

Memoires of the

Marquise de La Rochejaquelein

MARIE-LOUISE-VICTOIRE DE DONNISSAN, WIDOW OF LOUIS DE SAGUES,
MARQUIS DE LESCURE WIFE OF LOUIS DU VERGIER, MARQUIS DE LA
ROCHEJAQUELEIN

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AMATEUR
Voltaire

from the Mémoires de Madame la marquise de La Rochejaquelein

Chapter I of XXVIII

Up to the Estates-General

As both a witness to and a victim of the immortal war of the Vendée, I have endured a succession of events so dreadful and so extraordinary that I shall find it difficult to recount their sorrowful course. I regret only that I lack the talent to portray the heroic deeds I have witnessed. It is to strew flowers upon the graves of so many noble warriors that I have resolved to write these memoirs; though they will never see the light of day, they may perhaps prove useful to anyone who wishes to write an impartial history of the Vendée.

I must state at the outset that my sole advantage is a very good memory, and I shall rely upon it so as not to omit a single anecdote. Many, perhaps, will hold interest for no one but myself; but what does that matter, since I write for myself alone? Should these pages one day serve the future historian of the Vendéan exploits, he may freely strike out whatever is superfluous. Besides, the greater part of these anecdotes belong to my own history, and I find pleasure in recalling them. The vicissitudes of my life have been as cruel as they are unprecedented: I am but twenty-six years of age, yet I feel as though I have already lived for centuries, and the Revolution is not yet over...

I was born at Versailles ⁽¹⁾ on 25 October 1772. My grandmother, the Duchess of Civrac ⁽²⁾, was the friend and lady of honour to Madame Victoire, daughter of Louis XV. My grandfather, after serving in several embassies—most notably in Vienna, where he acted as proxy for the Dauphin in his marriage to the unfortunate Marie-Antoinette—was Knight of Honour and a *cordons bleu*. They had four children. The eldest was the Duke of Lorge ⁽³⁾, whose wife was lady of honour to the Countess of Artois; next was the Marquise de Donnissan ⁽⁴⁾, my mother, who served as lady of the wardrobe to Madame Victoire. I have the honour of being the goddaughter of that princess and of King Louis XVIII. My father was attached to the household of Monsieur, Count of Provence, as gentleman of honour. The third child was the Marquise de Lescure ⁽⁵⁾, who died in childbirth with her only son six years before I was born; and lastly came the Countess de Chastellux ⁽⁶⁾, lady-in-waiting to Madame Victoire, whose husband held the reversion to the office of Knight of Honour.

I dwell upon these circumstances because they form so sharp a contrast with the situations in which I was later to find myself. Picture, then, my childhood: I was an only daughter, and my mother, who loved me

to distraction, kept me constantly at her side. She lived in my grandmother's house; our family, immensely wealthy, tightly knit, and highly influential at Versailles, had, so to speak, no other child but me. My two Lorge cousins were away at school, and my aunt de Chastellux's children were out at nurse, so every care and attention was lavished upon me. My grandmother, whose wit and grace were inimitable, was ably seconded by her children—and especially by my mother—in drawing to her drawing room all the most distinguished and agreeable society of the Court. On Sundays and Tuesdays, the days on which the King held court ^[1], my grandmother's house was crowded with guests; during the rest of the week, a small circle of chosen friends graced her society. Madame Victoire spent every evening with her, possessing a kindness and friendship that made one entirely forget her royal rank.

Thus passed the first fourteen years of my life. At my grandmother's house, I encountered almost all the celebrated figures of the day: ministers, ambassadors, and princes, both French and foreign, including even the King of Sweden ⁽⁷⁾. I witnessed all the fêtes and splendours of the Court and of private society.

Yet, in general, all these things have left me with only a hazy recollection. They seemed to me neither remarkable nor extraordinary, but simply formed part of the everyday life of the world in which I lived.

I do, however, remember one incident that made a profound impression upon me. I was accustomed to seeing the Cardinal de Rohan ⁽⁸⁾ constantly at my grandmother's house. I was nine years old at the time, and was just about to set out with my governess to dine in the country with the Mesdemoiselles de Sérent ⁽⁹⁾, when someone came to tell my mother that a guardsman had been posted as a sentry at the Cardinal's door, and that he had just left the King's presence, followed by an officer of the guard, to return to his apartments. My mother could scarcely credit the news of this unexpected arrest. I set out on my errand, and as I left the chapel gallery, I encountered the Cardinal returning from his rooms. He was preceded by two servants and walking between a captain and an officer of the bodyguards. He was crossing the gallery to enter the carriage that would take him to the Bastille. With a calm and dignified air, he bowed to the curious crowd that had hastened to watch him pass. Because he had often given me sweets, I burst into tears and ran away. ^[2]

At that time, the exhibition of new paintings at the Louvre was held every two years, taking place entirely within the Grand Salon. One day, my grandmother sent to ask whether she might be granted a private viewing at an hour when the galleries would be empty. I was then ten or eleven years old, and she took me with her. We had scarcely arrived when the double doors were thrown open, and we saw the three young princes of Orléans enter with their sister, Mademoiselle ⁽¹⁰⁾. They were accompanied by Madame de Genlis ⁽¹¹⁾, who acted as both governor and governess to them, and were followed by their entire princely retinue. My grandmother turned to our party and said, "Oh, how charming! It has been an age since I last saw Madame de Genlis." The two women immediately advanced to greet one another. They had once been well acquainted, though my grandmother had long since ceased to receive her. As for myself, I was utterly enchanted to get a close look at the author whose children's books I read and whose little plays I performed. I had heard so much whispering whenever her name was mentioned, and had seen so many knowing smiles, that my curiosity was thoroughly piqued. Consequently, the scene I am about to describe remains as vivid to me as though it had taken place yesterday.

Madame de Genlis was dressed with great simplicity in a dark colour; indeed, I believe I can say with

certainly that the hood of her black mantelet was drawn up over her head. She appeared slender and dark-complexioned; her expression was delightful, and her mouth, teeth, and eyes were quite charming. She possessed an air that was at once amiable, gentle, seductive, and full of wit. The young princes were dressed in a style that was highly unusual for the period: they wore the attire of little English boys, their unpowdered hair falling in curls upon their shoulders—a very strange sight in those days. While the under-governors and the artists explained the pictures to the children, my grandmother and Madame de Genlis exchanged a thousand civilities. The latter introduced her daughter, the future Madame de Valence⁽¹²⁾, who was then fourteen years old, tall, and exceptionally beautiful.

My grandmother noticed a charming little girl of seven standing beside her. “You have only two daughters,” she observed (the elder, Madame de Lawoestine⁽¹³⁾, being already married), “who, then, is this enchanting creature?” “Oh!” answered Madame de Genlis in a lowered voice, though I could still hear her, “that little girl’s history is a very touching and interesting one; I cannot relate it to you at present.” She added, “But you have seen nothing yet; you must judge that face for yourself!” Then, raising her voice, she commanded: “Pamela, give us Héloïse!”^[3] Instantly, Pamela removed her comb, letting her beautiful unpowdered hair tumble down in long curls. She threw herself upon one knee, raising her eyes and one arm to heaven, her face adopting an expression of passionate ecstasy. She held this pose while Madame de Genlis, looking utterly delighted, made signs and whispered remarks to my grandmother, who in turn complimented her on the young pupil’s beauty and grace. As for myself, driven by pure instinct and comprehending nothing of what I saw, I simply stood there, spellbound.

