

BOOK VI.

CHAPTER I.

SISTER ANGELICA.

Two months had passed away since the fall of Belgrade, and Prince Eugene of Savoy was still suffering from his wound. Nothing had been spared that could contribute to his recovery; he was attended by the surgeon-in-chief of Max Emmanuel, visited daily by the physicians of the emperor, and nursed by his untiring secretary, Conrad. More than once the report of his death had been spread throughout Vienna, and then contradicted.

But, until the arrival of the physician of Victor Amadeus, all medical skill had proved unavailing. Whether through the agency of Doctor Franzi or of the nurse whom he had brought with him, Prince Eugene began, at last, to improve.

Sister Angelica, the nurse, had watched her patient with preterhuman vigilance. Day and night she sat by his bedside, dressing his wound, administering his medicine, and resting his fevered head on her shoulder; laying her soft, cool hand upon his brow, until to wild delirium succeeded tranquil sleep, or a calm, placid wakefulness. At such times the nun was accustomed to sing; and at the sound of her voice, Eugene smiled, and resigned himself to rest.

At last, the glance of his eye grew intelligent, and he returned to a consciousness of his position. Doctor Franzi remarked with regret, however, that he was apathetic, listless, and quite indifferent to his recovery. He made no complaint, seldom spoke, and seemed to be sinking gradually into a state of nervous prostration.

"Your highness," said the surgeon, one day, "you are now

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convalescent, and it is time you made some effort to receive your friends."

Eugene turned wearily away, and sighed. "No, no," murmured he, "I am averse to the sight of any man, friend or foe."

"Nevertheless, I prescribe it," urged the doctor. "You are now less sick in body than in mind, and you must have change of scene to cheer you."

"Change will not cheer me," replied Eugene, languidly. "I feel nothing but absolute weariness of life."

"A morbid state of mind resulting from your long confinement to this room, and it must be overcome by yourself. A pretty thing it would be, to be sure, if, after saving your life, we should allow you to fling it away because you are as melancholy as a lovesick maiden!"

"Doctor," cried Eugene, flushing, "choose your words more carefully!"

"Good, good," returned the doctor, with an approving nod. "You have some spirit left, I perceive, and if you would but see one or two of your most intimate friends—"

"I will not see them," interrupted Eugene, peevishly. He would have said something more, but his speech was checked by a paroxysm of coughing. In a moment, the door opened noiselessly, and the nun gliding in hastened to support his trembling frame; and, while he suffered his head to fall upon her shoulder, wiped the dew from his clammy forehead. Then, gently placing him on his pillow, she warmed his drink over a lamp, and held it to his lips while he partook of it.

"Thank you, dear sister," said the invalid, faintly.

The next morning a consultation was held by the physicians of the prince, and it was decided that he must have change of air without delay. Eugene, reclining in an arm-chair, looked wearily on, until the conference was at an end; then, shaking his head and frowning, he turned away and gazed fixedly at his nurse, who, with arms crossed over her breast, stood close at hand, ready to anticipate his wants ere he could give them utterance.

"Your highness must not resist," said the imperial court physician. "Change of air and of scene is indispensable to your recovery."

"Let me die here," was Eugene's languid reply.

"Your highness is not going to die," observed Doctor Franzi; "but I am afraid that you are about to cause the death of another person."

"Whom can you mean?" asked Eugene, interested.

"I mean Sister Angelica, your nurse."

"Surely she is not sick," said the prince, turning anxiously around. "No!" said he, smiling, "no—she is here."

"And yet she is sick," persisted Doctor Franzi. "For a month past, she has lived without sleep, scarcely snatching a moment to change her clothing, and never once breathing any but the air of this sick-room." The nun made a deprecating gesture. "You need not deny it," continued the doctor. "Prince, when Sister Angelica was allowed by the prioress of her convent to accompany me to Vienna, she made a vow never to leave my patient until he recovered from his illness or died. Now you are neither dead nor about to die; but if you do all you can to frustrate our endeavors to cure you, your nurse will succumb long before you are well enough to dispense with her valuable services."

"In that case, I cease to oppose you," said Eugene. "Do with me what you will. God forbid that I should harm my ministering angel!"

"In view of your highness's submission to our orders," observed the court physician, "his majesty the emperor has offered the use of his palace at Schönbrunn, and we have taken the liberty of preparing every thing for your immediate departure."

"His majesty is too kind," was the reply, "and my first care shall be to thank my gracious sovereign for so signal a proof of his beneficence. Let us then depart for Schönbrunn. You are satisfied, dear sister, are you not?"

