful nickname of Bellilotte, an ex-milliner, who had married a certain Lieutenant Foures. To make things easier, Napoleon sent this lieutenant to France with despatches which were not of the slightest interest to anyone. The British intercepted him. But when they found out the reason for his mission (and read the contents of his despatches), they promptly sent him back to Egypt, just to annoy the Emperor—which they succeeded thoroughly in doing. When he saw his faithful lieutenant back again, Napoleon no longer harboured any doubts that England was his real and hereditary enemy.

“His family did its utmost to persuade him to divorce Josephine. When he realised the extent to which she had betrayed him, he was on the point of doing so. She knew how to get round him, however, and she succeeded in disarming his wrath. Nevertheless his great love for her gave place to a feeling of old and well-tryed friendship, a species of live-and-let-live, which lasted until the day he made her an Empress.

“On that day, as he was going into *Notre Dame*—the portals of which had been camouflaged with pasteboard to make them look like a Greek temple—Napoleon turned to his brother Joseph and whispered: ‘Joseph—if only father could see us now!’ I think that’s rather a pretty touch, don’t you? The soldier of the Revolution thinking of his papa as he was about to become the Anointed of God!

“His three sisters, who had always hated Josephine, had been ordered to bear the train of her imperial robe. During the ceremony they vented their spleen by letting go of it so suddenly, that the Empress all but fell on her imperial nose.”

“All very touching,” remarked Juliette. “But the fact remains that in the end he did repudiate her, didn’t he?”

“What else could he do?” replied Chronossus. “When you succeed to a throne, it’s only natural that you should wish to ensure the succession to it. But before Marie-Louise comes on the stage, let us take a look at these two women whom he loved. First there was Josephine Beauharnais, who

<sup>1</sup> The people of Paris, ill-informed about the defeats that were being inflicted on Napoleon in her boudoir, dubbed her *Notre Dame des Victoires*.

was the more close to him, because, like him, she had fallen between the two stools of the ancient régime and the new order. Then there was the Countess Walewska, who loved him for the sake of upholding the principle of national independence, a principle which he refused to recognise, which was the cause of his defeats in Spain and in Russia and which later was to become the hobby-horse of his nephew, Napoleon III. And lastly there was the little Princess delivered into the hands of the Ogre, who adored her and whom she in the end scornfully discarded."

*This Hero with the Sweet Smile*

"Marie Antoinette's niece set out for France like Iphigenia being led to the sacrifice.

"The Emperor went along the road to Compiègne to meet her. In the village of Courcelles, in pouring rain, he halted the procession and, heedless of protocol, jumped into her carriage and threw his arms around her. Once she had recovered from this initial onslaught, she was agreeably surprised at the forethought and the little attentions which Napoleon showed. In the carriage, which raced at a gallop along the road to Compiègne, she discovered in this Minotaur a man of forty with regular features and a skin of pale gold, whose smile gave him a most delightful air of candour and youthfulness. All sense of shyness left her, and she felt completely at ease. So much so, indeed, that at Compiègne the Emperor did not leave her all night.

"He was in love, and his young wife was very happy. 'Everybody thinks I am afraid of the Emperor,' she wrote to Metternich, 'but it is he who is afraid of me.'

"In the mornings at the *Tuileries* he was constantly in and out of the Empress' room, fussing over the books she was reading, chattering away with her, listening attentively when she sat at the piano and sang the *Lieder* of her native land. He became a different man. He, who always used to swallow his meals in ten minutes, now loved to linger at table; he, who had always been such a chilly mortal, now welcomed the open windows. He learnt to dance and, to please her, he gave intimate little balls, at which he fluttered and hovered around her. She played billiards with him and beat him regularly. He took it upon himself to teach her to ride and often ran after her in his silken socks and without shoes in the sawdust of the riding school. And Marie-Louise wrote to her father: 'Wherever I go with him, I am happy.'

"Then she became pregnant, and Napoleon, as confident as ever in his star was sure that it would be a son. But when the time came, there were difficult complications. Napoleon forgot all about an heir to the throne

and thought only of his wife. 'Don't lose your head, Monsieur Dubois,' he said to her doctor. 'Forget that she is the Empress and treat her as you would treat a little shopgirl in *Saint Denis*.'

"In stammering phrases Dubois explained that the child was arriving most awkwardly, feet foremost.

"'What will you do?' asked Napoleon. Then, in sudden fear: 'My God! there isn't any danger, is there?'

"'We must save one or the other, Sire.'

"'Then save the mother,' replied Napoleon unhesitatingly. 'The mother—it is her right.'

"Then, at long last, was born the little King of Rome (King of Rome—always the same old idea of resuscitating the Empire of Charlemagne and through it, the Roman Empire). The cannon roared, and the throng in the *Tuileries* gardens counted the number of rounds. Nineteen . . . twenty . . . twenty-one. . . . If the cannon stopped now, it meant a daughter . . . the twenty-second round was greeted with a human roar that rattled every window in the *Tuileries*.

"In the Empress' room Napoleon went over to the window and, hiding behind a curtain peeped out. The soldiers on guard were waving and brandishing their arms as they had done during the Revolution, people were hugging each other, throwing their hats into the air and dancing wild jigs. The Emperor's head sank on to his chest and he wept, and it was with cheeks wet with these tears that he turned to take his first glimpse of his son.

"Abroad, however, the coalitions against him remained incessantly active. No sooner was one broken, than another was formed. From some poor wayside tavern in Germany or Russia he wrote to Marie-Louise to tell her that he had just won a battle and had captured so many guns and standards—and to urge her to take the little King of Rome to see the elephant in the *Jardin des Plantes*.

"After the defeat at Leipzig on January 23rd 1814—a bitter winter's day—he prepared to set out on his famous Franch campaign. He spent the afternoon in his study, poring over his maps and dictating his orders, while the little King toddled round the room, singing and pulling his wooden horse by the bridle. In the evening, after dining with the Empress, the King of Rome and Queen Hortense, he bade them good-bye. Marie-Louise cried and cried, and the more she wept, the more Napoleon kissed and caressed her in an effort to comfort her. (She would very soon find comfort—in the arms of Neipperg.)

"'Don't worry,' Napoleon told her. 'Trust me. Do you think I don't know my job?' He picked up his little son and hugged him. 'Now,' he

said laughingly, 'we're off to give *Papa François* a hiding! Don't cry,' he added, turning to his wife. 'I'll soon be back.'

" 'When?'

" 'Ah, that God alone knows.'

"He left the same night. As he was about to leave the *Tuileries* at three o'clock in the morning, he strode with giant strides to the room in which little nightlights shimmered to have one more look at his tiny son, who was sleeping peacefully in his cot and whom he was never to see again."

## The Autocracy of the *Bourgeoisie*

A.D. 1815–1830—THE RESTORATION. *Louis XVIII succeeds in restoring peace and the finances of the country. But Charles X fails to restore the aristocratic way of life of the old régime.* A.D. 1830—*The capture of Algiers and the July Revolution. Republicans and Imperialists organise the “Three Days of Glory”—much to the advantage of the constitutional monarchy;* A.D. 1830–1848—*Louis-Philippe, the carpet-bag king. An absolute bourgeoisie;* A.D. 1848–1852—THE SECOND REPUBLIC; A.D. 1852–1870—THE SECOND EMPIRE. *The absolute bourgeoisie remains firmly in the saddle. Napoleon III stands idle while Germany achieves unification at Sadowa (1866);* A.D. 1871—*Defeat at Sedan;* A.D. 1871—THE COMMUNE; 1870–1940 THE THIRD REPUBLIC. *The bourgeoisie turns to socialism;* THE NINETEENTH CENTURY—*The industrial revolution. Machinery, railways, industry, urban concentration of the population and the birth of socialism;* BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. *Technical and scientific revolution. Motor cars, aeroplanes, telephones, wireless, television, cinema, X-rays, anaesthesia, antibiotics, quotas, relativity, and so on ad infinitum; and the disintegration of matter. Colonisation of the planet. Social laws. Happiness within the reach of every pocket?*

“ONCE upon a time,” continued Chronossus, “there was a flourishing people, which felt that it was being borne onwards on the wings of progress. It had emerged from a Reign of Terror as fresh as though it were emerging from the dawn of the world; it had confidence in man. Confidence? Nay, rather, a burning faith in mankind. It is true that there were still negroes to be seen, toiling in the chains of slavery, but technical inventions would free them in no time; the towns were growing, swelling, visibly before one’s very eyes; the solid middle classes had become prosperous and needed no one to help them to govern; and the whole nation

in full flight was about to burst its bonds and swarm over the oceans to found new empires, while noble monuments proudly raised their heads heavenwards to the glory of the brave, new world."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Juliette. "All of which, in less eloquent terms, means that after the Revolution and the wars of the Empire. . . ."

"Which means that after the Reign of Terror in the year One Thousand. . . ."

"Oh!" said Juliette. "I see—you mean there was a clean sweep and then back we went to the beginning again?"

"Exactly," replied Chronossus. "Everything started again at the beginning—the serfs, the predatory knights, the rural exodus, the *bourgeois* ruling the towns, the horse-collar, the windmill, the overseas French colonies in Corsica and England, the faith of the Crusades, the steeples of the cathedrals and the turrets of the fortress *châteaux*. . . . Don't say that you've forgotten the splendid view we had of the eleventh century from the top of our Angevin stronghold?"

"Of course not," said Juliette. "Only—well, it's the nineteenth century you've got to talk about now, isn't it?"

"And that is quite easy. All I need do is to change the names. Now we have the factory hands, the Captains of Industry—honest men, self-assured, fully cognisant of their rights and as hard as the feudal Barons of old—the rural exodus, the mushroom towns, barricades in the streets, the railroad, the colonies. . . ."

"Quite, quite," interrupted Juliette. "But where are the faith and the spirit of the Crusades?"

"The spirit of the Crusades? Do you mean to say that you haven't scented it, wafted down to you on the winds of the twentieth century? And the faith of the modern world—in spite of one or two recent shocks and setbacks—is something which you know as well as I do—faith in, and worship of, progress!"

"Sneer if you must," retorted Juliette. "But even you would not dare to say that we have not progressed—and with giant strides—since Napoleon's day."

"I would not, indeed. And to get the measure of those strides, all we have to do is to take a lift."

"A curious way of doing it," observed Juliette.

"And go up, as we did to the topmost turret of our medieval fortress, to the top of the Eiffel Tower."

### *The Great Seesaw*

"From the summit of that pyramid of steel a whole century spreads itself before our eyes."

"I know," said Juliette. "A whole torrent of revolutions and all sorts of régimes, tumbling higgledy-piggledy one over the other—the Restoration, the July Monarchy, the Second Republic, the Second Empire, the Third Repu. . . ."

"Kings, legitimate or constitutional, Emperors, republican Presidents—all that sort of thing changed exactly nothing. Through it all it was the *bourgeoisie* that really sat on the throne and governed with an iron fist. Every time the people created a revolution—1830, 1848, 1871—the *bourgeoisie* was there to filch the profits. In 1830 all that was required was for Louis Philippe to ride in procession to the *Hôtel de Ville*, carrying a tricolour flag. In 1848 the *bourgeois* took personal charge, and their National Guard fought a four-day battle in the streets. In 1871 Thiers had his 'bloody week', the most cruel act of repression in the whole of our history. The fact is that throughout the whole length of this century the *bourgeoisie* was engaged in a revolution of its own, the greatest revolution the world had ever known, the industrial, technical and, towards its end, scientific revolution, which has changed the whole aspect of our lives.

"To assist them in their tremendous undertaking Louis XVIII bequeathed to the *bourgeoisie* his most potent instrument—the gold franc, which was stabilised by the Restoration, the franc which remained as steady as a rock from 1814 to 1914."

"Incredible!"

"But true. And you realise, don't you, that in the face of this *bourgeois* franc all the revolutions of the century were nothing more than a little game of seesaw."

#### *A Moderate Conception of Kingship*

"All the same," said Juliette, "wouldn't it have been much simpler if we'd reverted to a republic straightway after the fall of Napoleon and stuck to it?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Chronossus. "But Napoleon, heir to the Revolution, had mislaid the republic somewhere on the field of battle, and no one could say where it had got to. In point of fact, they hardly gave the matter a thought. The Allies of the Coalition, on the other hand, were most embarrassed by this empty throne. Who the devil should they put upon it, they wondered?"

"Bernadotte—he's a sound fellow!" said the Tsar of Russia.