My grandmother soon took her leave, eager to laugh over the encounter at her leisure. For a whole week, she regaled her visitors with the story, and there were endless jests concerning the fine education little Pamela was receiving. All those whispered remarks, coupled with the impassioned expression of this new Héloïse—of which I had previously had not the slightest conception—made an impression upon me that endures to this day. I have never since crossed paths with Madame de Genlis, Madame de Valence, or Pamela.

At the age of twelve, I accompanied Mesdames to take the waters at Vichy, and afterwards to the château of Louvois.

I come now to my fourteenth year. My grandmother was stricken with a fatal illness; she had made several journeys to the watering places, but all to no avail. At this time, my marriage was arranged with the son of the Count de Montmorin⁽¹⁵⁾, who was just returning from his embassy in Spain. The Count was then commandant of Brittany and a *cordons bleu*^[4]; he had been promised a dukedom and possessed an income of fifty thousand livres a year, not to mention the King’s further bounties. To all this was added the prospect of every possible advancement.

His son was a year older than I. It was decided that we should be married in eighteen months’ time, and that I was to have an income of eighty thousand livres.

I must say a word here concerning my education. My mother lavished every possible care upon me. Although I was greatly spoiled, in that everyone constantly sought to please me and I was permitted to give free rein to my natural gaiety and high spirits, no child was ever more closely watched. I was given a governess of profound intelligence and good sense. She left my side only when I was with my mother;

indeed, I can say truthfully that until I married at the age of nineteen, I never uttered a word that was not overheard, never listened to a word that was not spoken openly in my presence, and never read a single line that had not been previously inspected. Add to this the fact that I am naturally frank to a fault, and that my mother governed me through tenderness alone, and it will be easily understood how I became precisely whatever they wished me to be.

As a child, I coveted everything I saw. I was permitted to buy any toy I wished, without the slightest reflection, and I am certain that I sometimes spent as much as twenty-five louis a month on them ^[5]. Yet a moment later, with a capriciousness natural to childhood, I would tire of my purchases. Then, poor old people and crippled children would be brought before me. I would wish to give them alms, only to be told that I had no money left—that such-and-such a doll had cost two louis, and so forth. I would burst into tears, protesting that the doll had not amused me for a quarter of an hour. By this effortless method, I was brought to understand the absurdity of squandering money on trifles. The lesson succeeded brilliantly; I can say with perfect truth that from my childhood onwards, no one has been less prone to idle whims than I, and that even surrounded by the shops of the Palais-Royal, I should feel not the slightest desire to purchase anything.

I was of a very lively disposition, and all this ardour was channeled into my studies, for which I possessed a natural facility. I learned music, dancing, drawing, Italian, English, algebra, and astronomy. I formed strong attachments to several young persons of my own age, but above all to the Mesdemoiselles de Sérent, who were my most intimate friends and the most perfect creatures imaginable. They were the daughters of the Duke de Sérent ⁽¹⁶⁾, governor to the children of the Count of Artois, which meant I was also constantly in the company of those little princes, the Dukes of Angoulême and Berry ^[6].

From my earliest years, it had been intended that I should marry my cousin, Monsieur de Lescure ⁽¹⁷⁾. I loved him from the cradle just as fervently as if I had already been fifteen. He was exceedingly timid and unsociable, and was at that time studying at the École Militaire. He left the academy at the age of sixteen, the most learned of all young men, the most perfect in every respect, the most virtuous, yet also the most awkward.

His father, an excellent man, full of honour, but wholly given over to debauchery and gambling, had just amassed eight hundred thousand livres of debt ^[7]. The companion of his excesses was none other than Monsieur Thomassin, his own son's tutor. Yet such was the son's unshakeable virtue that it was to him that these two men came to confess their failings and seek consolation. He loved and respected his father despite all his weaknesses, and still wept for him ten years after his death.

From the age of five until he was nine and a half, Monsieur de Lescure had been educated by Father Duteil ⁽¹⁸⁾, a former Jesuit. It was this man who had inspired in him the ardent love of God and the profound taste for study which he possessed in so eminent a degree. When this holy priest first came to our house in Paris, in 1792, Monsieur de Lescure had not seen him for many years; nothing could equal their joy at being reunited. My cousin took great delight in fetching books in Latin and Italian, merely to prove to his beloved master that he had not forgotten his lessons. He assured him repeatedly that he had remained faithful to all his precepts regarding religion and diligent work. We warned the abbé in vain that it was dangerous to continue wearing his clerical dress. He replied that he would rather die than cast

it aside. He perished at the Carmes, during the massacre ^[8].

Father Duteil was replaced by Monsieur Thomassin, who remained with Monsieur de Lescure until the boy entered the École Militaire at the age of thirteen. Monsieur Thomassin had held various stations in life and had even served as a soldier. He was a man of great intelligence and learning, but of exceedingly loose morals. However, he had managed to conceal his misconduct so skillfully that he was recommended by persons of the highest respectability; indeed, Monsieur de Lescure always did him the justice of declaring that the tutor had never shown him anything but a good example.

I shall paint Monsieur de Lescure exactly as he was. I have far too much good to say of him to need to conceal his faults. I repeat that perhaps no one was ever so learned. Yet at the same time, his modesty was such that he took pains to hide his knowledge. By nature profoundly taciturn, he shrank from his own gifts and seemed almost ashamed of them. Though handsome and well-proportioned, his old-fashioned hair and unstudied dress made a poor impression at first glance. Thrown into the heart of the Court and Paris, having powerful passions, deeply pious, and with his father's example always before his eyes, he had become the most withdrawn of men. His piety, better understood as he grew older, finally ceased to be severe, but for a long time it worked against him.

How could one fail to admire a young man who followed his ailing father to Ermenonville, the seat of the celebrated Monsieur de Girardin ⁽¹⁹⁾, saw him expire in his arms, and then, at the age of eighteen ^[9], devoted himself to the strictest economy to discharge his father's debts? Everyone had advised him to renounce the succession and claim his mother's inheritance instead. But no; he possessed the moral courage to live on a pittance to clear his father's name. His noble-hearted grandmother, the Countess de Lescure, followed his example, achieving this without curtailing her numerous charities. They paid their creditors from their income, aided by friends, and above all by the worthy Monsieur d'Auzon ⁽²⁰⁾, the best of kinsmen. By the age of twenty-five, Monsieur de Lescure had reduced the debt to a mere two hundred thousand livres, while enjoying an income of eighty thousand livres, including his grandmother's fortune.

It is my uncle, the Marquis de Lescure, whose death is related in the history written by Abbé Barruel under the name of the Chevalier de Lescure. I know very little of the matter. My husband answered my inquiries only once or twice, and even then with the utmost brevity; seeing how deeply it pained him, I took care never to press him further. I raised the subject with my mother, but her goodness of heart was such that she could not bring herself to credit such horrors ^[10]. She preferred to believe that Ermenonville was merely a place given over to pleasure, perhaps even to libertinism, and that her brother-in-law had died as a result of his excesses. Monsieur de Lescure, then a *maréchal de camp*, was thirty-seven or thirty-eight years old at the time.