The sister bowed her head, and passed her hand over Eugene's glossy, black hair, while Doctor Franzi came in and out, making preparations for the accommodation of his patient.

A litter was brought, and when the prince had been carefully placed upon it the doctor inquired whether he felt comfortable enough therein to bear the journey. Eugene, on

his part, asked how his physician and the nun were to travel.

"We expect to occupy your highness's carriage, and to precede you, by a half hour, to Schönbrunn."

"Would it be inconvenient or uncomfortable for Sister Angelica to occupy the litter with me?"

"By no means; but if she accompanies your highness, things will not be quite so comfortable for your reception."

"Then let me have less comfort, and more content. She supports my head so delightfully when I cough, and moves my wounded foot so gently—"

The nun no sooner heard these words than she put aside the doctor who was standing before her, and hastened to the litter, altered the inclination of Eugene's pillow, and very gently changed the position of his wounded foot.

"Oh, how I thank you, dear sister!" murmured the prince, with a sigh of relief. "When you are by, pain seems to vanish, and night breaks into joyful day."

The bearers raised the litter, and the little cortège set out for Schönbrunn. Two runners went before, to make way, crying as they went along:

"Room for the litter of his highness the Prince of Savoy!"

The hurrying wayfarers retreated at the sound; a passage was opened through the crowded thoroughfares; and, while the hero of Belgrade was borne along the streets of Vienna, the people stood respectfully aside to let him pass.

The air of Schönbrunn was pure and delightful. Every morning the prince was conveyed to its lovely gardens, where he spent at least an hour in inhaling the sweet breath of coming spring. He drank goat's milk for his cough, and partook submissively of the food prescribed for his nourishment; but his fever was not subdued, and his cheeks grew paler and thinner each day.

"We must use other means," said Doctor Franzi to the nun, who had been anxiously questioning him as to the result of a consultation held that day over the sinking patient. "My colleagues are of opinion that his fever is hectic, and therefore incurable; but I differ with them. I really believe that if he could be roused from his apathy, we could save him yet."

Corporeal remedies have done their best ; we must try a moral reaction."

"What do you mean?" murmured the nun.

"I mean that Sister Angelica must raise her veil, and break her long silence," replied the doctor, raising her delicate white hand to his lips.

The nun trembled, and caught her breath, the doctor viewing her with amazement. "What!" said he, "you who have displayed such fortitude and endurance, are you about to become faint-hearted?"

"Doctor," whispered she, "joy has its agitation as well as grief. And if the shock should be too great for him!"

"If too great now, he will never be able to bear it, my dear child. It is possible that it may deprive him for a time of consciousness, but he will awake to life another man. At least, such is my impression. I consider that his fate now lies in your hands, and you must decide it to-day—nay, this very hour."

"Oh, doctor, I am so unprepared! I have no self-command; let us wait until to-morrow. If we should fail—"

"We shall have done him no injury. I am ready to answer before God that—"

The door was partially opened, and the valet of the prince apologized for interrupting them. "His highness feels very much exhausted, and calls for Sister Angelica."

"She will be there in one moment," replied the doctor.—"You see," whispered he, "that his heart has divined your presence. As soon as you leave the room, he begins to suffer."

So saying, he gave her his hand, and she submitted to be led as far as the door of the prince's sitting-room. There she paused, and laying her hands upon her heart—

"Oh, it will burst," murmured she. "Doctor, you will remain with me—will you not?"

"I will remain as long as my presence is beneficial, and depart as soon as it becomes oppressive. Come!"

He opened the door, and, with gentle constraint, compelled her to advance. The prince, extended on his couch, looked very ill. "Have you given me up? Have you, too, forgotten me?"

"You too," echoed the doctor, while the nun was engaged in preparing the patient's drink. "Why, has anybody else ever forgotten your highness?"

"No," sighed Eugene; "I was unjust. But I have lost her, and that loss is killing me."

"You hear him," whispered the doctor, while the nun, scarcely able to hold the glass, presented it to the lips of her patient.

"Drink, Prince Eugene," said she, in low, trembling tones. At the sound of her voice he started, and raised his head to listen.

"Great Heaven! Who spoke?"

The doctor smiled, and, slightly raising his shoulders, replied: "Nobody but Sister Angelica, I presume, for nobody else is here."

"Sister Angelica!" repeated Eugene, slowly. "I thought she had made a vow of silence, to last until her return to the convent?"

"You are quite right; but it appears that she has forgotten herself for a moment, in her anxiety to serve you. Drink, then, to oblige her."