"Bernadotte was King of Sweden and a sound fellow certainly from the Tsar's point of view, since he held him in the palm of his hand."

"Little Napoleon, under a Regent,' suggested the Emperor of Austria. And the Regent, of course, would have been his own daughter, Marie-Louise.

“‘Or what about electing the Duke of Orleans?’ countered the Tsar.

“‘An elected King? And the son of *Philippe Egalité*, to boot! A deplorable suggestion!’ observed Talleyrand.

“All the Prussians, ‘as happy as gods in France’, thought about was loot. And the British—well, the British, as usual, had no ideas at all. But Talleyrand had—Louis XVIII. Louis XVIII? With the Republic intervening, everybody had forgotten all about Louis XVI’s brother. Nor did anyone know anything about him. But he did represent a principle that was above party strife, above coalition jockeying—the principle of legitimate succession.

“And that’s how Louis XVIII came to ascend the throne of his ancestors and granted the Charter of Liberties to his subjects ‘in the nineteenth year of our reign.’”

“The nineteenth! He had a nerve, that Louis XVIII!”

“Nineteenth, because he wished to say: ‘I have been King of France since the death of Louis XVII in 1795.’ He also wished to say: ‘I will also make myself responsible for the obligations incurred during both the revolutionary and the imperial eras; here is your Charter, and that is the end of the matter.’”

“And what about the ‘white terror?’” asked Juliette, “and the *émigrés* who had ‘learnt nothing and forgotten nothing?’”

“Ah! But they had! There was one thing that they had certainly learnt—how to hate. Anyone who had fought for France under the Republic or the Empire was to them a traitor. They alone, they believed, were good Frenchmen; but they were the only ones who thought so.

“‘They are implacable!’ sighed Louis XVIII. And when the electors (there were only a hundred thousand whose financial position gave them the right to vote) presented him with an ‘impossible’ Chamber, full of ultra-reactionaries more royalist than the King himself, the latter promptly dissolved it.

“Louis XVIII set himself two tasks—to re-establish harmony among the various factions of the French people and to restore the country’s financial position. As far as the finances were concerned, this was easy. The King hit upon the idea, which will probably strike you as original in the extreme, of reducing expenditure. The Civil servants played their part nobly, and for six years drew only half their authorised emoluments.”

“I beg your pardon?” said Juliette.

“They did, I assure you. But there were others who were by no means content—the Officers of the *Grande Armée* who had been transferred to the Reserve on half pay. These old soldiers passed into the history of our literature as the symbols of glory unappreciated. For the *bourgeois* from



behind their office desks looked back with nostalgic affection at the epic era. There were clear indications of this in every family, whose handkerchiefs, table cloths and napkins were decorated with pictures of the *Grande Armée*. They sneezed to the glory of the Emperor and mopped their brows on a platoon of the Old Guard or the leg of a Cossack, and the ice-cream they ate was served on the battlefield of Eylau.

"Splendid though the Empire had been under the Restoration, the monarchy would have encountered but little more than this tea-shop sort of opposition, if only the Count of Artois, when he mounted the throne as Charles X in succession to his brother, Louis XVIII, had banished from his mind the days when he used to have 'little bets'<sup>1</sup> with Marie Antoinette. But Charles X was the last survivor of the Versailles featherheads. 'What can you expect?' Louis XVIII said of him; 'the fellow conspired against our brother, Louis XVI, he conspired against me, and, given half a chance, he would have conspired against himself!' But he was a King after the heart of those *émigrés* who, when they returned to the *Tuileries*, sniffed with deep emotion those odours of the good old days when a gentleman could always relieve himself in one of the royal antechambers.

"That the *Faubourg Saint-Germain* should have 'restored' the exquisite manners of the old régime in those delightful *salons*, that snobbishness—first in the *Café Anglais* and later in the Jockey Club, founded in 1833—should have brought about an Anglo-French reconciliation that paved the way for the *Entente Cordiale* are facts that cannot but give us the liveliest satisfaction. But that Charles X should have given back to the Jesuits the powers of which Louis XV had deprived them was all wrong. The 'Clerical Party' resuscitated all the furious anti-clerical animosities of the past; there were some who were 'benevolently minded' and others who respected the clergy as such, but who refused absolutely to allow a secret congregation of men to organise themselves into an instrument for spying upon the private life of the individual and for the purpose of acquiring power. And the Press, a growing power in the land, was snapping and snarling continuously at the heels of reaction."

### *The Children of the Century*

"There were at that moment a lot of young people, who were about to become grown men and who had been born after the Revolution. To them, the old régime was the fairy story of their grandfathers, 1793 something which had been fought for and won by their fathers, and the Empire

<sup>1</sup> As Count of Artois he had a "little bet" of 100,000 francs (twenty million francs today) that he would build a wooden *château* in the *Bois de Boulogne* in six weeks. He won his bet by employing 900 workmen night and day. This was Bagatelle.

a conglomeration of military standards in the midst of which they had grown up. These young people expressed themselves through the medium of a number of 'sonorous voices', the eldest of whom was Lamartine, born in 1790, and the youngest Musset, who was born in 1810, but had already become famous by the time he was nineteen. In 1820, Vigny was twenty-three years old, Michelet twenty-two, Balzac twenty-one, Hugo eighteen, Alexandre Dumas seventeen and Georges Sand sixteen.

"They wore waistcoats of vivid hues, affected a 'storm-tossed' hair style and beat their breasts over the heart, the seat of genius. The writers of the eighteenth century had styled themselves 'philosophers'. The romantic poets did far better; they were prophets, apostles, magicians, stirring lights, and they used to converse with God. No—I'm not making this up; on one of his photographs, in which he was shown in a meditative frame of mind, Hugo wrote: 'Victor Hugo, conversing with God.'"

"And what did the good God say to them?" asked Juliette.

"He told them that the poor were good and that the mighty were evil."

"All right as far as it goes."

"Yes, but if it were sufficient merely to be poor in order to be good, wouldn't that have made things altogether too easy? To hear them talk, you would think that God had also told them that the idle had genius, that the galley-slaves were sublime and that courtesans had great hearts."

"And those with mean hearts?" asked Juliette.

"Were to be found automatically among Ministers, priests, judges, soldiers, gendarmes and husbands. And so—long live revolt and long live misery in this desolate universe! And who, indeed among us has not a hidden tear in his eye?"

"But one day, they knew, the reign of Right, of Justice, of Humanity—of all those things, in fact, which one writes with a capital letter—would surely come. When? How? 'Ah!' they said, 'that is God's secret.'"

### *Man, Brought to Perfection by the Steam Engine*

"These young people, who proclaimed that society was inhuman—because they believed, poor innocents, that man was humane—had been breast-fed on the tears of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. But did you know that, apart from them, our wandering and solitary dreamer had other children, too?"

"Yes, I know," answered Juliette. "But they were illegi——"

"No, no," interrupted Chronossus. "Jean-Jacques Rousseau's other children were the *bourgeois*."

"Really!" exclaimed Juliette. "It seems to me that you delight in saying the first thing that comes into your head!"

"Not a bit!" protested Chronossus. "Mr. Everyman himself also suffered from the ills of the century, but he looked after himself most tenderly. He had his foot-warmers, his thick dressing-gown, and he never left off his flannel underwear; he wore a top-hat, but he also wore a lock of hair over his forehead, but—and this, I think, was a good portent—he brushed his hair à l'*inspiré*. His lady danced the quadrille, the valse, the cotillion and the polka; she wore corsets and had her occasional 'vapours'; her waistline had descended to its proper, natural place, and she wore long, leg-of-mutton sleeves; she made jams according to the fruit in season and—and this, surely, was also a good portent—she discovered sea-bathing at Dieppe in 1822.<sup>1</sup> Progress was certainly on the march. Some among the really go-ahead people even had gas-lighting. A sou really was a sou, stocks and shares all stood above par, and steam-driven machinery began to make its appearance. In the rural districts—the countryside which had not changed its face for centuries—the great arms of the telegraph passed on cryptic signs from hillock to hillock, the signs of progress. Victor Hugo sang of Canaan, the promised land of the free, the land in which all men were brothers. And Mr. Everyman was firmly of the opinion that the steam-driven machine would perfect the human race."

"Virtue acquired by machinery," said Juliette. "Isn't that exactly the opposite of what Rousseau preached when he said: 'Man, inherently good. . . .'"

"True; but extremes often meet, you know. Though I must say, to place one's trust in a lot of cog-wheels seems to me to demand a goodly measure of most robust faith—don't you agree?"

#### *Fabulous Chariots, Driven by a Volcano*

"The peasants did not hold nearly such optimistic views about the future, and even though the advent of the telegraph was a pointer to the coming of the railroad, they chose to turn a blind eye to the fact.

"When the first line, from Paris to Saint-Germain, was opened, however, we saw.

'La ville de Paris accourant ventre à terre  
Sur des chars fabuleux conduits par un cratère,'

and the first effect of this 'fulminating steam' was a tremendous rush to enjoy the delights of river bathing, for the Parisians found to their astonishment that in twenty minutes they could now reach a Seine which flowed clear and limpid between verdant banks and green meadows. That was in 1837."

<sup>1</sup> It was the timid Duchess de Berry, who set the fashion. The first time she went into the sea, a gun was fired to mark the occasion.

"1837?" cried Juliette. "And what about the Revolution of 1830? What have you done with that?"

"Forgive me," replied Chronossus. "We must have passed it without noticing. But you will agree that, as a revolution, it bears no comparison with the revolution caused by the advent of the railway."

"Perhaps not; but even so, I'd like to hear about it."

"Very well—if you insist. I told you that the Press had been snapping and snarling at the heels of reaction. Charles X was anxious to muzzle it on the grounds that it was interfering with the prosecution of the war in Algeria. I forgot to say, by the way, that we had embarked on the conquest of Algeria in 1830. The Minister on whose advice Charles X signed, on July 25th 1830, the famous ordinances dissolving the Chamber of Deputies and introducing flagrantly improper modifications into the Charter of Liberties, was Polignac, who conjured up sweet memories of his mother, Marie Antoinette's favourite.

"His action on that day made it obvious that the Revolution would have to start all over again at the beginning—a noble task, which the revolutionaries felt that they had worthily accomplished in three days of rioting—*Les Trois Glorieuses*—on July 28th, 29th, 30th 1830. Charles fled, and with him went the last chance of the survival of the principle of legitimate succession. Once again, the throne was vacant. The July Revolution had been carried out by the Republicans, acting in conjunction with the imperialists, and Louis Philippe was proclaimed King of France."

"That seems logical enough," commented Juliette.

"Louis Philippe was a carpet-bag King, the premier of those *bourgeois* Frenchmen whose hearts were in their jobs, whose stomachs were devotees of a good table and who had clear consciences and flannel waistcoats. From that moment you can assume that we had come under the sway of an absolute *bourgeoisie*, a régime which would have no truck whatever with revolutionary dreamers. As a result, the country enjoyed a period of prodigious prosperity, which continued until the declaration of war in 1914.

"Certain enterprising journalists like Emile Girardin realised that the fortune of a newspaper was not made by selling news to its subscribers, but by providing a medium of publicity for businessmen. Low prices wedded to large circulations gave birth to the modern Press. Madame Girardin, a superb and intelligent blonde, consoled herself for not having married Alfred de Vigny by becoming a leader of society and fashion in the *beau monde* of Louis Philippe; in her *salon* Dukes and Ambassadors rubbed shoulders with the romantic poets, though even the wit and charm of their hostess could not make them entirely forget the sovereign grace of Madame Récamier in her little flat in the *Rue de Sèvres*.

“Stendhal, whom no one could accuse of toadying to those in power, wrote in *Les Mémoires d'un Touriste*: ‘My pleasure gives me courage, but I do not know how to describe in moderate terms the growing prosperity that France is enjoying under Louis Philippe. I fear to be taken for a paid propagandist. But on all sides, I see masons at work, building a whole heap of houses—in the towns, in the villages and in the countryside; new roads stretch forth in every direction; everywhere in the fields they are digging irrigation channels, building walls, planting hedges. . . .’

“To give you some idea of the proliferation of the steam-driven machine under Louis Philippe, let me cite one solitary example. In 1828 coal production stood at one and a half million tons; twenty years later it has risen to five million tons. Spinning was among the foremost of our industries. Anxious lest machinery should really bring about the perfection of the human race, the *bourgeois* suppressed without mercy the ever-increasing number of strikes, and particularly those of the Lyons silk-weavers in 1831 and 1834.