His father, a gentleman attendant to Monsieur the Dauphin, father of Louis XVI, had married Agathe-Geneviève de Sauvestre de Clisson ⁽²¹⁾, whose brother had just been killed at the battle of Fontenoy. Her two elder sisters had become nuns, against their mother's wishes. The youngest had the same vocation, but the death of her brother determined her to renounce it, so as not to leave her mother alone.

The Count de Lescure, having been appointed colonel of a dragoon regiment then serving in Italy, departed a month after his wedding. He crossed the snow-bound Alps with great difficulty, arriving on

the very eve of the battle of Piacenza. Though wounded in the engagement, he refused to leave the field; as the only dragoon colonel present, the command of the entire corps had fallen to him. "My position is too fine, at my age," he declared, "for me to withdraw." Wounded a second time, he was being carried to the rear by his men when a cannonball shattered his head in their arms.

The widowed Countess de Lescure, then expecting a child, was a woman of profound piety. She consecrated the rest of her life to her mother and to her son, the Marquis de Lescure, who, in honour of his father's memory, was treated with exceptional favour. At seventeen, he married Jeanne de Durfort de Civrac, my mother's sister. Madame de Lescure died in childbirth, leaving the son who was later to become my husband. The Marquis's grief was so violent that he had to be closely watched lest he do himself an injury.

At twenty-three, out of deference to his mother's wishes, my uncle contracted a second marriage, taking Mademoiselle de Sommièvre⁽²²⁾ as his bride. She bore him a daughter who died at birth. His wife lingered for four years in a state of cruel suffering, finally dying with a courage and piety beyond all praise. She adored her husband, who, though he did not love her, always treated her with great affection. My uncle was gentle, kind, cheerful, and remarkably brave. In short, what the world calls a man of perfect honour. Yet he threw himself with frantic energy into every amusement and dissipation. Because of his exceedingly amiable disposition, he was universally beloved. Neither trouble nor expense ever gave him a moment's pause.

He was captivated by the Baroness de Pel^[11], and it was she who drew him to Ermenonville. He spent the greater part of his final years there, amidst all the follies which have attached such strange and dark memories to that estate. My father-in-law was of so frivolous a nature that everything seemed a jest to him. Yet when he fell ill, he wrote summoning his son to attend him, which indicates he must have felt himself to be in grave danger. For forty days he hovered between life and death, suffering from continuous sweats and extreme exhaustion, yet without fever. He showed his son great impatience to leave Ermenonville, declaring he would never return there.

Monsieur de Lescure left his father's side only to dine with the society of the château, remaining in the drawing room for perhaps half an hour out of mere civility. Two things in that bizarre company had struck him forcefully. The first was their extreme license of speech, in which Monsieur de Pl*** joined freely, despite the presence of his three unmarried daughters, who answered him in the same tone. Then, from time to time, this same mad assembly would gather with an air of the deepest devotion around one of their number, who would open the Bible and read aloud. From their solemn bearing, one might have taken them for a congregation of monks. Yet no sooner was the book closed than the free talk and indecent rites^[12] recommenced.

Certain details linger in my memory which I hesitate to state as absolute fact, as I can no longer recall from whom I heard them—though it was certainly not from my husband. It is said that when this society sought to initiate my uncle, who had joined them merely for amusement and attached not the slightest importance to their proceedings, they attempted to force him to take their notorious oath by pressing the point of a sword to his heart. Seized with righteous horror, he cried out, "Drive the sword home; I shall never take that oath." The adepts, dreading the consequences of such a murder, or perhaps fearing he

might expose them to the King, passed the matter off as a joke. They smothered him in praise, insisting it had been nothing but a jest, and that they had been certain he would refuse so dreadful an oath, which none of them would ever have dreamed of taking either. ^[13]

Feeling somewhat restored, my uncle ordered his carriage and had his hair dressed, saying to his son, “We shall go down to the drawing room for a moment to take our leave.” But as he rose to shake off the powder, he fell to the floor and expired two minutes later, without uttering a single word. This was all I ever learned from Monsieur de Lescure concerning his father’s death.

Périer, his old and devoted valet, was present at the autopsy and heard the physicians’ verdict. To the end of his days, he maintained that his master had been poisoned at Ermenonville, that he possessed undeniable proof of the fact, and that the nature of the illness defied all natural explanation. His son and the public, however, were informed that an abscess had been found near his ribs, the result of a blow he had received against a tree while hunting.

The society of Ermenonville quietly dissolved soon after Monsieur de Lescure’s death. Monsieur de Pl***, deeply suspected of unspeakable infamies, fled to Brabant, from whence he wrote continually to Madame Pel. She made an open display of irreligion. Her parents, with whom she had sought refuge, sent for Madame de la Rochebrochard d’Auzay ⁽²³⁾, who had been her friend since childhood, begging her to visit. Madame d’Auzay prevailed upon her to attend Mass one Sunday. She was handed a missal, and herself remarked that she was holding it upside down.

She was dying, though no one ever diagnosed her malady. Blood seeped constantly from her mouth, drop by drop. She made no complaint, continued to rise and dress herself, and utterly refused all remedies. One day, when Madame d’Auzay offered her a glass of lemonade, she seemed to accept it with pleasure. She was raising it to her lips when her friend remarked, “I hope this little remedy will do you good.” She instantly threw the glass away, crying, “Ah, it is a remedy!” She died without uttering another word, steeped in an air of profound insensibility and self-absorption.

It was also Périer, I believe, who related that on the eve of my uncle’s death, Monsieur de Pl*** came to inquire after him. The sick man barely deigned to acknowledge him. Monsieur de Pl*** then took a cup of tisane, added sugar, and, stirring it deliberately, offered it to him, saying, “Take this, it will do you good.” My uncle at first waved it away with a look of indignation. Monsieur de Pl*** fixed him with a hard, unwavering stare. My uncle, without a word, seized the cup with an expression of mingled fury and defiant courage, and drank it down, his eyes locked on Monsieur de Pl*** the entire time. The gaze of those two men, fastened upon one another, had something truly terrible in it.

I loved my cousin, but the scandalous disorder of his father’s life had changed my parents’ intentions, and they were right to be cautious. Who could have foreseen that he would achieve such absolute mastery over himself that he would never have the slightest transgression to answer for? He never had cause to repent of a single youthful folly, not even those indiscretions so readily forgiven in young men. In this, his conduct was entirely without exception.

Continually animated by the fear and love of God, and shrinking from the slightest thought that might offend Him, he appeared grave and abstracted in society, scarcely listening to the conversation around him. Within the family circle, however, he was remarkably cheerful.

I must add that never in his life did he display the slightest irritation or anger. He possessed an evenness of temper and a self-command such as I have witnessed in no one else, which was all the more remarkable given his naturally spirited disposition. He was, however, somewhat obstinate. This fault stemmed largely from the derision he encountered at every turn. Accustomed to a constant struggle against his own inclinations and those of others, he naturally grew inflexible in his opinions. He spent his life reading and studying; possessing a prodigious memory and a deeply reflective mind, he knew everything, yet found pleasure in nothing.