Eugene clutched the glass and emptied it of its contents.

"Good," said the doctor. "Now that you are somewhat refreshed, I must entertain you with a little outside gossip. I have letters from Turin to-day. Victor Amadeus has disenthralled himself from his filial bondage. His mother, having been regent during his minority, has been struggling since his majority to retain her supremacy over him and the duchy. She insisted upon taking precedence of her daughter-in-law, the reigning duchess, and was equally bent upon dismissing one of the ministers. There was considerable strife, and no little intrigue in Turin, until the defection of one of the dowager's adherents, which so strengthened the opposite party, that she was obliged to succumb, and retired in high dudgeon to her estates. The duke, on his side, out of gratitude to his new friend, has created him prime minister—an appointment which is very popular in Savoy—for there is not a worthier man in the dukedom than the Marquis de Bonaletta."

At sound of this name, Eugene started up, and leaning his head upon his hand, prepared to listen.

The doctor continued: "By-the-by, he is the uncle of the unfortunate young marchioness of that name who was forced into a marriage with a depraved Venetian nobleman called Strozzi. Your highness has heard her history?"

Eugene murmured something in reply, and sank back upon his pillow.

"A very melancholy affair," pursued the doctor, signing to the nun to approach, "and it has ended most singularly."

"Ended! How?" cried Eugene. "Speak, doctor, I implore you: is she dead?"

"She? The marchioness? Quite the contrary, she is alive and well. Her husband suddenly disappeared with her from Venice, last spring; and it was discovered that he had confined her within a solitary castle, somewhere in a forest; having previously given out to the world that she was a raving lunatic."

"The accursed liar!" muttered Eugene. "May God grant me life to avenge her wrongs!"

"Your highness is much moved at the recital," continued the doctor, "and no wonder, for it is a fact much stranger than fiction. But I will defer the conclusion of my story to some other day. You are too much excited to hear it now."

"Oh no, indeed! I am strong—well. Look at me, doctor; and believe me when I say that your conversation is more healing than all the medicines you have ever administered."

"In truth, your highness seems quite invigorated within the last half hour. Do you not perceive the change, Sister Angelica?"

She bowed her head, and approached the couch.

"Then, in mercy, let me hear the rest," cried Eugene, his eyes flashing with eagerness.

"Be it so, then. In spite of bolts, bars, and her miserable husband's spies, the marchioness has managed to escape."

"Escape!" exclaimed Eugene, starting from his couch, and standing upright upon the floor. In a moment the nun was behind him, ready to support him in case of need; but he walked hurriedly to the window, threw it wide open, and in-

haled the fresh morning air. For a while, not a word was spoken. The prince looked upward at the blue and silver clouds that were floating silently by; his large, dark eyes wandered lovingly over the beautiful landscape that lay below, and then, bowing his head, he lifted his heart to heaven, and thanked God.

"Doctor," said he, at last, "whither fled the marchioness?"

"No one knows, your highness. But you must excuse me if I take my leave. I must attend a consultation of—"

"Doctor," cried the prince, grasping him by the arm, "you cannot go: I must know all that you have to tell."

The doctor smiled. "Upon my word, your highness speaks as if you were ordering a charge against the Turks. But I cannot obey: Sister Angelica has heard the story from beginning to end, and she will relate the rest of it. Adieu."

So saying, Doctor Franzi left the room.

"Oh, dear sister," cried Eugene, "can you tell me whether she fell into his hands again?"

"She did not," replied the nun, in a low, tremulous voice; "but the shock of her disappearance was so terrible in its effects upon the marquis, that he is now a maniac in the very apartments wherein he had confined his wretched wife."

Eugene had listened in breathless amazement to these low, fluttering words; and when they ceased he seemed still to listen. His face had become excessively pale; his lips were slightly parted, and his eyes riveted upon some imaginary object at a distance, which seemed to obliterate from his mind the presence of his companion. She meanwhile became so terrified that she clasped her hands, and knelt at his feet.

He saw—he understood it all, and, raising her in his arms, he pressed her rapturously to his heart. The veil had fallen, and she was there! His Laura! his long-lost Laura!

CHAPTER II.

LOUIS THE FOURTEENTH.