“At that time the *bourgeois* had no hesitation in acting in defence of his rights. He attached great importance to having the honour—provided that he paid enough in taxation—of donning the uniform of the National Guard and firing his rifle at the working masses. In the fights in Saint Merry cloisters (1832) and the *Rue Transnonain* (1834) and in the initial revolts of the reign, two thousand *bourgeois* fell to the bullets of the insurgents. In 1848, however, there were still only three hundred and forty-two thousand workers to sixty thousand employers—or one employer to roughly every five workmen. The proletariat did not yet constitute a great mass. Only its misery was immense.”

### *The Slaves of Machinery*

“Let us take a look at these new slaves of the machine in the place where industry has made the most rapid strides—in the cloth industry. In Lille a man earned one franc seventy-five a day, a woman earned sixty centimes and a child fifty-three centimes. They worked for thirteen hours a day for the right inadequately to stay their hunger and exist in the most appalling hovels. Children of six years of age had to get up at five o'clock in the morning to go to their work. Let us watch them as they arrive at the factory. Among them are a number of women, pale and thin, walking bare-footed through the mire; they have no umbrellas, and when it rains they throw their aprons or their skirts over their heads for protection; and there is an even greater number of children, no less dirty, no less wan and emaciated, dressed in rags and tatters all covered with greasy filth from their machines. Most of the women carry a basket on their arms with

their food for the day. Not so the infants, who merely clutch a crust of bread in their little fists, or hide it under their shirts, a miserable crust, which must satisfy their hunger until they return home again.

"Home! Would you care to glance for a moment at the Saint-Sauveur quarter in Lyons? It is a succession of little islets, separated by dark and narrow streets ending in small courtyards, which serve as both sewers and depositories for every possible kind of filth, which remain dank, dark and fetid regardless of the season of the year. The windows of the dwellings and the doors of the hovels open on to these foul and noisome alleys, at the end of which grill-covered cesspools serve as public latrines, both night and day. The dwellings are clustered closely round these pestilential pits. As one penetrates deeper into the womb of these miserable backyards, a strange population of children, pock-marked, hunch-backed, deformed, pale and filthy, creep out, begging urgently for alms.

"But what right, forsooth, have these people to complain? Why don't they do as Guizot, one of the great Ministers of the reign, advises: 'Work hard and save, and you will soon become prosperous!' What more can they expect, pray?

"Then if you please, in 1841 the Government started interfering and limiting the ownership of private property. That you would think, was just about the limit. But, dear me, no! Their next act was the promulgation of a law prohibiting the employment of children under eight years of age! These work-people, obviously were in no hurry to 'work hard and become prosperous'."<sup>1</sup>

### *Men of Fashion and Fops*

"Year in year out, a workman earned on an average about five hundred francs a year. Monsieur de Viel-Castel one day wagered that he would eat at one sitting a meal costing just that amount. The *Café de Paris* enabled him to win his bet—with the greatest ease. Viel-Castel was a 'lion of the boulevards', a dandy, a man of fashion, a sportsman of the doeskin glove variety. These gentlemen were all fanatical admirers of everything English, tremendously keen on horses, traps, cigars and women. They divided their time between the *salons* and the *châteaux*, the Jockey Club and Chantilly and Longchamps racecourses, the stalls and boxes at the Opera, the boulevards, the *Café Anglais* the *Café de Paris* and *Tortini's*—in short, the exclusive and favourite haunts of men of fashion.

"The 'lion' was a pomade addict, he waxed his moustaches and made

<sup>1</sup> On November 10 1831, during the riots, the Lyons manufacturers (one hundred and four of them), held a meeting and declared that the men were demanding higher wages "because they themselves have invented for themselves a number of quite artificial necessities".

generous use of perfume. He wore a massive chatelaine, with a coat of arms, if he possessed one (and very often when he didn't). Seals, pencils, gold charms in profusion dangled from an enormous watchchain stretched across his flowered waistcoat. Then there were the 'monkeys', who aped the 'lions'; since the Restoration and the construction of the *Boulevard de Gand*, they had been given the name of *les Gandins*. The *Gandin* degenerated swiftly into a '*cocodès*'—an effeminate fop, a simpering young man, who plucked the hairs of his chin, smarmed his face with creams and then covered it with powder. And in the same way as each 'lion' in Louis Philippe's time had his 'lioness', each '*cocodès*' under the Empire had his own little '*Cocodette*'."

"There you go again, tearing non-stop through another revolution straight into the Second Empire!"

"So I have, by Jove!" admitted Chronossus. "But you see, it hadn't altered things in any way at all."

"Really!" said Juliette a little sarcastically. "And Louis Philippe, the Second Republic, the Second Empire, I suppose, were all much of a muchness?"

"Completely so," asserted Chronossus. "Throughout the lot, it was the *bourgeois* who remained in real power and waxed rich; the factory hands slaved away and starved, class hatred increased as the towns grew in size until it exploded in the revolution of 1848. But the *bourgeoisie* was on the alert."

### *The Land is Free and Belongs to Us All*

"There were some generous spirits who were deeply concerned at the forlorn state of degradation into which the people had sunk. At the time of the Restoration a liberal movement was started in Catholic circles thanks to the initiative of Lamennais, de Lacordaire and Count Montalambert. It was high time, they thought, for the Church to free itself from the shackles of those in power and go to the people. At the end of the eighteenth century, the aristocratic and *bourgeois elite* of the country had lost their faith, while the peasants, the lower middle and the working classes had remained staunchly Catholic. After the Empire the situation was reversed. The Church had recaptured the upper classes but the Revolution had destroyed the faith of the masses.

"The liberal Catholics wished to see Church and State separated, to see the latter specialise in the art of government and the former devote itself to the work of Christian charity.

"When the Pope condemned this liberalism, Lamennais renounced his priesthood and turned to socialism. But liberal Catholicism survived and

joined forces with the great evangelist movement started under the Restoration by *La Propagation de la Foi* and the *Société de Saint-Vincent-de-Paul* (founded by Ozanam in 1833).

"There were others, moving in the same direction as the liberal Catholics but who wished to go much further. Saint-Simon, Fourier, Louis Blanc, Proudhon, Barbès, a rich *bourgeois* and a communist<sup>1</sup> and Auguste Blanqui were all deeply concerned about the working classes, exposed without any protection to immoral exploitation by their employers, and they set about the task of organising labour. For them, political revolution was nothing more than a means by which to promote social revolution; nevertheless, the explosion of February 1848 came like a bolt from the blue, for the working population was at that time not yet strong enough to take charge of events.

"In France there were then six thousand steam-driven machines and six million factory hands, but there were also more than twenty million peasants. It was the wrangling among the *bourgeois* themselves which was the spark that touched off the powder."

"Why—what were they wrangling about?" asked Juliette. "Were they still not content? What more, in heaven's name, did they want?"

"Movement, excitement, glory—that's what they wanted. I told you that in their heart of hearts they still cherished the stale perfumes of the Napoleonic epic. They were becoming wealthier and wealthier all the time; but they were also getting thoroughly bored with life, and they were suffering from nostalgia and an enlarged bank balance. They hated this most *bourgeois* of all Kings, because he refused to go to war.

"Thiers was the most dangerous of all those firebrands who were fanatically determined to set Europe aflame. It was he who arranged for the return of the Emperor's ashes in 1840. The sabre-rattling fraternity were squinting obliquely towards the Rhine frontier, where a recrudescence of Prussian patriotism gave Alfred de Musset an opportunity to fire off a fine piece of braggadocio in reply to Becker's *Der deutsche Rhein*—'We had it once, your German Rhine,' retorted de Musset. But that same year Louis Philippe refused to sanction the mobilisation of five hundred thousand men, and Thiers tendered his resignation.

"From then until 1848 Louis Philippe governed through Guizot, the man of peace, of the *Entente Cordiale* and of prosperity. He refused to countenance any adventure other than the colonisation of Algeria, and that was being well conducted by Bugeaud, Lamorcière and the Duke d'Aumale. That, however, by no means satisfied the *bourgeois*' thirst for glory, and Lamartine proclaimed a 'Revolution of Scorn'.

<sup>1</sup> Marx and Engels published their *Manifesto* in 1848.



“The whole affair started as the result of a misunderstanding. Two hundred and forty-one thousand Frenchmen now had the right to vote. A campaign in favour of universal suffrage had been launched, and, as political gatherings were forbidden, the lower middle classes got round the law by organising banquets for a thousand guests. Louis Philippe obstinately refused to consider universal suffrage. He did not realise that the lower middle classes were the most reactionary of all his subjects; but the fact became apparent a few months later. In Paris, the holding of one of these banquets was forbidden, and an unfortunate rifle shot set fire to the train of powder and the hearts of the people. Liberals, socialists and *petits bourgeois* fell into each other’s arms. Yesterday all they had been demanding was the right to vote; now there were universal shouts of: ‘The land is free and belongs to us all!’ It was a sublime and mystic effusion of sentiment. In the villages the priests blessed the trees of liberty; in Paris the *bourgeois* donned their battle helmets; Lamartine harangued the students. ‘What our country is doing at this moment,’ he cried, ‘is the sublime essence of poetic justice!’ But a young man armed with a rifle retorted, ‘Enough of words!’

“Lamartine, however, had nothing but words with which to keep within bounds popular excesses. Delegation after delegation poured into the *Hôtel de Ville* and besieged the offices of the provisional Government. On one day alone Lamartine faced the crowd no less than seven times in his efforts to appease them and to gain control. It was on this occasion that he launched the famous phrase which saved the tricolour: ‘The Red Flag,’ he cried, ‘has only marched round the *Champ de Mars*, soaked in the blood of the people; but the tricolour has marched round the whole world, emblazoned with the name, the glory and the liberty of our country.’ ‘He’s not a man,’ people said wonderingly, ‘he’s a lyre.’ And the ‘lyre’ sang a lullaby, which kept the people slumbering peacefully until the April elections, which were held on the basis of universal suffrage. And nine million voters in the provinces demonstrated in no uncertain manner that they had no use for Parisian effusions and that the mass of Frenchmen, lower middle classes and peasants, were strongly in favour of a Republic, but not a Welfare State.

“On June 23 a few thousand workmen gathered before the column of the *Bastille*, knelt in memory of the original martyrs of 1789 and cried: ‘Liberty or death!’ They then entrenched themselves behind barricades. For four days the ‘sublime essence of poetic justice’ fired on the workmen. The army fought with discipline; the stocky citizens of the *bourgeois* National Guard fought with furious ardour. ‘The Republic is lucky,’ wrote Louis Philippe from exile. ‘It is allowed to fire on the people.’

And the whole upshot of the 'sublime and mystic effusion' was the advent of a Prince-President, who later, after a *coup d'état*, was proclaimed (a mere formality) Emperor of the French on December 2nd 1851."

"That all sounds very logical to me," said Juliette.

"Well—all they were doing was to take the same people and start all over again."

*The Boudoir is the Gateway to the World (Provided One Can Get Out)*

"In actual fact, the *bourgeois* now had nothing further to desire. Perhaps they were bored in their offices and factories? The return of the Emperor put the cachet of his *panache* upon them. If we no longer had glory, at least we retained the memories of it. So—let the imperial fête commence!

"The Second Empire marks not only the apogee of the *bourgeoise* but also the triumph of woman as a whole. For woman was now sparkling in all the glittering glory of her last reign."

"Are you daring to insinuate that woman no longer occupies a throne?" demanded Juliette.

"Obviously not, Madame, since she is now man's equal! You owe a great deal to Napoleon III, you know. He loved you all so much, and he was such an attractive fellow! He wasn't very big, of course, and he was rather flat-footed; but he had a pale and interesting face, a faraway, dreamy look in his eyes, delightful manners, all the elegance of the perfect dandy, and always wore that fascinating and mysterious air of a tender-hearted conspirator. But he, too, owes you no less a debt of gratitude, for it was a woman who helped him to his throne.

"One evening during his exile in London, his friend, the Count d'Orsay, had introduced him to a truly beautiful woman, a Miss Howard. She was a superb creature, dressed that evening in a white silk gown, generously *décolletée* to show to full advantage two lovely arms and a fascinating throat. She had opulent blonde hair gleaming with russet lights, and her dark blue eyes sparkled somewhat imperiously. But she held promise of being a most fragrant morsel. A fortnight later the Prince had proved to his satisfaction that the promise had been no empty one.