A single anecdote will serve to better illuminate Monsieur de Lescure's character. One day, he was in my grandmother's drawing room with several guests. Having picked up a book, as was his custom, he sat reading instead of attending to the conversation. My grandmother reproved him for this, and, finding herself somewhat bored, bade him read aloud to her. He complied at once. After half an hour, someone who had approached him exclaimed, "But the book is in English! Why did you not say so?" He replied, looking quite abashed, "I thought that, since Grandmamma did not know English, I ought to translate it into French as I read." It would never have crossed his mind to mention the fact.

I believe nothing could better demonstrate both his learning and his modesty. I could cite many other instances of the same kind.

Monsieur, the Count of Provence^[14], is one of the most learned of men, particularly in languages. Once the formal court hours had passed, he often enjoyed conversing with those courtiers who shared his taste for study. One day, Monsieur de Montesquiou⁽²⁴⁾, a member of his household, arrived to dine at my grandmother's carrying a volume of Horace. He had just come, he said, from Monsieur's apartments, where he and several others had been attempting to interpret a particularly difficult ode. Unable to grasp the author's exact meaning, they had continually felt that something was eluding them. He declared his intention to carry the ode with him everywhere until he had uncovered the poet's true thought.

There was a large company at my grandmother's house, but no one would attempt the translation. She then turned to Monsieur de Montesquiou and said, "Come, do you know whom you ought to consult? My grandson." Monsieur de Lescure was then sixteen and had recently left the École Militaire. He was sent for. Found standing by the window, deeply embarrassed and with his back to the room, he came forward, protesting that it had been a long time since he had read any Latin and that he was quite incapable of interpreting Horace. "Try; I wish you to do so," said my grandmother. "If you fail, it will be perfectly natural." He took the book and read the ode aloud in French from beginning to end, very rapidly, elucidating the obscure passage without the slightest hesitation. Monsieur de Montesquiou embraced him enthusiastically and hurried back to Monsieur; meanwhile, Monsieur de Lescure, blushing furiously and deeply ashamed, retreated to the window, muttering, "It was pure chance. I know Latin very poorly."

He was also well versed in German and Italian, possessed a profound knowledge of history and geography, and excelled in mathematics, with an astonishing facility for mental arithmetic. In later years, he devoted himself to a thorough study of fortification and military tactics. He drew landscapes from nature admirably. He rode with great enthusiasm but detested music; and though he enjoyed dancing and executed the steps perfectly well, he carried himself rather poorly.^[15]

I had been raised to place absolute trust in my parents. My mother easily convinced me that, as Monsieur de Lescure's fortune was ruined, I could not possibly marry him; and it was easier still to highlight his awkwardness in society so as to cure me of any such romantic notion. I could not help but love him, yet I did so only as a brother. He was permitted a certain familiarity with me, and we both felt truly happy only in each other's company. When he sat reading in a corner of my room while I studied with my governess, I seemed to breathe a different air, though I did not then understand the feeling. I was innocence itself, and my thoughts had been so thoroughly directed away from such matters that I should have been deeply dismayed at the prospect of marrying a cousin who was so exceedingly awkward.

I was brought with the fullest confidence towards my parents. As such, my mother had little difficulty in making me understand that, as Monsieur de Lescure was ruined, the match was impossible, and less difficulty still in making him appear sufficiently absurd in society to put the idea out of my head. I could not help loving him, but as a brother. He was permitted a certain freedom with me. We felt that we were happy only in each other's company. When he sat reading in a corner of my room while I studied with my governess, I seemed to breathe a different air, though I could not account for the feeling. I was innocence itself, and had been so thoroughly turned away from my own inclinations that I should have been genuinely distressed at the thought of marrying my cousin, who was so gauche. He loved me in return. Yet, knowing my parents' wishes, grateful for the confidence they placed in him, sustained by his faith, and possessed above all of a reserve and timidity without equal, he never allowed me to understand for a single instant that he loved me otherwise than as a brother. But enough has been said of him, far too much, indeed, were I not writing for myself alone, and had he not since become famous.

For his part, he loved me deeply. Yet, knowing my parents' wishes, bound by gratitude for their trust in him, guided by profound religious piety, and, above all, possessed of an unparalleled timidity and reserve, he never allowed me to suspect for a single instant that his affection for me was anything other than fraternal. But I have said enough of him. It would be far too much, were I not writing for myself alone, and had he not since achieved such renown.

When I was fourteen, I lost my grandmother. We withdrew to a country house named Brimborion, which Madame Victoire had lent us. It lay on the road from Versailles to Paris, just below Bellevue. My grandfather was overcome with grief, as indeed was my entire family. While Madame de Chastellux remained in attendance upon Madame Victoire, my parents, my uncle de Lorge, Monsieur de Lescure, and I remained with my grandfather. He was afflicted with the stone^[16]. His suffering, compounded by the loss of his wife, had transformed our household into a place of deep mourning and sorrow. An absolute silence, broken only by tears, reigned over our seclusion, and only rarely were two or three close friends permitted to call for an hour. It was during this period that Monsieur de Montmorin was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs, and my own marriage was postponed for a year out of respect for my family's grief.

I spent five months at Brimborion, finding no diversion save for the games of chess I played with Monsieur de Lescure. Then my grandfather died, and Mamma fell into so dreadful a condition that for three weeks she revived from prolonged fainting spells only to suffer convulsions. No physical remedy could relieve her: the malady was in her soul.

My father was advised to take her travelling. We departed for Switzerland, where she had friends, Madame de Diesbach and the d’Affry⁽²⁵⁾ family. Our party in the first carriage comprised my parents, my governess, a chaplain, and myself. Mamma wept incessantly, and none of us dared utter a word. We travelled by short stages. From time to time, when the landscape was particularly fine, my father would draw her attention to it. She would look out with a vacant expression, and then close her eyes once more. Every evening brought on a nervous attack. It was in this manner that we travelled for five months.

My uncle de Lorge, his two sons, Madame de Diesbach, and several others joined us. At times, our party numbered as many as eighteen ladies and gentlemen travelling together. On the outward journey, we passed through Auxerre, Dijon, Salins, and Pontarlier. We saw everything in Switzerland that could be viewed from a carriage, and returned by way of Basel, Strasbourg, and Nancy. I shall not give a detailed account of this journey; I will say only that while there, I saw Lavater^[17] and Cagliostro^[18].

Upon our arrival in Brienz, we found an immense crowd gathered on the promenade. We were told that people were flocking to the little town to consult Cagliostro; he had been living there for some time, and all the inhabitants regarded him with boundless enthusiasm and absolute trust. The sick came to him in droves. My father had never seen him, and was curious to meet the man who had recently caused such a stir. Three or four of our fellow travellers wished to accompany him. It was agreed that they would go at eight o’clock in the morning, and that our caravan would await their return before setting out again. I begged my father so earnestly that he consented to take me with them.