THE morning service was at an end, and King Louis XIV., attended by his courtiers, left the royal chapel. His countenance was troubled, and it followed, as a matter of course, that everybody else wore a woe-begone expression. The fact is, that things were very dull and solemn at the French court. Feasts and festivals were forbidden, and nobody was allowed to look cheerful. La Vallière, in a Carmelite convent, was doing penance for the sin of her love for Louis; while De Montespan, in the world, was expiating hers within sight of the king's indifference. He had tired of her long ago, but had permitted her to remain at court, where her saloons were as stupid, as silent, and as empty, as they had once been bright and crowded.

The reigning favorite was De Maintenon, who might have had followers innumerable, had she desired them. But she appeared to be perfectly unconscious of her own power; going about, now as ever, with modest mien and simple dress, with folded hands and downcast eyes, apparently unaware of the existence of any mortal whatsoever, save that of her well-beloved Louis. And her course of action had been triumphantly successful, for by many she was believed to be the legitimate spouse of the King of France.

From the chapel, Louis betook himself to the boudoir of the marquise, and greeted her with a slight inclination of his royal head.

"Why were you not at mass to-day, madame?" inquired he, curtly, as, hastily crossing the room, he flung open the window and admitted the sharp air of a raw autumn morning.

De Maintenon stifled a sigh, and compelled herself to smile. "You know, sire," replied she, gently, "that I am indisposed. My physician has forbidden me to breathe the air, and for this reason I dared not follow the impulse of my heart, and join my prayers to those of your majesty this morning. The autumn winds are too keen for me."

The king paid no attention to De Maintenon's allusion to the "autumn winds." The window remained open, and she was obliged to stand directly in front of it as long as Louis was pleased to enjoy the breeze.

"You are becoming sickly, madame," observed he, coldly.

"True, sire, I suffer of late," sighed she.

"You are getting old," replied he, tartly. "Old age is a sorry companion; it makes people peevish and disagreeable."

The marquise grew as pale as ashes, and the sharp glance of her black eyes was turned quickly upon the countenance of the king, who, instead of looking at her, was staring out of the window at the marble Naiads, over whose white limbs the waters of a fountain were foaming and plashing, in myriads of pearly drops. He appeared to be quite unconscious of having wounded the feelings of his sensitive companion.

She, on her part, felt that a crisis was at hand, and that, to waken the king from his apathy, desperate measures must be adopted. She plunged into her remedy at once.

"I see," sighed she, "that my presence is irksome to your majesty. It is better, therefore, that I gather up my strength, and sacrifice my happiness to yours. I will retire to St. Cyr."

Louis raised his shoulders. "I think not. People often say such things, but never mean what they say."

"Sire, Madame de la Vallière is a proof of the contrary, and I—although (as you remarked just now)—I am old, possess a heart over whose emotions time and age have no power. I love as I have ever loved, passionately, profoundly; but my love is disinterested, and soars high above all self-gratification. Now that it has become obtrusive, its current shall be turned to heaven, and in the sacred walls of a cloister I will spend the remainder of my days in prayer for him whose image I shall cherish unto death. Sire, I respectfully request permission to enter the convent of St. Cyr."

Louis began to be uneasy. He knew very well that De Maintenon had a vigorous and resolute soul, quite capable of carrying out any purpose dictated by her head; and, if once she appealed from her affections to her pride, he felt that no ulterior persuasions of his would avail to deter her from the step she meditated.

"Are you serious, madame?" said he, reproachfully. "Would you, indeed, forsake me?"

"Sire, I am so earnest in my intention to free you from the presence of an infirm old woman, that I repeat my request to be allowed to depart now—this very hour."

The king hated nothing on earth like surprises; he disliked to have the sluggish waters of his every-day life stirred by unaccustomed occurrences. He turned around at once to remonstrate, and, instead of the pallid face he had encountered just a few minutes ago, he saw a pair of glowing cheeks and flashing eyes, from whose lustrous depths there darted a light that warmed up his tepid old heart, and set it to beating as it had been wont to do, when La Vallière smiled and De Montespan coquetted.

"Surely," said he, "you would not set a bad example to the wives of my courtiers, *Françoise*! You would not teach them that when they tire of their husbands they may desert them, and bury their ennui in a convent!"

"Sire, I cannot accept the responsibility of other women's derelictions. My duty points out to me a convent as the proper refuge for a woman who has outlived her husband's love."

"I will not release you from your marriage-tie, madame; and, should you brave my displeasure, and attempt to leave me, I would follow you to St. Cyr, and drag you from the altar, were you in the very act of making your vows!"

The marquise dropped on her knees. "Oh, sire, do I hear aright! I am not odious to you!—You will not drive me away from my earthly heaven! I may yet be happy, yet be loved!"