"At the age of twenty-six, Miss Howard had already made her fortune in the lists of love. A half-caste by the name of Sampaio had been her first lover and manager of her amorous affairs. His successor had exploited her charms with a skill which enabled him to set her up in a small flat near Hyde Park; then she opened a gambling den in Oxford Street, where her lover worked marvels with marked cards. Next, a more distinguished aspirant to her favours, Lord Clebden, installed her in a magnificent flat

at Number 9 Berkeley Street, with servants, horses and a carriage. From one of his successors she borrowed a name, for Miss Howard had been born Elizabeth Herriot. This high-flying young love-bird was playing the role of hostess of a political *salon* when Louis Napoleon first entered her boudoir. He emerged from it President of the French Republic."

"A lady's boudoir is the gateway to all the world," said Juliette, "provided, that is, that one can get out of it. How did he manage it?"

"In 1848, when he realised that the moment had come to seize fortune by the scruff of the neck, he hadn't a sou. Also he hadn't a clue as to where he could raise the money necessary for his campaign.

"I'll give it to you," said Miss Howard.

"She sold her flat, her jewels, her silver and her horses. She even sold a property in the Papal States which she owned; this latter she sold to Napoleon himself—on credit; and armed with this acquisition the Prince promptly raised a loan of three hundred and twenty thousand francs. Then off he went to Paris with his mistress.

"On December 10th he was proclaimed President of the Republic by a crushing majority of five million votes. He took up his residence in the Elysée Palace and leased a little house, Number 14 *Rue de Cirque*, for Miss Howard. Thus they were neighbours, and by the simple expedient of having a door cut in the wall of his garden, he could be with her in a moment, once his day's toil had ended.

"Little by little Miss Howard began to be seen more and more at the various official functions attended by the President, and the Parisians came to the conclusion that the Prince must certainly be a pretty shrewd fellow, since he had brought with him from London the finest horse and the most beautiful woman in the world.

"It is perfectly true that the Prince-President was quite incapable of resisting the appeal of any little butterfly that flitted within grasping distance of his arms. But Miss Howard remained his official mistress, and, on the day after the proclamation of the Empire, he took her with him to visit the *Tuileries*. Miss Howard was already savouring the delights of becoming Empress, when catastrophe overtook her. The Emperor had decided to marry Eugénie de Montijo! The Emperor, the man who had loved her so passionately, the man for whom she had sacrificed all she possessed! She could not believe it! The Emperor tended to the best of his imperial ability the wounds that the lover had inflicted; he presented her with the *château* of Beauregard, near Paris, he made her Countess of Beauregard and, during the first four years of his reign, he gave her exactly five million, four hundred and forty-nine thousand francs."

*Only by Way of the Altar*

"Napoleon III, the bachelor Emperor whom the aristocracy of the *Faubourg Saint Germain* eyed sullenly askance, seemed rather like a lodger in his *Tuileries* Palace, in spite of all the gracious skill of his cousin, Princess Mathilde, who carried out the functions of his official hostess.

"This charming Princess had known much unhappiness. After her father, King Jerome, had dissipated his fortune, a Russian Count, immensely wealthy and completely mad, had insisted on having the honour of marrying the Princess. His name was Anatole Demidoff. The father-in-law touched the son-in-law, and very soon the husband began to beat his wife. One winter's evening in St. Petersburg the Count, having once more beaten his wife, had gone off alone to a ball that was being given in the Winter Palace. Suddenly he saw his wife enter the ballroom and throw herself at the Tsar's feet. She removed the scarf which veiled her shoulders and exposed the angry, red weals which zigzagged across them. Demidoff received a very severe rebuke from the Tsar, swore that he would mend his ways and then started all over again. When her father Jerome returned from Florence, he was once more up to his eyes in debt, and he implored his daughter to obtain some money for him. After much misgiving, she decided to ask her husband, who refused. She went down on her knees to him and was begging him to help, when the Count, roaring with laughter, pulled violently at the bell-cord and exclaimed, in front of all the servants who had rushed to obey his summons: 'Here you see Napoleon's niece on her knees, begging me to give alms to her father!'

"A few days later he so far forgot himself as to box his wife's ears in public in the middle of a ball. Mathilde went off at once to St. Petersburg and begged the Tsar for his protection. He authorised the young wife to go and live in Paris, where Demidoff was forbidden to set foot until further orders. The Tsar further ordered him to make his wife an allowance of two hundred thousand francs, of which the delighted Jerome pocketed about forty thousand.

"When the Emperor married Eugénie Matijo, Mathilde gladly made way for her in the Palace and set up her own court of writers and artists, only too pleased, I think, not to be an Empress, for she had a wandering disposition."

"Do you mean that she could have become Empress, had she so wished?" asked Juliette.

"Good Lord," replied Chronoussus with a shrug, "one might as well admit that Louis Napoleon had a very soft spot for his little cousin."

"For whom didn't he have a soft spot!" retorted Juliette.

"That would be indeed difficult to answer," replied Chronoussus. "In

any case, however, his weakest spot by far was undoubtedly for Eugénie Montijo—even to the extent of placing a crown upon her head. 'To marry one's mistress,' said Thiers, 'is a thoroughly foolish thing to do; but to desire a woman for eight days and then to conduct her to *Notre Dame* to be crowned Empress is the height of madness.' The fact is, however, that Eugénie's mother was an able matchmaker, and Eugénie was intelligent enough to place a very high value on her virtue.

"When the Prince had tried to press his suit, she cut him abruptly short. 'I thought I was dealing with a gentleman,' she told him. I have also heard it said that when he asked her: 'Tell me, how can one come to your person?' she replied: 'Only via the altar, Sire!' Even so, he was quite unable to make up his mind, until one evening in the *Salle des Maréchaux* a great lady of the Court saw fit to insult this marriageable young woman, whom they all regarded as an ambitious adventuress. The Emperor surprised Eugénie just as she was hurriedly departing, scarlet in the face with anger and shame. 'I am going, Sire,' she cried, 'and I will never again come here to be insulted!' The next morning Madame de Montijo received a letter from Napoleon III, in which in the best middle class manner he asked for her daughter's hand in marriage.

"As it all turned out, it wasn't too bad a choice. You know she was very beautiful, with a perfect oval face, a lovely transparent complexion and a glittering mass of pale golden hair; and it is to her superbly moulded and sloping shoulders that we owe the famous *décolleté à l'Impératrice*. But more important even than her beauty was her grace, and to see her make an incomparable curtsey was a sheer delight. On her wedding day, when she stepped from her carriage on to the threshold of *Notre Dame*, she raised her silvered gown with the tips of her fingers and dropped an exquisite curtsey to the assembled concourse. From that moment, Paris took her to its heart.

"Thanks to her, the receptions in the *Tuileries* and at Compiègne were always a great success. Princess Metternich used to say of Eugénie: 'Only a woman of the world, turned Empress, could have given receptions such as this; a Princess of the Blood could never have done so, for she would have lacked that worldly knowledge which the Empress Eugénie possessed in such great measure.' She was a perfect wife, and she took her duties as Empress very seriously. She attended the meetings of the Council of State, and she even officiated as Regent during the Emperor's absences. The latter encouraged his wife's intense interest in politics; and while she was immersed in the study of intricate problems, he was free to pursue his frivolous little butterflies.

"It is, I think, also true to say of her that she was the last woman to reign

in France. She strongly encouraged the futile expedition to Mexico and the bellicose attitude towards Prussia. But she was also a staunch Catholic, a Papist and a great admirer of Marie Antoinette. If the Emperor had listened to her, he would have made an alliance with Austria in 1866 and would not have allowed the latter to be defeated by the Prussians at Sadowa."

*The Nightdress of Compiègne*

"As far as the war which resulted in the independence of Italy is concerned, the Empress was emphatically opposed to it. It was a war that could only be waged at the expense of Austria and the Papal States. But Italy had secretly sent an Ambassador to Napoleon III, of whom Princess Metternich said: 'Never have I seen such incomparable beauty, and never shall I see it again.' The Ambassador was the Countess of Castiglione.

"She was born in 1837. At the age of seventeen she married the Count of Castiglione, who did not have to wait long for his entry into the ranks of deceived husbands. When she was nineteen—the Crimean War had ended and the Conference of Paris was about to open—her cousin, Cavour, the Prime Minister of Piedmont, and King Victor Emmanuel II hit upon the happy idea of sending her to plead Italy's cause in the bed of the French Emperor. On the evening of December 17th 1855, the King of Piedmont came in person to wish her *bon voyage* and every success. 'At eleven o'clock,' she noted in her diary, 'he departed, and I went with him as far as the garden, where he-e . . . f.'<sup>1</sup>

"In January 1856 the Castiglione household took up residence in a furnished flat at, curiously enough, Number 10 *Rue de Castiglione*. It was in the *salon* of Princess Mathilde that the Countess made her entry into Parisian society. She was then at the height of her wondrous beauty. She had pink plumes in her hair which was arranged in little puffs at the temples and the rest swept back and held by two pendants, she looked like a Marquise of bygone days with her hair dressed *à l'oiseau royal*.

"The Emperor saw her that evening and remained very pensive, twirling his clipped moustache with his left hand. At the end of the month, she was invited to the Grand Ball given in the *Tuileries* in honour of the Crimean victory. She had just received a letter from Cavour which ended with the words: 'You must succeed, dear cousin! Use what means you like, but—succeed!'

"Six thousand guests pressed into the various *salons*. When the red-

<sup>1</sup> Which means in the Countess' code that the King kissed her and she yielded to his embraces. In view of the time of the year, I should point out that in the garden was a hothouse, completely furnished.

coated Chamberlain announced the name of the Countess and she advanced towards the thrones of Their Majesties, there was a murmur of admiration from the throng. She made her curtsy, and the curious thought to see a fleeting gleam of emotion in the Emperor's eyes. According to etiquette, she was required to stand aside at once. She went into one of the gaming rooms, where she at once became the centre of an animated circle. She was all smiles, happy in the success she had scored, when the circle around her fell away and lapsed into silence. The Emperor was advancing with his slow and rather dragging gait, still stroking his moustache, to speak to her.

"And for the next two years they continued to 'chat together'. The beautiful Virginia stuck with intoxication to the role for which the King of Piedmont had 'engaged' her, the intoxication of ambition.

"In the autumn of 1887 she was again invited to Compiègne for a visit which, I imagine, must have held indelible memories for her, for in her will she directed that she was to be buried in 'my Compiègne nightgown'. When she returned from this visit, she left France and went back to Turin. Napoleon III had parted from her."

"He had realised, I suppose, the game she was playing?" said Juliette.

"No—it wasn't that. He found her somewhat indiscreet. He objected strongly to his liaisons becoming the subject of common gossip, and the Empress was also making trouble.

"A few months later, he declared war on Austria. There followed the victories of Magenta and Solferino. Italian unity was in sight.

"It is no use, however, searching for much coherence in the policy of the Second Empire. Napoleon III himself said: 'The Empress is a legitimist, Napoleon (Prince Napoleon, his cousin, known as Plonplon) is a Republican, Morny is an Orleanist, I am a Socialist, and the only Bonapartist among us is Persigny—and he's mad!'"

### *Our Lady of the Arts*

"If you could have come with me to visit Princess Mathilde, whom the Goncourts described as 'a Marguerite of Navarre in the skin of a Napoleon', you would have met everyone who counted in the second half of the century, in the world of science and literature—or nearly everyone; only the Victor Hugos and the Zolas would not have dreamed of going there. Three generations visited her *salon*, one after the other (she died in 1904). Everything was very reminiscent of Madame de Rambouillet's *salon*, but with this difference that people spoke much more bluntly and directly; and you would certainly have met the best brains there."

"Such as?"

"Such as Théophile Gautier, Alexandre Dumas  *fils*, Saint Beuve, the

Goncourts, of course, Mérimée, Flaubert, Pasteur, Maupassant, Marcel Proust—just to mention a few. They sometimes called her ‘Our Lady of the Arts’.

“The other famous *salon* at the time was that of Princess Metternich, the Austrian Ambassador. She was not exactly beautiful. She used to say of herself: ‘I am a monkey; but I am the best dressed monkey in Paris.’ She was the Empress’ most intimate friend and she was always ‘the life and soul’ of the Compiègne season. And she and the Empress between them were an absolute gold mine for dressmakers. What is more, women smokers should light a candle in her honour. After three young women had been flung out of the *Tuileries* Gardens in 1864, because they had cigarettes in their mouths, Princess Metternich held a party every Thursday for the really fashionable, at which it was the absolutely *chic* thing to indulge in a real orgy of smoking.