We arrived at Cagliostro’s house. My father asked the servant to announce that some French visitors had called, to which the man replied that his master received no one. “Tell him,” my father persisted, “that I am a very close relative of Madame de Brivazac⁽²⁸⁾.” She had entertained Cagliostro and his wife for several months at Bordeaux, where he had completely turned her head; she believed him to be the most skilful and virtuous of men. This, of course, was before the Affair of the Necklace. The servant withdrew and soon returned, bidding us come upstairs. Scarcely had we entered a rather small drawing-room when Cagliostro appeared, flanked by two men, one of whom was the Protestant pastor^[19]; both seemed filled with joy and admiration.

Cagliostro received us with great politeness. He was a rather short, stout man, dark-complexioned, with a handsome face. I was much astonished to observe that, although he was otherwise fully dressed in the ordinary fashion, he wore no cravat; his shirt collar was turned down and trimmed with muslin, in the fashion children wore at the time. Scarcely had the bows and compliments begun when his wife entered and took possession of me, much to my regret, as it meant I could hear nothing of what her husband was saying. Madame Cagliostro was no longer in her first youth, but her face, which was still rather pretty, bore a gentle and amiable expression; she was very short, slightly plump, and exceedingly fair. Her hair was elaborately dressed; she wore a feathered hat, earrings, a muslin gown over a pink underdress, and a profusion of trimmings. Such a toilette would not have been ridiculous for an evening engagement, but at eight o’clock in the morning it was highly incongruous. I was not yet fifteen; she treated me according to my years, but was otherwise charming. She spoke to me of Lake Brienz, of walking tours, of music, and insisted that I play upon an open harpsichord that stood in the room. Within a few minutes, I was furious. As we took our leave, I caught only this one singular phrase, which I shall never forget: “Be assured, Monsieur le Marquis, that the Count Cagliostro will always endeavour to make himself useful to

your commands.^[20]»

Upon our return from Switzerland, I was fifteen years of age. Mamma resumed her attendance upon Madame Victoire, and I returned to my former happy life. We saw far fewer people, however. Mamma, still burdened by grief, received scarcely anyone but intimate friends, and her health was greatly impaired. Madame de Montmorin, my future mother-in-law, was a constant visitor and overwhelmed me with kindness, for the time of my marriage was drawing near. Her son came to our house accompanied by his tutor; we took our lessons together, but we were both so timid that we scarcely dared exchange a word.

The marriage articles had thus far been agreed upon only verbally, for neither family suspected the slightest cause for misunderstanding. My trousseau was ready, the wedding was to be celebrated within a fortnight, and the time had come to draw up the formal contract. It was then that Monsieur de Montmorin said to my parents: "I do not wish to conceal from you that I may perhaps have debts. I have always occupied myself with the King's affairs, to the neglect of my own. Although I have continually held posts in which other men enrich themselves, my men of business claim that I am ruined. I shall send them to you; in ascertaining the truth for yourselves, you will render me an equal service.

As it transpired, disorder and pillage had reigned so absolutely in Monsieur de Montmorin's household that his debts far exceeded his fortune. I need cite but a single example: Madame de Montmorin declared that she retained at least her dowry of two hundred thousand livres, which she could employ for her son's benefit. She was informed in reply that she had stood surety for a tailor's bill, and that this single debt amounted to one hundred and eighty thousand livres. Monsieur de Montmorin, launched into the highest offices of state and loaded with dignities and favours of every kind, thought of nothing but his ambition.

My mother, who set her store by more solid realities, broke off the marriage. She refused to sacrifice me to the precarious vicissitudes of the Court. Thus the match came to an end, though the friendship and esteem which had always united our two families remained intact. As for myself, I wept for the balls Madame de Montmorin had promised me, and for the dignity of being a married woman; but I was swiftly consoled when Mamma assured me that she would soon find me another husband, and that I should attend the theatre and all the fêtes just the same.

I shall set down here^[21] some details I learned from my mother concerning the Chevalier d'Éon⁽³⁰⁾. I have never seen it explained elsewhere why the King required that he return to France only in women's clothing. Since Monsieur d'Éon had spoken, written, and acted in every conceivable manner against Monsieur de Guerchy⁽³¹⁾, the ambassador in London, whose secretary he had been, the ambassador's son⁽³²⁾ resolved, following his father's death, to challenge the Chevalier to a duel, unless, as rumour had it, he was in fact a woman. It was to prevent this encounter, therefore, that the King obliged Monsieur d'Éon to assume female attire. I also heard my mother say that France had sent him to Russia as a spy when he was still very young, to serve as lady's maid to the Empress Elizabeth⁽³³⁾. He held this post for three years; several years later, when the Russian court began to harbour suspicions regarding this escapade, France was only too glad to maintain that he was indeed a woman.

I remember seeing him during my childhood at my grandmother's house in Versailles. He was then an object of universal curiosity, and did indeed pass for a lady⁽³⁴⁾. I can still picture that strange figure. She

^[22] wore a black gown and a large cap of the style then known as a *baigneuse*; beneath this head-dress, she was positively hideous. Thick black eyebrows shaded his burning eyes, and a flushed, reddish-brown complexion completed his frightful countenance. His bold demeanour, and the violent movements of his arms and legs as he gesticulated, were quite incredible to witness. Upon his breast he wore an enormous Cross of Saint-Louis. I recall that, in my presence, another Knight of Saint-Louis, a *maréchal de camp* who had never seen active service, attempted to jest about seeing such a decoration pinned to a woman's gown. The Chevalier retorted angrily, "Monsieur, I won it on the field of battle, and not, as many have done, by the fireside."

I was obliged to embrace this singular young lady, who frightened me terribly. My grandmother had a *maître d'hôtel* who had known her as a man. Unable to believe his eyes, the servant kept half-opening the drawing-room door to peer at the Chevalier more closely. Everyone was highly amused by his curiosity, most of all Mademoiselle d'Éon, who had embraced the man upon recognising him.

My mother told me on several occasions that she had it from Madame Victoire herself that the princess had been tormented by a burning curiosity to uncover the truth regarding the Man in the Iron Mask ^[23]. She had repeatedly implored the King, her father, to confide the secret to her, but for a long time he refused. Yielding at last to her incessant entreaties, he consented, upon the condition that she swear never to reveal it to a living soul. He then impressed upon her the profound gravity of the oath he exacted. Seized with dread lest she should fail to keep such a momentous pledge, she chose instead to forgo the secret entirely. My mother was firmly convinced that the Count de Maurepas was the last person to know the truth, although, in his capacity as minister, he had presumably imparted it to King Louis XVI.

As Mamma's health remained exceedingly frail, she sought Madame Victoire's permission to retire to Gascony. I travelled there for the first time in my life in 1788. While passing through Tours, my mother called upon the Cardinal de Rohan. He was all the more deeply touched by this mark of attention, as courtiers so often shrink from acknowledging those in exile. My uncle de Lorge and his sons joined us in Gascony, and we spent the summer between his estates and our own. I returned to Versailles with my parents at the end of the year. I was then sixteen; several matches had been proposed for me, but Mamma remained undecided.

The time of the Estates-General was at hand, and with it, the beginning of the Revolution.