The king bent over her, and raised her tenderly in his arms. "Rise, madame," said he, "it does not become the wife of the King of France to bend the knee to any man. You know full well, *Françoise*," continued he, affectionately, "that without you my life would be an aimless, burdensome one. Who could replace you, my wife, my counsellor, my prime minister?"

"Ah, sire, what words! They thrill me to the depths of my heart, and restore me to bliss unspeakable!"

"Then the cloud of your discontent has passed away, has it not?"

"Oh, sire, it is day, bright day, and my soul is flooded with sunshine!"

"Then let us sit down on yonder divan, and talk of the affairs of France. Do you know that I have bad news from Germany?"

"I feared as much, sire, when you entered the room with such a troubled aspect."

"These German princes will not come to a decision as to my claims. For four years my envoys have been before the imperial Diet, vainly urging them to define our boundaries."

"They are procrastinating in the hope of receiving succor from the emperor, who, as soon as he has sufficiently humbled the Porte, will make an attempt to humble France. With Leopold to sustain them, the Diet will claim Strasburg and Alsatia, and exact of your majesty the withdrawal of the French troops from all the Rhenish provinces."

"They shall not be withdrawn," returned Louis. "When France has her grasp upon a province, she never relaxes her hold. And so far am I from any intention to temporize, that, if the Diet decides against me, I will not scruple to break the twenty years' truce, and appeal to arms. This I have long ago decided to do, so we need not discuss the question any longer. I have other matters to confide to you, which harass me."

"Has the emperor refused to recognize the new Elector of Cologne?" asked the marquise, indignantly.

"Yes, he has had the assurance to reject the lawful election of Egon of Furstenberg; and to appoint, in his stead, Joseph Clemens, the brother of the Elector of Bavaria. Out of four-and-twenty prebendaries of the archbishopric of Cologne, fourteen votes were given to Egon, while Joseph received but ten. And what, do you suppose, is the ground of the emperor's insolent rejection of my nominee? He pretends that the fourteen voters were bribed by France, and that the candidate himself is disaffected, and under French influence. This is tantamount to a declaration of war; and, what is worse than all, Pope Innocent sustains the emperor."

The marquise folded her hands in pious resignation. "That is a sad proof of the unfriendliness of his holiness toward France," murmured she. "But that is the fault of the Minister Louvois. He has deserved the displeasure of his holiness by the forcible occupation of Avignon (so long the residence of the successors of St. Peter), and by the arrest of the papal nuncio."

"He could not help it," cried Louis, impatiently; "it was an act of reprisal. Our ambassador at Rome had been affronted; the spies of the pope had forced themselves into the hôtel of the embassy and had arrested two men that had sought protection from the French flag."

"Sire," said the marquise with determination, "they were papal subjects and criminals, who had no right to the protection of the French flag. It should never be said that Louis of France shields from justice the thieves and murderers whom the Vicar of Christ would punish. You know, sire, that these men had committed sacrilege. They had plundered the altar of St. Peter's of its golden pyx and candlesticks, and had poniarded the sacristan that had them in charge."

"It was a crime—that I cannot deny," said Louis with a deprecating sigh, "but the right of asylum is sacred, and we were forced to defend it."

"Sire, do you, an earthly monarch, pretend to believe that you can shield a criminal from the all-seeing vengeance of the Lord? Had the sinner the wings of the morning, wherewith he might fly to the uttermost limits of the earth, the arm of God would overtake and arrest him in his flight! How, then, do *you* pretend to cover his crimes with the folds of the French flag?"

The king was cowed by the bold and uncompromising voice of truth. He folded his hands and bowed his head.

"Alas, alas! you are right and we were wrong! We should not have given refuge to these murderers and plunderers. I am truly repentant, Françoise, and will do my best to expiate the sin."

"Sire, you are right to bewail the sin, but it lies not on your conscience; it is the fault of your arrogant minister, who, without consulting you, demanded satisfaction of his holiness; and,

when it was righteously refused, took possession of Avignon, and imprisoned the papal nuncio. Then, when the deed was done, and not until then, he dispatched a courier to Paris, to inform you of what had taken place."

"That is true, dear Françoise," said Louis, mildly; "but, after all, Louvois had no alternative. Had he consulted me, I might have felt myself bound to temporize; whereas, by his assumption of the act, he renders apology on my part possible. The thing is done; the honor of France is satisfied, and I can now release the nuncio, and make all necessary excuses to his holiness."