“She took up the cudgels on Wagner’s behalf in Paris, and when *Tannhäuser* was hissed off the Opera stage, she indignantly broke her fan on the head of her neighbour, who was one of the boozers.”

#### La Vie Parisienne

“Meanwhile all Paris guffawed at Mérimée’s categorical pronouncement on Wagner’s opera—‘the words annoy me and the noise offends my ears’.”

“Good lord!” exclaimed Juliette. “Is that what they really thought at the time?”

“It is. But the people had two great musical passions—the *café-concert* and Offenbach’s Comic Opera. The two great successes of the reign were *La Belle Hélène* and *La Grande Duchesse de Geroldstein*. Paris flocked in such numbers to the *Théâtre des Variétés*, that the Tsar Alexander II, while on his way to Paris, sent a messenger ahead from Strasbourg to book a box and to invite the leading lady, Hortense Schneider, to sup with him.

“Beneath the frivolous exterior of a dandy, one at least of the fashionable ‘lions’ hid a cold and abiding ambition—Mornny. He had been baptised ‘Demornny’, but he gave himself a title and called himself the Count de Mornny. The Emperor conferred a Dukedom on him and made him President of the Legislative Council. He was the natural son of Queen Hortense (and rumour had it that the good Hortense had given birth to Napoleon III in the same ‘natural’ way). His (natural) father was the Count de Flahaut, who was the natural son of Talleyrand. And he himself had a daughter—‘naturally’. All this return to Nature inspired *Punch* to publish a caricature showing Mornny seated in deep meditation and saying to himself: ‘My mother is Queen Hortense, my father the Count de



Flahaut, the Emperor Napoleon III is my brother and Princess Louise Poniatowski is my daughter—all very natural, of course.'

"Morny conformed rigidly to all the dictates of fashion. He was a regular attendant at the *Café de Paris* and in 'The Devil's Box' at the Opera, where the dandies raised Cain and had formed the habit of donning green gloves with which to applaud artists who had displeased them. He was the prime arbiter on waistcoats and cravats, he was a member of the Jockey Club, and was regularly to be seen in the *Bois de Boulogne*, riding with some dashing horsewoman or seated on the box of a landau.

"To lead that sort of life, however, one needed money—and lots of it. Speculation on the Stock Exchange, he thought, was surely within the competence of a well-informed man about town. To provide the necessary initial capital, Morny found a sleeping partner with golden hair and blue eyes in the person of Madame le Hon, the wife of the Belgian Ambassador. Together with those of Princess Mathilde and Princess Metternich, Morny's *salon* was among the most brilliant in Paris.

"He had many striking successes, notably the *coup d'état* on December 2nd and the launching of Deauville as a resort on August 14th 1864, which at once became so much the rage, that even Baden-Baden, the accepted rendezvous of Paris, found herself deserted in favour of the Normandy Longchamp. When he died, his wife (*née* Troubetskoi) cut off her golden tresses and placed them in his coffin. Then she discovered a lot of letters which enlightened her as to the very widespread extra-marital interests of her late husband, and that same evening she appeared at dinner in a gown of the gayest colours."

"Typical of the Slav temperament, of course," observed Juliette, "What about her hair?"

"It grew again and eighteen months later she married the Duke de Sesto. Yes—she was perhaps too typically Slav in a Paris where *tout le monde* and *tout le demi-monde*, too, for that matter, thought of nothing but fun and gaiety. It was Alexandre Dumas who coined the phrase '*demi-monde*'. A *demi-mondaine* was a *bourgeoise* who had stepped beyond the bounds of legitimate love—a woman of the world who had lost 'class'; the name was also applied to those professional ladies whose talents and good manners showed that they, on the other hand, had gained 'class'.

"Celebrated hetaerae popped up all over the place. Some of them even came from abroad. We had, for example, Cora Pearl, who came from England, whose real name was Emma Crutch, a name that suited her pretty well, though she herself sometimes called herself Church, which was much less appropriate. I myself never thought her attractive, and I

don't know what people saw in her; but she was a great tap-dancer, and she had red hair."

"And that, I suppose, was quite enough for the men?" sighed Juliette.

"Well, they're rather like sheep, you know," admitted Chronossus. "She called herself Pearl, and so, of course, they all took her for a pearl. And there were plenty more like her. Giddy little shopgirls, lionesses of Society, women of the world and of the *demi-monde* all made hay in the sunshine of the Second Empire. The great invention of the times was the crinoline. Thanks to this women appeared for ten years to be as light as balloons, surmounted by a heart-shaped *décolletage* which showed off beautiful bare shoulders to perfection. Sea-bathing dealt the crinoline a shrewd blow, but the *coup de grâce* was given by a man, the first couturier of modern times, the Englishman, Worth. In 1867 Princess Metternich appeared at Court in a gown which fell straight. Her friend, the Empress, at once adopted the new fashion, and very soon Worth was able to declare: 'The 1870 revolution was as nothing when compared to mine. I have dethroned the crinoline.' After the crinoline, the ladies carried their little contrivances at the back, in the shape of bustles, and wore gay ribbons, known as 'follow-me-young-man', round their throats. In the world of dress Worth was what Caroline Riboux was in the domain of hats. Now too, the first of those specialised institutions for the preservation of beauty appeared on the scene—that of Rachel l'Emaillouse and that of Made-moiselle Jouvence, 'for the further embellishment of the fair sex'.

#### *Handsome Surroundings*

"While the dashing young men and the beauties of Paris promenaded on foot, by omnibus, in rakish traps and in tilburys, Napoleon III gave Baron Haussmann the task of designing a new Paris more in keeping with the modern era. At the same time the provincial Prefects busied themselves with large-scale town-planning. We are enjoying the fruits of their labours to this very day. Nothing comparable to these great activities had been seen since the days of Louis XIV and his regional administrators.

"Paris till now had more or less retained its eighteenth century appearance. It had grown haphazardly in a tracery of little streets, ancient Palaces, convents and squat, bulbous houses. Pedestrians still twisted their ankles on the uneven cobblestones and paddled through the rivulets of filth which flowed down the middle of the roads. For ladies who wished to cross from one side of the street to the other, enterprising 'businessmen' provided flying bridges, planks mounted on small wheels, upon which they ferried the ladies across. Even under Louis Philippe, however, a certain amount of

reconstruction had been in hand. At the bottom of the *Rue Royale* noble columns had appeared above the surrounding pallisades, and the *Madeleine* had been completed in 1846. The *Louvre* had been converted into artists' lodgings and homes for the aged, and the present *Place Carrousel* was still nothing but a conglomeration of houses, crammed along the whole length of the narrow, ill-favoured streets, which were occupied for the most part by antique dealers, bric-à-brac, picture and junk shops. The *Place de la Concorde* was nothing more than an irregular, rough-surfaced open space, and the ditches along the railings of the *Tuileries* were just one long, public latrine, squelching with fetid and stagnant water and muck.

"In 1834 Louis Philippe filled in the ditches, put the statues on plinths, constructed the fountains and, in 1838, crowned his efforts with the erection of the obelisk. As for the *Champs Elysées*, that was still open country. The *Carré Marigny* was the rendezvous of the riverside fraternity and itinerant showmen. Streams provided fresh drinking water in abundance, and the cows still grazed along the borders of the great avenue. In the distance, on the Chaillot hillock at the spot called the *Etoile*, the skeleton of the *Arc de Triomphe* started to take shape in 1809. It was finished and unveiled in 1836.

"Louis Philippe had done a fine job of work, but he had confined himself to purely local and restricted embellishment. Napoleon III realised that he would have to plan on broad lines in this new Paris which was springing up at so rapid a pace. The Emperor was not a Parisian, and he allowed Baron Haussmann to commit some deplorable errors in his demolitions. Those who loved old Paris were very angry, while the more modern-minded sharply criticised the heavy expenditure which Haussmann was incurring. Now, I think, we should reproach him rather for not having planned on a broader scale. Be that as it may, Paris swiftly became the scene of innumerable enormous building projects.

"From here, on the top of the Eiffel Tower, we can see the capital's great arteries. Nearly all of them date from the Second Empire. The *Rue de Rivoli* was completed; then came the north-south axis of the *Boulevard de Strasbourg*, stretching down to the *Boulevard Saint Michel*, the *Boulevard Saint Germain*, girdling the *Grands Boulevards*; and the *Places* from which the great avenues radiate—the *Place de la République*, the *Place de l'Etoile*, the *Place Victor Hugo*. Where, indeed, in Paris will you not find some trace of Haussmann's work, from the Opera to *Saint Augustin*, from the *Bois de Vincennes* to the *Bois de Boulogne*, from the *Parc Montsouris* to the *Buttes Chaumont*? This new town was lighted by gas, and here and there even a few electric bulbs, whose yellowish gleam evoked but little enthusiasm among the people.

"A great deal was demolished; but a great deal more was built. Nevertheless, a journalist wrote: 'This building of houses in Paris is rendering Paris uninhabitable.' The fact is that the new buildings were very expensive. In the old houses, the *bourgeois* used to live on the lower floors, while the working classes and the minor employees occupied the upper floors and the garrets. Rents in the new houses were quite beyond the means of the latter, who were forced to move out into the suburbs or into the slums of the eastern quarter of the city.

"In this way there grew up a Paris which was popular and over-populated, with any number of empty houses in the new districts. It was, moreover, a Paris in which class distinctions immediately began to come into being. Formerly, rich and poor used to hobnob on the staircase and invite each other to birthday parties and similar family festivities. Now frontiers began to spring up, and for those who had still not emigrated a mechanical device which rendered all floors equally habitable completed the process of class discrimination—the lift."

#### *The Rush to the Towns*

"During this period the towns swelled up like toads—toads, which belched forth the fumes of coal. Between 1846 and 1866, while the population of the whole of France rose by only two million—from thirty-five and a half to thirty-seven and a half million—the population of Paris increased from one million two hundred and fifty thousand to one million nine hundred thousand. The other towns followed suit.

"The town that benefitted—or suffered—the most was Paris. Why Paris rather than Lyons, Bordeaux or the others? Because of the railway, of which Thiers had said that it would never become anything more than a toy. But if you glance at a map of the railway network of France, you will see at once what I mean. All the lines radiate from Paris like the threads from the centre of a spider's web. Before the advent of the railway, it was just as easy to go from Chartres to Orleans (71 kilometres) as it was from Chartres to Paris (86 kilometres). But as soon as the Paris-Chartres and Paris-Orleans lines were in operation, both these towns were brought to within a couple of hours of Paris, the return journey could be made easily in a day; but to get from Chartres to Orleans still took you a good eight or nine hours on horseback. In 1848 there were 1,800 kilometres of railway line in France; at the downfall of the Empire there were 17,000 kilometres. Between 1851 and 1861 the population of France (exclusive of Savoy and Nice) rose by 2.6 per cent, while that of the *Département de la Seine* went up by 37.4 per cent. Paris was gobbling up the whole province."

*Mr. Everyman Remains the Backbone of the Country*

"This concentration on Paris, however, gives a very false impression of France as a whole. Our country had become irremediably swollen-headed thanks to the railway, but we had not yet become, and we presumably never shall become, a country of vast, proletarian masses. On the eve of the 1914 war, there were still only eleven million five hundred thousand employees as compared with eight million five hundred thousand employers and self-employed, and there were only ten thousand concerns which employed more than fifty men. In the country as in the towns, the average Frenchman remained stolidly firm, and he it is who ensures the unbelievable wealth and the incredible stability of the country in the face of any and every catastrophe. He it is, too, who reacts every bit as uncompromisingly as the *bourgeois* against each fresh Parisian brainwave—in 1840 . . . in 1870. . . . It is upon the average Frenchman that the great business banks rely and it is for him that the great shops—the *Bon Marché*, the *Louvre*, the *Printemps* and the rest—have been created. He it was who financed the great railway construction venture, and he it was who supported Lesseps, when he built the Suez Canal; this latter in the teeth of all the intrigues of Britain which was determined, at all costs, to prevent the opening of a maritime route which would cut the journey to India and the East by at least half, but which she herself did not (yet) control.