Original Editor's Notes

1 I wrote that I was born at Versailles because my family lived there; I was brought there immediately after my birth; I was nursed and brought up there. But some works have said that I was born at the Louvre, and that is true. The Duke de Nevers, father of the Duke de Nivernais, had obtained from Louis XV permission to build himself a house within the great walls of the Louvre. The King had granted him half of the façade overlooking the quay; the other part had formerly been arranged for the Infanta of Spain, who had been betrothed to Louis XV, and who later became Queen of Portugal. There were terraced gardens over the Seine; that of the Infanta was planted with several rows of tall trees. On the death of the Duke de Nevers, in 1738, the King allowed my grandfather, the Duke de Civrac, and his son to enjoy this residence during their lifetimes, after coming to an arrangement with the Duke de Nivernais, who sold them the building for forty thousand francs. The end pavilion, which has three windows on the façade, remained in usufruct to the two daughters of the famous Quinault.* The elder had secretly married the Duke de Nevers, and her excellent conduct caused her to be treated with much civility. I remember that my grandmother one day took me to see these old ladies; we found the Duke de Nivernais there. My grandmother's garden was equal in extent to that of the Infanta, from which it was separated only by the wicket gate; one third was reserved for Mlle Quinault. During the Revolution all the windows, partitions, staircases, and floors were pulled down; only the great walls were left, like the rest of the Louvre of that time. (Author's note.)

*They were daughters of the actor Quinault, who died in 1750. Marie-Anne, who had married the Duke de Nevers, widower of Marie-Anne Spinola, died at the end of the century, aged about one hundred. The younger, Jeanne-Françoise, the most celebrated of the family for her charm, wit, and connection with illustrious figures, died in 1783; her correspondence with Voltaire and Piron has been published.

2 Marie-Anne de Lafaurie de Monbadon, born in 1730, died at Versailles on 28 October 1786; married, by contract of 21 August 1744, Emeric-Joseph de Durfort, Marquis de Civrac, born at La Mothe-Montravel, in Périgord, on 19 March 1716; created duke in 1774, died on 8 April 1787.

3 Jean-Laurent de Durfort-Civrac, Duke de Quintin, born at La Mothe-Montravel on 7 July 1746, married on 22 May 1762 to Adélaïde-Philippine de Durfort-Lorge, born on 16 September 1744, died at Fonpertuis, near Beaugency, on 12 December 1819. The duchy of Lorge was transmitted to the Duke de Quintin by letters patent of 23 March 1773. Peer of France in 1814, lieutenant general, Cordon bleu and governor of Rambouillet, he died on 4 October 1826.

4 Marie-Françoise de Durfort-Civrac, born on 21 September 1747, followed the whole campaign of the great Vendéan army; after the Revolution of 1830, she withdrew to Orléans, where she died on 19 May 1838. She had married, on 26 January 1760, Gui-Joseph, Marquis de Donnissan and de Citran, born at Bordeaux on 7 February 1737, colonel of the Grenadiers of France, grand seneschal of Guyenne, maréchal de camp, Knight of Saint-Louis. Appointed governor of the country conquered by the Vendéans and president of the Council of War, he was taken at Montrelais, near Varades, condemned, and executed at Angers on 19 Nivôse Year II, 8 January 1794.

5 Jeanne-Marie de Durfort-Civrac, born on 12 October 1748, died at Versailles on 26 October 1766, married, on 17 June 1765, Louis-Marie-Joseph de Salgues, Marquis de Lescure, born at La Rochelle on 24 November 1746, colonel of the Lescure Dragoons, later maréchal de camp, died at Ermenonville, near Senlis, on 8 December 1784.

- 6 Angélique-Victoire de Durfort-Civrac, born at Versailles on 2 December 1752, died in Paris on 14 November 1816, married on 21 April 1773 to Henri-Georges-César, Count de Chastellux, born in Paris on 15 October 1746, first hereditary canon by birth of the cathedral church of Auxerre, *maréchal de camp* in 1788, died in Paris on 7 April 1814.
- 7 Gustav III of Holstein-Eutin, born on 24 January 1746, succeeded his father, Adolf Frederick, on 12 February 1771, and was assassinated at a masked ball by an agent of the secret societies on 16 March 1792; he died thirteen days later.
- 8 Prince Louis de Rohan-Guéménée, born in Paris on 25 September 1734, consecrated Bishop of Canopus, in Egypt, in 1760, cardinal in 1778, Bishop of Strasbourg in 1779, ambassador, Grand Almoner. Following the Affair of the Necklace, he was exiled to the Abbey of La Chaise-Dieu, in Auvergne. Later deputy to the Estates-General, he died in 1803.
- 9 Anne-Félicité-Simonne de Sérent, born in 1780, married in 1799 to Étienne-Charles, Count de Damas-Crux; lieutenant general, Grand Cross of Saint-Louis, Peer of France, created duke in 1826, Knight of the Orders. She died in Paris on 21 January 1848. Anne-Angélique-Marie-Émilie de Sérent, married to Raimond-Jacques-Marie, Count de Narbonne-Pelet, Peer of France in 1815, duke in 1817, ambassador, minister of state, Knight of the Orders. She died in Paris on 16 March 1836.
- 10 Louis-Philippe, the Duke de Montpensier, the Count de Beaujolais, and Madame Adélaïde.
- 11 Félicité-Stéphanie Ducrest de Saint-Aubin, born at the Château de Champcéry, near Autun, on 25 January 1746, Countess de Bourbon-Lancy as canoness of the noble chapter of Alix, near Lyon; lady of honour to the Duchess de Chartres, wife of Philippe-Égalité, then governess to their children; died in Paris on 31 December 1830. She had married Charles-Alexis Brulart, Count de Genlis, Marquis de Sillery, colonel of the Grenadiers of France, brigadier in 1780, deputy to the Estates-General, then to the Convention, condemned to death on 30 October 1793.
- 12 Edmée-Nicole-Pulchérie Brulart de Genlis, married, on 3 June 1784, to Jean-Baptiste-Cyrus-Marie-Adélaïde de Timbrune-Thiembrone, from an Artois family, Count de Valence, colonel of the Chartres-Dragoons regiment in 1783.
- 13 Caroline-Jeanne, born in Paris on 4 December 1765, married, on 18 April 1780, to Charles-Ghislain-Antoine-François de Paule de Deceler, Marquis de Lawoestine, *mestre de camp* second-in-command of the Chartres-Dragoons regiment in 1784. She died in Paris in 1788.
- 14 Nancy Seymour, according to Mme de Genlis, was born at Fogo, a dependency of Newfoundland, and was brought from England to the Palais-Royal. In December 1792, at Tournai, she married Lord Edward FitzGerald, and later the American Pitcairn, consul at Hamburg. Having divorced, she withdrew to the Abbaye-aux-Bois, in Paris, then left it to follow the Duke de La Force; she died on 8 November 1831.
- 15 Armand-Marc, Count de Montmorin Saint-Hérem, born in Paris on 13 October 1745, *maréchal de camp*, ambassador of France, Knight of the Holy Spirit and of the Golden Fleece, Minister of Foreign Affairs, massacred at the Abbaye on 2 September 1792.
- 16 Armand-Louis, Count de Sérent, Marquis de Kerfily, born at Nantes on 30 December 1736, *maréchal de camp* in 1780, governor of the princes in 1788, *grandee* of Spain; Duke de Sérent and Peer of France in 1814, lieutenant general, Knight of the Orders, died on 30 October 1822.
- 17 Louis-Marie de Salgues, Count, then Marquis de Lescure, born in Paris on 15 October 1766, captain attached to the Royal-Piémont cavalry regiment, became a general in the great Vendéan army, and died of his wounds on 4 November 1793.