The marquise gazed searchingly at the countenance of the royal casuist, who bore her scrutiny without flinching, and, with a slight clearing of his throat, went on:

"I am not yet at the end of my chapter of vexations. A courier has arrived to-day from the Marquis de Villars. In spite of all his petty intrigues, and the millions with which he bribed the mistress of the elector, Max Emmanuel has never been estranged from Austria. So far from it, he has assumed the chief command of the imperial armies, and is about to lay siege to Belgrade."

"He will come to grief, sire," cried the marquise. "The Turks and Hungarians greatly outnumber the imperialists, and—"

The king raised his hand and shook his head. "I would you were right; but, Françoise, you are a false prophet—my last and worst tale is told—Belgrade has fallen!"

"The will of God be done!" cried the marquise. "Christianity has triumphed, and the unbelieving Moslem has bitten the dust!"

"Pray," interrupted Louis, fretfully, "put aside your piety for a while and look at the thing through the medium of good sense and earthly foresight. The Emperor of Germany is victorious; he is gradually weakening the Sultan, so that it is within the range of possibilities that he overturn the Ottoman power, and consolidate the Germanic confederations into one great empire. This done, he will turn his attention to France—of that you may be sure."

"My beloved sovereign speaks of events that will never

come to pass," replied the marquise, with one of her most enticing smiles. "Long before the Emperor Leopold will have exterminated the Turks, we will force him to defend his own territories from the invading armies of France."

"You approve me, then, and think that it is time I began to be aggressive in my warfare," exclaimed Louis, eagerly.

"I am always of the opinion of my lord and sovereign," was the courteous reply of the marquise, who had already forgotten the discussion relating to Avignon. "It remains to be seen if Louvois acquiesces."

"Louvois will do as he is bid," said Louis, frowning.

"Remember, sire, that he said publicly, yesterday, that the French army was not in a condition to open a campaign, and that it could not be equipped before spring."

"Before spring!" echoed the king. "While the generals of Leopold carry every thing before them!—for he has distinguished generals in his service, madame; one of whom is that same Eugene of Savoy whom you pronounced unworthy of a bishopric. Whatever he might have done as a churchman, I would he were an archbishop rather than what he is to-day!"

"Oh, sire!" said the marquise, reproachfully. "True—I never thought Prince Eugene had any vocation for the priesthood; and, knowing his disinclination to the church, I myself advised him to ask for a commission in the army. He did ask it—a mere captaincy—and your majesty well remembers who it was that influenced you to refuse him so small a boon. To Louvois France owes the loss of this great military genius."

"Right, right, you are always right, and I have unwittingly given you another pretext for blaming him."

"Although he is my bitter foe, I would not blame him, sire, were he not culpable."

"Your bitter foe, *Françoise*? How?"

"Ah, sire, was it not he that opposed our marriage?"

"Forgive him, dear *Françoise*, he acted according to his own notions of duty. But you see that my love was mightier than his objections, and you are, before God, my own beloved spouse."

"Before God, sire, I am; but the world doubts my right to the name. In the eyes of the court, I am but the mistress of

the king; a humiliation which I owe to Louvois, who bound your majesty by an oath never to recognize me as Queen of France."

"I rejoice to think that he did so," was the king's reply, "for the tie that binds us is sacred in the sight of Heaven, while in the eyes of the world I am spared the ridicule of placing Scarron's widow upon the throne of Charlemagne the Great. In your own reception-room you act as queen, and I am perfectly willing that you should do so, for it proves that you are the wife of the king, and not his mistress. Be magnanimous, then, and forgive Louvois if, above the ambition of Madame de Maintenon, he valued the dignity and honor of the French throne. But the hour of my interview with you is at an end: I hold a levee this morning, and must leave you."

Kissing the hand of the marquise, Louis bowed and left the room.

CHAPTER III.

THE KING AND THE PETITIONERS.

WHEN the king entered the audience-chamber, the courtiers, dispersed in groups about the room, were all in eager conversation. So absorbed were they in the subject under discussion, that those who stood at the opposite end of the room were not aware of the royal presence until the *grande tournée* forced it upon their attention.

The king joined one of these groups. "Gentlemen," said he, "what interests you so deeply to-day? Have you received any important news?"

"Yes, sire," replied the Prince de Conti. "We are speaking of my cousin Eugene. He has been severely wounded, but not until he had materially assisted the Elector of Bavaria to capture Belgrade."

"Ah! you have heard of the fall of Belgrade!" said the king, frowning, as he perceived that Louvois was approaching. "Is it you," asked he, curtly, "that has been in such hot haste to spread the news of the successes of the imperial army?"