"The International Exhibitions of 1855 and 1867, patronised by Kings and Queens and visited by throngs from all over Europe, proclaimed our high prosperity. Creusot, we told each other with pride, had made the locomotives for the railways of Britain, and the Russian trains were crossing the Russian rivers on metal bridges made in France. It was the triumph of iron, a triumph to which, at the Exhibition of 1889, the Eiffel Tower put the final exclamation mark.

"At the same time, Napoleon III concerned himself deeply with the problem of the amelioration of working conditions. He did not reduce the hours of work, but he did abolish the *livret*, a kind of personal history sheet, upon which the employee was required to enter the names of all his previous employers and which reduced him to a species of card-index cypher. He created a system of medical assistance, an old age pension scheme, a scheme for accident insurance, and, finally and most important of all, by the promulgation of the Law of 1864 he restored to the working classes the right of collective action, of which they had been deprived by the revolution of 1789. This 'socialist' Emperor did not go so far as to repeal the prohibition of strike action, though this did not prevent strikes from occurring with increasing frequency up to 1870.

"The advent of steam would not, perhaps, have led to the *Commune*, if

Napoleon's slogan: 'The Empire means Peace' had not led to Sedan. It must not be thought that the Empress and Countess Castiglione dictated the entire foreign policy of France; the Emperor himself had at least one idea—or rather a dream—the principle of national independence. He wanted to see the peoples of the world constitute themselves into free and independent nations. He participated in the Crimean War (1854–56) in order to wipe out the memory of the defeat of 1815 and to make sure of winning the friendship of Britain and Prussia; actually, however, he made sure of exactly nothing at all. He waged war on Austria in Italy in 1859 for the sake of the Italians. Why he fought Mexico in 1862–63 God alone knows; and he allowed the Austrians to be defeated at Sadowa in 1866 for the love of the King of Prussia, who paid him back very shabbily four years later. The average Frenchman was still so much in love with glory that he was prepared to fight on anybody's behalf—except, perhaps, his own."

"And that, I presume, is supposed to be logical?" said Juliette.

#### *A Great Nation, Determined Not to Perish*

"On September 4th 1870, the day after Sedan, no sooner had the Emperor abdicated than a Government of National Defence was formed. We were determined to defend ourselves, of course. But how? While Bismarck was informing Jules Favre of the Prussian demands—the surrender of Alsace and Lorraine—Thiers went hastening round the capitals of Europe, begging assistance—in London, in Vienna and in St. Petersburg—and meeting everywhere with nothing but a selfishness that was as obstinate as it was damnable. For the violent seizure of those two French provinces plainly meant that all Europe would be condemned to live in the atmosphere of Franco-German hatred.

"We could not acquiesce to this seizure. Gambetta, inspired with the spirit of '92, the spirit of Du Guesclin and Joan of Arc, telegraphed to all the Prefects: 'Paris, exasperated, swears to fight to the death. Let the *Départements* rise!' On September 19th Paris was besieged. On October 7th Gambetta succeeded in flying out of the beleaguered city in a balloon and went off to Tours to organise resistance. His efforts resulted in the astonishing improvisation of the Army of the Loire, which staggered Moltke and fought with the utmost valour, while the Parisians made sortie after desperate sortie and kept body and soul together on rats.

"Gambetta exhorted the people to 'show the world that we are a great people, determined not to perish'. Thiers called him a 'violent madman'. These two men personified our dual ancestry of knight and *bourgeois* (as, indeed, did de Gaulle and Pétain, later).

"On January 18th 1871 the German Empire was proclaimed in the

Hall of Mirrors. On January 28th the armistice was signed. Gambetta cursed and swore furiously, but in vain; it was a victory for the reasonably minded.

"But the citizens of Paris were not at all reasonable. They cherished a furious hatred against the Prussians and against the *bourgeois*. They had stoically endured the siege, the bombardments and the famine; and they were furious with those who had consented to surrender. When King William's troops marched down the *Champs Elysées* on March 1st (only to depart from Paris a few hours later) the people shouted: 'Death to the Prussians!' They shouted from a fair distance away, I admit, so that the Prussians shouldn't hear them. But what could we have done against an organised and efficient army? The Central Committee of the *Commune* felt much more at home directing a social revolution than conducting a foreign war; but the National Guard had withdrawn to Versailles, and to try and fight against its regular troops would have been equally absurd. The *Commune* had no real leaders; all it had was enthusiasm.

"Their *Communards* fought valiantly, while anarchy reigned supreme. From March 18th 1871—the date on which the revolt started as a result of Thiers' attempt to regain the artillery withheld by the *Commune* in Montmartre—until May 28th, the last day of 'the bloody week', Paris was being besieged without ever having been declared to be in a state of siege; and while some men, and always the same men, manned the ramparts, the rest wandered about the streets and the cavernous hollows of the bastions, or stayed quietly at home. The 'army' of the Federates never exceeded twenty-five thousand men under arms, of whom a quarter, perhaps, were effective.

"The women harried the laggards. Love and amour-propre took a hand in the game. During the winter, the milkmaid, full of admiration, had done her utmost for the National Guardsmen against the Prussians; in the spring, against the forces of Versailles, she would have nothing to do with him. The little milkmaid was dead set on epic heroism.

"The spring of 1871 was exceptionally mild. Charity concerts were given in the open air, and battalions of Amazons were raised—female warriors in skirts, with rifles on their shoulders and red cockades at their ears. In this struggle, in which the ignoble mingled with the sublime, in which inflammable hatred and the lust to kill mingled with humanitarian idealism and self-sacrifice, the women fought every bit as obstinately as the men."

"All very fine," said Juliette. "And what, pray, did they hope to get out of it all?"

"They weren't quite sure themselves. I mean—they certainly had great aims—bread, liberty, the brotherhood of man and so on, but they hadn't

the means to implement their ideas. But Thiers had the means all right—the troops whom Bismarck had given back to him to enable him to check-mate the riff-raff.

“On May 21st his troops entered the city by the Saint Cloud gate, and seventy thousand men deployed in two columns to left and right and captured the *château* of la Muette and the Chaillot hillock. It was the opening of the ‘bloody week’, the action which was to sweep from west to east, district by district, and wipe out the ingenuous visionaries.

“But the Committee of Public Safety, dismayed by these initial reverses, decided to burn down everything it was constrained to abandon, and on May 24th Paris became one gigantic brazier. The *Cours des Comptes*, the *Conseil d’Etat*, the Palace of the Legion of Honour, the *Tuileries*, parts of the *Rue de Lille* and the *Rue du Bac* were all in flames, as were also the *Palais de Justice*, the *Hôtel de la Ville* and the *Châtelet*. From the *Madeleine* to the *Rue de Rennes* was one unbroken sheet of flame; showers of sparks and enormous clouds of smoke blotted out the sky and reduced the street to an infernal corridor, in which men, sweating with fear and heat, were busy killing one another. Louise Michel the ‘red virgin’, fighting in the tunic and *képi* of the Federates, was among those left for dead.

“It was these conflagrations and the massacre of hostages (among them Monseigneur Darboy, the Archbishop of Paris) that, combined with their own terror, now goaded the *bourgeois* to further atrocity. When the ‘bloody week’ ended on May 28th, they had thirty thousand dead on their consciences; and to them were soon added deportees beyond number. The average Frenchman had cause to be proud of the Republic, which had easily beaten all the records of the Jacobin Reign of Terror. From the time of our tyrant Kings, I can think only of the crusade against the Albigeois as being in any way comparable to the deeds which this little man, the representative of *bourgeois* autocracy, dared to commit.”

“And that,” said Juliette, “was how the Third Republic was founded.”

“It was founded by the heir to the throne, the Count of Chambord, who refused the crown and insisted that the tricolour should be replaced by a white flag.”

“Another marvellous example of logic,” scoffed Juliette. “So your industrialists were monarchists, after all.”

“Hardly that,” replied Chronossus. “But the electors were all still yokels, and after the Count of Chambord had refused the throne, it was a monarchical Assembly which voted—almost as though by mistake and by a majority of one<sup>1</sup>—in favour of a republic.”

<sup>1</sup> It seems to have become a traditional habit. It will be remembered that Louis XVI was condemned to death by a majority—of one.



“And let’s hope,” said Juliette, “that we’ve now finished with masculine logic once and for all.”

“We have,” replied Chronossus. “The Republic had now come to stay, I mean, ‘the more things changed the more they remained the same’. Twirling in perfect balance to all the tunes called by the various Ministries, the Republic maintained the poise of an accomplished dancer. But all the tunes and all the frills will never heal for good the wounds inflicted during that ‘bloody week’. Thiers may perhaps be regarded, territorially speaking, as a liberator<sup>1</sup> but in that territory he dug a great trench and he filled it with blood. There was one class which never forgot the injuries it had suffered and which every year paid tribute to its martyrs. It was a class apart from the rest of the nation, and, as the successor to its leaders—the disciples of Rousseau, the Jacobins, the men of ’48, patriots and humanitarians all—we shall soon have the Communist Party machine.”

“To sum up,” said Juliette, “if I have understood you correctly, everything was combining to divide Frenchmen into rival factions—the *Commune* and steam-driven machinery, the lovely new houses, the railroad and the lift.”

“Exactly,” replied Chronossus. “But with just this nuance of difference that, during the period in which the tune to which it danced was a hesitation waltz, the Republic was induced to pass a number of social enactments granting the right to strike, limiting the hours of work, strengthening social security and so on—all in a movement which was perfectly natural and republican in spirit, which had once turned Girondins into Jacobins and which now transformed a republic based on moral issues into a left wing bloc, from a Republic of Dukes to a Republic of professors. But, as you can well imagine, this was a transformation which was violently opposed. Fortunately, the violent aspect of the opposition was almost entirely oratorical; the slide to the left occurred during a series of electoral and parliamentary battles, which, even if they were not always glorious, were at least preferable to the guillotine and rifle volleys. . .

“The ‘notables’, who could not forgive themselves for having made a mess of the restoration of the monarchy, hoped that to have a man like Marshal MacMahon as President of the Republic would prove to be the next best thing to having a King. The Duke de Broglie, as head of the Government ‘purged’ the republican Civil Service, and a Deputy, by name Monseigneur Dupanloup, confused the Pope with religion in a reactionary policy worthy of Charles X. The ducal republic maintained a chant of: ‘Save Rome and France in the name of the Sacred Heart!’ In retort to Louis Veuillot’s clarion call of: ‘The clergy—therein lies your salvation!’

<sup>1</sup> The real liberator was the Frenchman’s stocking, in which he kept his savings.

came Gambetta's famous challenge: 'The clergy—that is your enemy!'

"Even in the hey-day of their Christian fervour, even in the days of Saint Louis, the French had always had a horror of seeing the Church direct national policy.

"Thus it came about that the 'notables', having made a mess of the monarchy, then proceeded to make an equal mess of their republic; the elections of 1876 and 1881 brought the Liberals into power, the men who sought inspiration in the great principles enunciated in '89. You will, I hope forgive me if I do not tell bead by bead the whole rosary of the statesmen of the Third Republic. You'd be bored to tears. MacMahon, Jules Grevy, Jules Ferry, Gambetta, Freycinet, Waldeck-Rousseau, Delcassé, Combes, Briand, Caillaux, Clemenceau—we must just put up with these for the most part most worthy bores. But there you are—they remind me of one of those family photo albums enthroned on a small table in every self-respecting *bourgeois* household, a volume bound in velvet or brocade, plastered with leather, iron, steel and even gold, in which you can see grandfather on one page, leaning gracefully against a pillar, and on the next papa, squatting naked on a strip of goatskin, and then a whole gallery of riding habits, chokers and top hats, of feathers and boas, of whale-bone and wimples, of calicos and cottons."

### *The Left-Wing Bloc*

"Some of these republican leaders were nevertheless very much above average, as for example, Gambetta, whom you have already seen in action, but who was never allowed to exercise power; the only Ministry which he succeeded in forming was defeated within a few weeks by Deputies who were frightened of his obvious superiority. Gambetta then allayed their fears by dying almost at once at the age of forty-four.

"Unfortunately for the mediocre politicians, there still remained one statesman—the man who did more for the French Republic than any other man—Jules Ferry. In him were wedded two basic ideas essential to any republic; or perhaps I should have said two loves—the love of liberty and the love of order."

"I expect you're quite right," remarked Juliette. "But aren't the two a little contradictory?"