- 18 The Abbé Vareille-Duteil had taken refuge in 1792 in the Maison Saint-François de Sales, at Issy, near Paris. Brought before the Committee of the Luxembourg section, he was confined in the Church of the Carmes and massacred on 2 September.
- 19 Ermenonville, near Senlis, belonged to René-Louis, Marquis de Girardin. Born in Paris in 1735, he fought in the Seven Years' War and became colonel of dragoons, then brigadier of the bodyguards of the King of Poland, Duke of Lorraine. Having retired to Ermenonville, he gave hospitality to J. J. Rousseau, who died there after six weeks. In 1793, he saved himself from the scaffold by protesting his devotion to the republic, and died at Vernouillet, in the Oise, on 20 September 1808.
- 20 Hector-François Sonnet d'Auzon, knight, lord of Baignon, near Pouzauges, and of La Boulaye, parish of Treize-Vents, in Lower Poitou, shot at Blain, near Savenay, in December 1793.
- 21 Agathe-Geneviève Sauvestre, lady of the county of Les Mothes and of Clisson in Poitou, married, on 15 February 1746, François-Alphonse de Salgues, Marquis de Lescure, in Albigeois, Baron de Sainte-Flaive in Lower Poitou, mestre de camp of the Dauphin-Dragoons regiment, killed beneath the walls of Piacenza on 16 June 1746.
- 22 Anne-Marie-Thérèse de Sommièvre, daughter of Gaspard, Count de Sommièvre, and of Louise de Choiseul.
- 23 Marie-Françoise Jouxlard d'Yversay, born on 17 May 1752, lady of Basserolles and Le Coudreau, married, on 17 June 1775, François-Xavier-Joseph Brochard de la Rochebrochard, Baron d'Auzay, near Fontenay-le-Comte, captain in the light horse, Knight of Saint-Louis.
- 24 Anne-Pierre-Elisabeth, Count de Montesquiou-Fezensac, born in Paris on 31 September 1764, First Equerry to Monsieur, later member of the Legislative Body, Grand Chamberlain of Napoleon, senator, Peer of France in 1819, died at the Château de Courtanvaux, in the Sarthe, on 4 August 1834.
- 25 Marie-Madeleine d'Affry, born in 1759, daughter of Louis-Auguste-Augustin, Count d'Affry, born at Versailles on 28 August 1713, ambassador of France, lieutenant general, colonel of the Swiss Guards, Knight of the Orders in 1784, died at his château of Saint-Barthélemy, in the canton of Vaud, on 10 June 1793, and of Marie-Elisabeth d'Alt. She married, on 21 September 1762, François-Frédéric, Count de Diesbach Torny, born at Fribourg in 1739; he served for a short time in the regiment of Swiss Guards, in which several members of his family were found; having returned to his own country, he held various magistracies, was appointed, in 1780, chamberlain of the Emperor of Austria, and died childless on 11 September 1811. The Countess de Diesbach, Lady of the Starry Cross of Austria, died at Fribourg on 22 March 1822.
- 26 Johann Kaspar Lavater, born at Zurich in 1741, first pastor of the Church of Saint Peter, published a great number of works. He died in 1801 from a wound received at the taking of Zurich.
- 27 Joseph Balsamo, born at Palermo in 1743, first a Brother of Mercy, physician, then adventurer, settled in France in 1780, was imprisoned in 1785, condemned at Rome in 1791 to life imprisonment as a magician and sorcerer practising Freemasonry; he died in 1795 at Fort Saint-Léon. His wife, Lorenza Feliciani, was the daughter of a passementerie-maker of Rome; she was arrested with Cagliostro in 1789, and condemned to end her days in a convent.
- 28 Marguerite de La Porte de Puyferrat, married at Angoulême to Jean-Baptiste-Guillaume-Léonard de Brivazac, lay councillor in the Parlement of Bordeaux.
- 29 Françoise-Gabrielle de Tanes, born in 1742 at Chadieu, in Auvergne, married in 1764 to Armand-Marc, Count de Montmorin Saint-Hérem; lady companion to Madame Sophie of France. She was guillotined on 10 May 1794, with Madame Élisabeth, as was her son Hugues-Antoine-Calixte de Montmorin, born at Versailles in November 1771, second lieutenant in the 5th Chasseurs in 1792.

- 30 Charles-Geneviève-Louis-Auguste-Timothée de Beaumont, Chevalier d'Éon, born at Tonnerre in 1728, officer and diplomat, Knight of Saint-Louis in 1763, died in London on 21 May 1810.
- 31 Claude-François-Louis Régnier, Marquis de Guerchy, born in 1715, of a Burgundian family, lieutenant general, Knight of the King's Orders, married to Gabrielle-Lydie d'Harcourt, died in Paris on 17 September 1767.
- 32 Anne-Louis Régnier, Count, then Marquis de Guerchy, born in Paris on 3 February 1755, married to Marie-Françoise du Roux de Sigy, died in 1806 at Montreuil-sur-Mer.
- 33 Elizabeth Petrovna, daughter of Peter the Great, born on 5 September 1709, Empress of Russia on 6 December 1741, died on 29 December 1761.
- 34 According to the *Biographie universelle*, it was in 1777 that he was at Versailles; I would then have been only five years old, and yet I am inclined to believe that it was later. (Author's note.)
- 35 Jean-Frédéric Phélippeaux, Count de Maurepas, born on 9 July 1701, received the title of Minister of State at his father's death, as early as 1715, became Minister of the Navy and of the King's Household at the age of twenty-four, then was exiled in 1749. Recalled by Louis XVI, he presided over the Council of State, and died on 21 November 1781.



Translator's Notes

1

The French phrase here is *les jours où le Roi recevait*, literally “the days on which the King received.” This does not mean that the King “held court” in the judicial sense, but it refers to the fixed reception days at court, when Louis XVI formally received members of the court, dignitaries, and persons being presented according to royal etiquette. Such days drew a large aristocratic and diplomatic attendance to Versailles, and neighbouring court households naturally became crowded with visitors.

2

This passage refers to the arrest of Cardinal Louis-René-Édouard de Rohan during the Diamond Necklace Affair. In 1785, Jeanne de La Motte and her accomplices persuaded Rohan that Queen Marie-Antoinette secretly wished him to arrange the purchase of an extremely expensive diamond necklace on her behalf. Forged letters and a staged nocturnal meeting at Versailles were used to convince him that he had the Queen’s confidence. When the fraud was discovered, Louis XVI had Rohan arrested at Versailles on 15 August 1785 and sent to the Bastille. Although Marie-Antoinette had no part in the affair, the public scandal badly damaged her reputation and became one of the most famous signs of the monarchy’s loss of credibility before the Revolution

3

“Héloïse” refers chiefly to Rousseau’s *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, published in 1761. The novel is an epistolary work centred on Julie d’Étange and Saint-Preux, her tutor. They fall in love, but marriage is prevented by differences of rank, family authority, and moral duty. The book was one of the great novels of eighteenth-century sensibility. In this scene, “Héloïse” means the sentimental posture associated with Rousseau’s heroine: natural hair, visible emotion, and dramatic feeling. “Pamela” also recalls Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*, another major eighteenth-century sentimental novel

4

A *cordon bleu* was a knight of the Order of the Holy Spirit, the highest chivalric order of the French monarchy. The name came from the blue ribbon on which the order’s cross was worn.