"Certainly not," said Chronossus. "On the contrary, I am quite sure that there can be no real liberty that is not based on order, and that there is equally no real order which is not based on liberty. As regards liberty, Jules Ferry considered that his most urgent task was to educate the people; and he felt that to leave education in the hands of republican priests was to invite a state of disorder. In 1880 he therefore withdrew from the non-

authorised sects (Jesuits, Marists and Dominicans) the right to give instruction, and at the same time he suppressed religious instruction in the State schools.

"The clergy rose in wrath. Expulsions by force ensued and the Catholic Church vowed eternal hatred of this man who had repeated again and again: 'My policy is purely anti-clerical; it has never been anti-religious.'

"The Pope, fortunately, showed more wisdom. Very quickly Leo XIII, who did not consider that it was any part of the Church's duty to oppose the Government of a country, broke the ancient alliance between Throne and Altar and gently but firmly steered the clergy of France towards support of the Republic (1890). It took some considerable time before the French clergy appreciated the Pope's wisdom. They had forgotten that the Church was eternal and that she outlived dynasties and régimes. 'The Church in bygone days had sacrificed the Merovingians to Pippin; she could now well afford to sacrifice the Count of Paris to Sadi Carnot.'

"The lay Republic, however, pursued its own course. It created colleges for young girls. Up till now our young girls had been educated exclusively in the convents, and even there had received only the barest minimum of instruction. For a long time the new State schools were attended only by the daughters of State officials, and even they were rather ashamed of having to do so. 'Goodness only knows,' people said, 'what they'll teach our daughters in those *Lycées* of theirs.'

"To find the answer, they had to wait quite a while, and when the answer came it appalled them. 'Have you heard,' people said, 'that we are to have women doctors, if you please! If that sort of thing goes on, we shall soon have women lawyers, and, who knows, perhaps even women postmen!'

"But—to whom could they turn? The Duchess d'Uzès had become a declared feminist and was making common cause with Louise Michel, the 'red virgin'. She succeeded in forcing through an act which gave married women the right to dispose of their property as they saw fit, and she became the first Vice President of the French Union for Female Suffrage. And what, I ask you, do you think of this?—There were people who were now using a sort of baby piano with which to write! Very soon the typewriter would give rise to the shorthand typist.

"As a result of this swing, the Left Wing bloc—the Radicals and the Socialists—was formed and put Combes and his sectarianism into power. This was an open declaration of war on religion, which was swiftly followed by a ban on all denominations, the closing of fifteen hundred religious establishments, the dispersal of more than twenty thousand clergy, the suppression of all religious instruction and finally, in 1905, by the separation

of Church and State. Thus an end was put to that state of confusion between temporal and spiritual power, which had existed since the days of Clovis and Pippin the Short. It caused a great stir among the devout, but it nevertheless gave the Church of France the opportunity to re-fashion its soul in poverty and a spirit of humility; and if our Church today seems to be the most charitable and the most truly Christian in the world, it is to Combes that our thanks are due.

"This sectarianism was the absolute antithesis of the liberalism of Jules Ferry. But Jules Ferry had long ago been swept out of power."

### *The Republic's Empire*

"Although religious emancipation and social progress had dominated our internal political struggles, the seizure of Alsace and Lorraine by Bismarck remained an open and bleeding wound. And that is something which you must bear in mind if you wish to understand our reactions in 1914. 'Never talk about it; think about it always,' Gambetta had said.

"We were living in a state of sorrowing patriotism. In 1878 the Iron Chancellor thought it would be rather a good idea to distract our attention from the Rhine and thoughts of revenge by giving us a free hand in Tunisia. He also hoped that any colonial enterprise on our part would bring us into conflict with Britain. It was a good idea; and the net results were an immense French Colonial Empire and the *Entente Cordiale*.

"The 'notables' who had been flung out, the Liberals who were in power and the Radicals who were on the up-grade were all obsessed with the thought of revenge; and at last we re-discovered our National Anthem, the *Marseillaise*."

"Why—had we lost it?" asked Juliette.

"Not exactly. People still used to sing it—each one in his own way, incidentally—but we had forgotten that by a decree of the Year III it had become our official anthem. We also had a fête—on July 14th. . ."

"You don't say!" cried Juliette. "And that, too, I suppose, was an official national celebration?"

"It was—but only from 1880 onwards. We had hesitated for a long time and we had rather hoped that August 4th would become our National Day; but the anniversary of the abolition of privileges came in the holiday season, and for that reason the anniversary of the storming of the *Bastille* was thought to be more appropriate.

"But while we were cheering the military parades at home, Jules Ferry quietly sent out thirty thousand men, who without firing a shot established our protectorate over Tunisia; at the same time he was shaping a policy

which, within twenty years, was destined to give us an empire more vast than that we had lost under Louis XV. Savorgnan de Brazza brought us Equatorial Africa, Gallieni presented us with Madagascar, while Francis Garnier and Rivière, assisted by quinine, which calmed the tropical fevers, and by admirable missionaries, who soothed the tropical soul, contributed Indo-China. It is, I think, fair comment to say that this Greater France was a present made to the Republic by a handful of intrepid men.

"As regards Jules Ferry himself, the foremost among them, he was 'killed' by the mediocre men who felt uncomfortable in the presence of his superiority, by the Catholics, who hated him, and by the revenge faction, who were merely very short-sighted. When, in 1885, certain troubles in Tongking gave rise to fears of war with China, the radical Clemenceau led the attack against Ferry with unparalleled fury: 'Yes—all is over between us; we do not wish to hear your voice; we refuse any longer to discuss with you the great issues which affect the interests of the country; we no longer know you and we have no desire to know you. These men before me are not Ministers, they are prisoners at the bar facing a charge of high treason!' In the streets the crowds were shouting: 'Down with Ferry! Down with Tongking!' A month later China renounced her claim to Tongking; but by then Ferry had already been driven from public life for good.

"His successor continued the good work—but on the sly. For the rest of us there were excitements far more stirring than the foundation of an empire. July 14th 1886 offered the revenge faction and the malcontents, the Bonapartists, the monarchists, the counter-jumpers and the little shopgirls a splendid opportunity to indulge in an orgy of emotion. How proudly magnificent the white-bearded General Boulanger had looked on parade, mounted on his black charger! He was the talk of the town!

"The sight of the gallant General warmed the hearts of all good citizens. It was Clemenceau and the Left Wing who had launched him, but the Right were equally enthusiastic in their plaudits. Was he against Germany? Against the Republic? No one really knew. 'Soldierly appeal,' said Maurice Barrès; Déroulède founded the League of Patriots, and the Duchess d'Uzès placed three millions 'at the disposal of the Count of Paris, to wager on the Boulanger card'. When Boulanger was elected a Deputy for one of the Paris constituencies, all Paris cried: 'To the *Elysée*! To the *Elysée*!' But that was more than the gallant soldier was prepared to dare. He promptly took a train to Brussels, where he lived for two years with his mistress, Marguerite de Bonnemains, a sentimentalist who suffered from tuberculosis and who died in 1891. The gallant General then committed suicide on her grave, and that was the end of that little

farce—much to the disappointment and the sentimental sorrow of the little shopgirls.

“In the same year the alliance with Russia was concluded and was greeted in France with delirious enthusiasm. At last we did not face the Germans alone! All we now had to do was to woo and win Britain; scarcely had we wooed and won the Prince of Wales (at *Maxim's*), however, than there occurred an incident of the type for which Bismarck had been hoping. In 1900 Captain Marchant, while trying to establish liaison between our Equatorial African colonies and the Red Sea, ran into a British column at Fashoda. One or the other had to withdraw, but the question was—which one? Fortunately, we had a man who fully appreciated the relative importance of a major national interest and mere national prestige. By renouncing all claim to Egypt, Delcassé obtained from Britain a free hand in Morocco. This was the beginning of the *Entente Cordiale*, covered by no formal treaty, but enshrined in the hearts of both peoples and soon to be transformed into deeds, thanks to King Edward VIII and thanks, too, to Delcassé, who remained at the *Quai d'Orsay* for seven years from 1898 to 1905, while truly great Ambassadors—the Cambons in London and Berlin and Canille Barrère in Rome—strengthened France's position in the face of a Germany growing more and more truculently menacing each day.

“These threats found expression in provocative acts in Tangier and Agadir, against that Morocco, where Lyautey was doing such an admirable job of work. But our allies were no longer prepared to tolerate Kaiser Wilhelm's sabre-rattling. When all this finally led to war in 1914, France already possessed an empire—and she was no longer alone in Europe.

“Only, we didn't seem to realise, or perhaps we were unwilling to face the fact that during the last hundred years something very serious had been happening—we had completely forgotten to breed children. Between 1801 and 1911, when the population of France rose from twenty-seven million to thirty-nine million, the populations of Germany and Italy had tripled, while that of Britain had multiplied itself five times over. We were still in the habit of equating ourselves with half Europe; but in reality our population now represented no more than 7 per cent,<sup>1</sup> and the terrible casualties of the first world war left us bled white.”

### *The Gracious Age*

“From what you have said, I gather that the French were expecting that war,” said Juliette. “In fact you were dancing the cancan on a volcano.”

<sup>1</sup> In the middle of the *Grand Siècle* it sufficed if one European in five were a Frenchman, to make us equal to half Europe. In the middle of the twentieth century, the ratio was one Frenchman to thirteen.

"There were quite a number who saw it coming, but human imagination is poor at foreseeing the horrible; we were still enjoying the gracious age, the period when 1914 was still just another date ahead of us. And before we part, Madame, let us take a look together at the way of life in those days."

"From the top of the Eiffel tower?"

"If you like. Every eleven years an Exhibition was held to celebrate the progress made by industry. In 1889 an incredible carcass of iron started to rise from the *Champs de Mars* to a height of over a thousand feet. Paris was scandalised by the eyesore. Fortunately, it would not be for long, they said—a few months at the most; as soon as the Exhibition closed the monster would be demolished. But then you see, we got attached to the thing, as we had become attached to the family album; and so it remained there as a sign of the industrial glory of the nineteenth century. The Eiffel Tower is the Versailles of the *bourgeois* autocracy.

"In this iron age, padding and stuffing were the twin passions of the *bourgeoisie*. We had tapestries and curtain with pompons, Henry II sideboards and chandeliers, artistic bronzes and indoor plants. We also had our minor scandals; and we'd have been very bored without them. The Panama scandal caused great jubilation to the Right Wing; there was hardly a single one of those damn Radicals who was not discreditably mixed up in it. Then there came an affair of no importance at all, which threatened to become infinitely more serious. A Court Martial had found a certain Captain Dreyfus guilty of treason. He was degraded and deported to Devil's Island, and that would have been the end of the matter, had not a number of busy-bodies asserted, three years later, that Dreyfus was innocent. The Army felt that it could not possibly admit having made a mistake; and, contrary to the advice of Colonel Picquart of the Military Intelligence Service, who was convinced of Dreyfus' innocence, Colonel Henry had some false documents drawn up to prove that Dreyfus was guilty. Emile Zola published his famous letter, *J'accuse*, and was prosecuted and sentenced as a result. France was split into two camps—the Right, which supported the Army, and the Left which upheld the principles of justice; the dispute was further exacerbated by anti-semitic feelings. Brother quarrelled with brother and friends parted in anger. Did you ever see that drawing by Caran d'Ache, showing a family party? In the first picture the hot joint, giving off its savoury odour, stands steaming on the table, surrounded by smiling faces, happy in the anticipation of a jolly good lunch. At the head of the table sits grandfather, brandishing his carvers preparatory to serving. And the caption: 'Now remember—we won't talk about it!'

"The second picture is of the same scene. But all is now ruin and desolation and a welter of broken dishes and plates; the tablecloth is torn and wine-bespattered, women sit swooning in their chairs, grandfather brandishes the carving-knife under the noses of his guests, who threaten to hit him on the head with decanters, and the servant is weeping into the salad-bowl. And the caption: "They DID talk about it!"

"All this, however, does not impede progress. At first it was the Republic which gained ground—"Down with priests! Let the curates stick to their sacristies and the soldiers to their barracks!" The civilian official took precedence over the General at official functions, and thanks to the incandescent mantle notices now announced proudly: 'Gas on all floors'. Then came the little fairy who was to sweep it all away—electricity; her hour of triumph came at the Exhibition of 1900; that year, too, the first underground line, the Maillot-Vincennes line, was opened. 'How lovely! And how beautifully clean!' exclaimed everyone, and the station lights glittered like those in a bathroom—or anyway, as they would have glittered in a bathroom, if we had not preferred, those of us, that is, who had a bathroom, to stuff them with the curtains, draperies and pompons that were quite *de rigueur*.