5

A louis d’or was a gold coin commonly reckoned at twenty-four livres in the late Ancien Régime. Twenty-five louis therefore amounted to about six hundred livres. Twenty-five louis is roughly €3,056.81.

6

The Dukes of Angoulême and Berry were the two sons of the Count of Artois, Louis XVI’s younger brother and the future Charles X. Louis-Antoine, Duke of Angoulême, was born in 1775, and Charles-Ferdinand, Duke of Berry, in 1778. In the original 1799 manuscript, the Marquise adds the phrase *aujourd’hui notre espoir* (“today our hope”), since by 1799 Louis XVI and Louis XVII were dead, and royalist hopes rested on the surviving Bourbon princes in exile. By the time of the 1889 edition, however, the phrase had become awkward. The Bourbon Restoration had come and gone, the elder Bourbon line had failed politically, and the legitimist hopes once attached to these princes no longer made sense to an editor working under the Third Republic.

7

Eight hundred thousand livres was an enormous debt, even in a great aristocratic family. Such a debt could endanger family credit, inheritance, marriage arrangements, and estate management. In current currency, it would mean of debt of around €3.26 million

8

“The Carmes” refers to the Carmelite convent in Paris, which was used during the Revolution as a prison for refractory clergy. On 2 September 1792, during the September Massacres, 115 priests and religious prisoners detained there were killed.

- 9 The 1889 text appears to contain an error. It says that Lescure devoted himself “for eighteen years” to paying his father’s debts. This is chronologically impossible: Lescure’s father died on 8 December 1784, and Lescure himself died on 4 November 1793. The original manuscript gives the correct reading: *se consacrer à 18 ans à la plus stricte économie*, meaning “at eighteen, he devoted himself to the strictest economy.” The translation follows the manuscript reading.
- 10 In the 1799 manuscript, the Marquise is more explicit about the suspected circumstances of the elder Lescure’s death. She writes: *Je sais peu de chose à cet égard, mais j’ai tout lieu de croire qu’il y a eu du mystère dans cette mort et dans ce séjour à Ermenonville. Je vais rassembler mes souvenirs*. This means: “I know little on this subject, but I have every reason to believe that there was some mystery in this death and in this stay at Ermenonville. I shall gather my recollections.”
- 11 The 1889 edition does not identify the woman who drew Lescure’s father to Ermenonville, but the original manuscript names her as the Baroness de Pel.
- 12 The 1889 edition reads *les propos lestes et les rites indécents recommençaient*, “the free talk and indecent laughter began again.” The original manuscript reads *les propos lestes et les rites indécents recommençaient*, “the free talk and indecent rites began again.” The difference is important. *Rires* means “laughter”; *rites* means “rites” or “ritual practices.” Given the following description of initiation, an oath, and a sword held against the heart, *rites* is probably the more accurate reading.
- 13 Ermenonville was the château of René-Louis, marquis de Girardin, and was famous as the last residence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who died there in 1778. By the late eighteenth century, Ermenonville was associated with Rousseau, sensibility, philosophical sociability, and landscaped retreat. In royalist and Catholic polemic, it could also be presented as a place of irreligion, libertinism, or secret doctrine. The “society” mentioned here should not be understood as a clearly documented formal club, but as the circle gathered around Ermenonville. Abbé Barruel wrote about Ermenonville in his anti-Masonic and anti-Illuminist conspiracy writing.
- 14 “Monsieur” was the title used for the King’s eldest surviving brother. Here it refers to Louis-Stanislas-Xavier, Count of Provence, younger brother of Louis XVI and future Louis XVIII. He claimed the throne in exile after the death of Louis XVII and later reigned as Louis XVIII during the Bourbon Restoration.
- 15 The original manuscript contains additional details about Lescure’s character. The Marquise writes that Lescure, deeply religious, never had a mistress and detested not only immoral actions but even impure thoughts and light indecent jokes. She also adds that he read constantly, had a prodigious memory, read quickly, and often read several volumes a day. The manuscript summarises him in the phrase: *Il a toujours été un saint, il a été de bonne heure un savant, il est devenu un héros*, “He was always a saint, early became a
- 16 “The stone”, in French *la pierre*, refers to urinary stones, usually bladder or kidney stones. In the eighteenth century this was a painful and serious condition. Surgical treatment existed, especially lithotomy for bladder stones, but it was dangerous before modern anaesthesia, antisepsis, and urology.
- 17 Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741-1801) was a Swiss Protestant pastor, writer, and major promoter of physiognomy, the supposed art of judging character from facial features. His writings were widely known in late eighteenth-century Europe.
- 18 Cagliostro was the assumed name of Giuseppe Balsamo, a Sicilian adventurer, occultist, healer, and Freemason. He became famous in European high society for claims of secret knowledge and extraordinary powers. In France, he was associated with Cardinal de Rohan and the Diamond Necklace Affair. He was imprisoned in the Bastille, acquitted, and banished from France.
- 19 The Marquise is showing here that Cagliostro, an Italian occultist and notorious adventurer, is being admired by a man whose office would normally imply religious seriousness and suspicion of mystical fraud.

20 The French phrase is: *le comte de Cagliostro s'empresera toujours de se rendre utile à vos ordres*. Literally, this means: “the Count Cagliostro will always hasten to make himself useful to your commands.” The expression is unusual because it combines two different polite idioms. In French, one may say *être à vos ordres* or *se mettre à vos ordres*, meaning “to be at your orders” or “to place oneself at your disposal.” One may also say *se rendre utile à quelqu'un* or *se rendre utile à votre service*, meaning “to make oneself useful to someone” or “to be of use in someone’s service.” The reason why the narrator finds the phrase singular is because *utile* normally attaches to a person, a service, a cause, or a task, not directly to “your orders.”

21 In the 1799 manuscript, the Marquise specifies that these details about the Chevalier d’Éon come from her mother: *Je mets ici des détails que je tiens de ma mère, et qui concernent le chevalier d’Éon*. This means: “I set down here some details which I have from my mother, and which concern the Chevalier d’Éon.”

22 The Chevalier d’Éon, Charles-Geneviève-Louis-Auguste-André-Timothée d’Éon de Beaumont (1728-1810), was a French soldier, diplomat, spy, and writer. D’Éon served Louis XV in a variety of diplomatic and military roles across Europe. After returning to France in 1777, d’Éon lived publicly in women’s clothing. The 1889 edition generally uses masculine pronouns for d’Éon. This translation follows that convention, except where the original manuscript uses feminine pronouns. In those cases, the feminine pronouns have been retained.

23 The Man in the Iron Mask was an unidentified state prisoner of Louis XIV’s reign. He died in the Bastille on 19 November 1703. His identity became one of the most famous mysteries of French history, with theories identifying him as a disgraced minister, a noble prisoner, or a hidden member of the royal family. The “iron” mask is more of a legend, historical accounts pointing rather to a black velvet mask instead.

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