"Dancing still held sway at *Mabille's*, where lovely legs in black silk stockings danced the cancan mid a cascade of frilly white petticoats. In a corner of the *Jardin de Paris* a funny little fellow with stunted legs, a descendant of that Count of Toulouse whom we met on the first Crusade, Toulouse-Lautrec, portrayed with pitiless pencil the blonde Jane Avril, or the *Casques d'Or*, *la Goulue* and *Grille d'Egout*. The antics of the illustrious Valentin Désossé were much admired, and so was the parade in the foyer, in which the *demi-mondaines*, the little bits of nonsense and the honest-to-god professionals pirouetted and preened themselves.

"At the *Folies Bergère*, Loïe Fuller's flowers budded, burst into bloom and perished in a cloud of muslin—all by electricity. In another darkened hall the first cinema-goers were horrified at the sight of a train running into a station. In the *Bois de Boulogne* the belles of the city cycled on the latest and very *de luxe* model velocipede, machines which cost two hundred and fifty francs—or an Army Lieutenant's pay for a month. To cycle you had to be well off, but to cycle was also very *chic*. 'The bicycle, of course, won't last for long,' most people said, 'and it will certainly never appeal to the masses. Can you imagine a navvy on a bike, with his bag of tools slung on his back, or a *curé* with his cape tucked up, or a gendarme with his *aiguillettes*—on a bike!' The sophisticated assured us, 'The bicycle will go the same way as tennis, the craze for the automobile and this sudden faith in contraptions that can fly. There's nothing like a good old growler,



plodding sedately along. That, believe me, old boy, is the thing in which you'll drive throughout the whole of this twentieth century.'

"The 1900s were the gracious age, modern style, under President Loubet. With the Russian loan and the Republican stock pegged at three per cent, we had no worries. There was, too, no country in the world who knew how to receive the Tsar of Russia<sup>1</sup> or the Prince of Wales more delightfully than the French Republic. In Nice, on the *Promenade des Anglais* Russian Princes soothed their spleen to the dulcet tones of a Viennese valse. In the *Rue Royale* you could dine with a lady guest at *Maxim's* for a louis, and at the *Bouillon Duval*, you could sup for twenty sous—for a sou was still a sou.<sup>2</sup> At la *Grenouillère* on the Seine we boated in striped bathing costumes; the belles of the beach, in flowered hats, reposed in the shade of gaily coloured umbrellas, figures blossomed, the waist became a waist and, transient miracle of an exceptional year, busts were allowed to stay where God intended them to be."

### Peace

"It really was such a lovely age! Though we weren't quite sure that we still remained the policeman of Europe, as we had been in the days of Louis XIV and Napoleon, we still felt that we were the premier nation in the world.

"That Empire of ours which had grown so unobtrusively was now thoroughly appreciated by everybody—especially by fathers of families. 'What! You can't do anything with the lad? Nonsense—push him off to the colonies!' As much as to say, exile the little brute, put him in a penal settlement.

"It was so delightful to live in one's own land, now that we had powerful allies. Long live Russia! Long live the *Entente Cordiale*! Now, too, that all the world liked us they were flocking to visit our Exhibitions. Wasn't French the *lingua franca* of all self-respecting foreigners—in Saint Petersburg, in Constantinople, in Rio de Janeiro? Furthermore, we had writers of the highest quality."

"Yes," said Juliette, "That cra seems to have produced a team very much out of the ordinary—Péguy, Barrès, Valéry, Gide, Claudel."

"Are you trying to be funny, Madame?" demanded Chronossus sharply.

<sup>1</sup> In 1901, when the Russian Imperial couple visited Compiègne, an enthusiastic official gave expression to his fervour by embellishing the toilet paper in the august guests' quarters with the Imperial Arms of Russia! The Chief of Protocol fortunately heard of it just in time, but it was touch and go!

<sup>2</sup> And will remain so until the Second World War. Herriot's drawing is well known: Small boy to father, "What can I do with a sou, Daddy?" Father, "Indulge in charity, my son."

"No—but we certainly appreciated Georges Ohnet, Edmond Rostand and the *Drames dans le Monde* of Paul Bourget. Painting, too, flourished at the *Institut*—but for heaven's sake don't talk to me about Cézanne, Renoir, Degas and that crowd, or before we know where we are we'll have got right down to Braque and Picasso."

"All right, all right," said Juliette soothingly. "But don't tell me that you also scorned Bizet, Saint-Saens, Lalo, Duparc, Fauré, Debussy and Ravel. France, surely, had never before been so musically minded?"

"One or two of them we could stomach—at a pinch. But those last three—your Fauré, Debussy and Ravel, with their degenerate little refinements—God! what cacophony! No—I'm sorry! And when one thinks that they were all the sons of shopkeepers, it makes one a bit anxious about the results being obtained by State compulsory schools.

"Poetry that did not rhyme, 'modern' music, cubism, trade unions and employers' federations—all these were growing up cheek by jowl and presaged no good. It seemed almost as though people took pleasure in cutting the ground from under one's feet, and that, for one who liked to tread a dainty measure, was infuriating.

"All this was no more reassuring for the industrialist than it was for the the retail trade. With their hard but honest conscience, our capitalists had also lost their taste for adventure, and they now demanded State protection. The little *bourgeois*, who saved his money by shopping at *Gagne Petit* or *Pauvre Diable*, read the news of the world in the *Petit Parisien*, the *Petit Journal*, the *Petite Gironde* and the *Petit Marseillais*; in the evening, in his little provincial town, much as it was in the days of Louis XIV, the little businessman had a little game of bezique with the little shopkeeper and drank a little drink with him. And then they both went home early and slipped into their *bourgeois* beds, only too happy to be allowed to live in peace."

### *Before the Storm*

"It's a funny thing," said Juliette, "but the pre-1914 man seems to me to belong much more to the Middle Ages than to the twentieth century."

"You're absolutely right," said Chronossus. "Between 1900 and 1950 everything that the nineteenth century had been slowly and quite unconsciously preparing burst suddenly upon us—the motor car and the aeroplane, the téléphoné, the cinema, wireless, television, surgery, antibiotics. I needn't go on, there's no point in my attempting to give you a picture of how you yourselves live. So, with your permission, I will end my story here, on the threshold of the atomic age that is now opening before us.

Nor will I elaborate the statement that the technical revolution of the twentieth century is the most revolutionary revolution in history."

"Everyone knows," said Juliette, "that the twentieth-century man in the street enjoys more comfort than Louis XIV himself."

"And that the Hiroshima bomber was more powerful than Napoleon. But the industrial century had another explosion up its sleeve for us—the one that occurred in Russia in 1917; and that intense faith which animated the masses in the Middle Ages now radiates from Moscow—and with exactly the same intolerance and with exactly the same inquisitorial machinery."

Juliette laughed. "You're an astonishing fellow, Monsieur Chronossus," she said. "The sequence of your ideas and some of your similies are often quite astounding."

"But didn't I tell you, when I invited you to look down on the twentieth century from the Eiffel Tower as we had looked down on the eleventh century from our fortress stronghold, that the two centuries were strangely alike? You have seen the serfs of the Middle Ages and the serfs in the factories, the Knights of old and the Captains of Industry, the railroads and the colonics, the mushroom cities, communal revolts. . . ."

"True," interrupted Juliette. "Everything, in short, except the Crusades,"

"But they too are on the march," replied Chronossus. "But they are now crusades without a cross, and whither they are going—well—that I will tell you in five hundred years' time."

"Couldn't you please have a shot at telling me today?"

"Today," said Chronossus, "the atom bomb, microbe warfare and the concentration camps cloud our vision. The destruction of our civilisation, if not, indeed, of our whole planet in a nuclear war is a threat so new and so terrifying, that I am frightened lest I should shock you. Even so and notwithstanding our consternation at the results of our efforts as sorcerers' apprentices we are making steady progress. Today we have less people dying of hunger and more people with leisure to live. We have learnt that beautiful ideas are not enough to prevent wholesale killings, that religious faith is not an instrument of government and that the 1750 Voltaire type of rationalism (as modified by Jules Ferry in 1880) is not sufficient to explain the world; science has gone so far ahead that we now realise that the peaceful use of atomic energy will no more generate human wisdom than did the steam engine, that our real enemy is oppression and intolerance, and that what now remains for us to do. . . ."

"Hold it!" interjected Juliette. "We're not frightened by words, are we."

"All right," laughed Chronossus. "But, seriously, don't you think that

France is in a better position than anyone to produce a man who is more or less human?"

"Provided that some bloody crusade or an atom bomb doesn't devastate the whole country," said Juliette.

"Of course. And, of course, we are no longer the greatest power in the world. But we are much more important than mere figures and statistics indicate, and perhaps more important, too, than we ourselves realise. I have seen enough during twenty centuries of France's history to know that there is no such thing as resignation to fate—unless one is willing to be so resigned. Fatalism of that kind is only a poor excuse, it is the name we give to forces which are most complicated, but which an upright spirit and a firm will can go a long way towards controlling."

"I trust you are not going to read me a homily on political morality?"

"Don't worry; the moral is here—in the story I have told you."

"Rome tamed Gallic fantasy into a state of order, but as a peacemaker she was hard and cold. Throughout that long period during which this state of order first collapsed, partly as the result of carelessness and partly under the blows of the Barbarians, was then re-established by Charlemagne, only once more to disintegrate into feudalism, the Church spread kindness and Christian charity through the world and was the mainstay of government, learning and the peace of God. Kingship was then born, extended the boundaries of its domains and, taking over temporal power from the Church, defended its peasants and its townspeople against the ravages of the wild and predatory. The King was loved as the peacemaker, the dispenser of justice and the father of his people, until that spirit of critical examination and the conception of liberty, which first manifested themselves in the *Communes* and the *fabliaux* (the old folk-lore songs), put breath of life into the Renaissance and the Reformation, grew more active still with the advent of the eighteenth-century philosophers and burst finally into bloom with the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

"France and the western world still base their way of life on the liberal principles of '89, when the popular conscience, taking the form of Trades Unions and communism, clung to the principle of justice with all the mystic tenacity of a new adolescence.

"Between the two colossi who now confront each other in the name of justice and liberty, France is no longer sovereign mistress of her own destiny. But the whole world is crying out for the sound of a humane voice, and it is the voice of France, if we are prepared to raise it, which, in spite of our somewhat unpredictable temperament, always talks sense, which will supply the need.

"If sometimes you feel a little anxious about things, remind yourself

that, after much violence and effusion of blood, we have at least created a way of life. Those human masterpieces—the knight polished by the Church and by romantic love, and the ordinary, decent fellow, his corners rubbed smooth by woman—were admittedly the masterpieces of an *élite* society. But don't you see that the motor car, the mechanical gadgets, the eight-hour day, holidays with pay, the radio, the torrent of practical advice in our women's magazines, the 'digests', which supply you with culture in tabloid form, camping, hiking, the bikini. . . ."

"A torrent of fine old French words from the Voice of France," exclaimed Juliette laughingly.

"What does it matter? We have always been a country open to both invasion and ideas; but we have a strong stomach, and we digest them very easily. All these inventions have descended upon us pell-mell and have cheapened knowledge, comfort and leisure; but only one of the old privileged class, suffering from a severe attack of disgruntled nostalgia would dare assert that they have vulgarised man himself. They prevent no man from exercising his powers of cultural selectivity—and that, believe me, is privilege in its truest form. On the other hand, by drawing the classes of society closer together, they have brought the art of living within the reach of all 'at a flat rate'. And that being so, I am quite happy about things. Each Frenchman, I am convinced, will be capable of fashioning his own particular little heaven."

"Dear Monsieur Chronossus," said Juliette, "dare I venture to hint that you seem in grave danger of losing your serene sense of historical detachment?"

"The fact is, Madame, that since I have been living in France, I admit I've fallen rather in love with her. Is she not a truly lovely young woman, a tiller of the soil so capably clever at cultivating abundant happiness on earth? If the Cathedral of Chartres were not buried so deeply in the bosom of the luxuriant plains of Beauce, it would not be able to give forth its message of light with such grace and boldness."

"Blimey!" exclaimed Juliette rudely. "Is this where I get up and cheer?"

"I'm sorry," exclaimed Chronossus huffily. "I won't say another word till the twenty-first century."