

CHAPTER VII.

KING LOUIS XVIII.

KING LOUIS XVIII. was, however, in the retirement of his palace, still the most enlightened and unprejudiced of the representatives of the old era; he clearly saw many things to which his advisers purposely closed their eyes. To his astonishment, he observed that the men who had risen to greatness under Bonaparte, and who had fallen to the king along with the rest of his inheritance, were not so ridiculous, awkward, and foolish, as they had been represented to be.

"I had been made to suppose," said Louis XVIII., "that these generals of Bonaparte were peasants and ruffians, but such is not the case. He schooled these men well. They are polite, and quite as shrewd as the representatives of the old court. We must conduct ourselves very cautiously toward them."

This kind of recognition of the past which sometimes escaped Louis XVIII., was a subject of bitter displeasure to the gentlemen of the old era, and they let the king perceive it.

King Louis felt this, and, in order to conciliate his court, he often saw himself compelled to humiliate "the *parvenus*" who had forced themselves among the former.

Incessant quarrelling and intriguing within the Tuileries was the consequence, and Louis was often dejected,

uneasy, and angry, in the midst of the splendor that surrounded him.

"I am angry with myself and the others," said he on one occasion to an intimate friend. "An invisible and secret power is ever working in opposition to my will, frustrating my plans, and paralyzing my authority."

"And yet you are king!"

"Undoubtedly I am king!" exclaimed Louis, angrily; "but am I also master? The king is he who all his life long receives ambassadors, gives tiresome audiences, listens to annihilating discourses, goes in state to Notre-Dame, dines in public once a year, and is pompously buried in St. Denis when he dies. The master is he who commands and can enforce obedience, who puts an end to intriguing, and can silence old women as well as priests. Bonaparte was king and master at the same time! His ministers were his clerks, the kings his brothers merely his agents, and his courtiers nothing more than his servants. His ministers vied with his senate in servility, and his *Corps Législatif* sought to outdo his senate and the church in subserviency. He was an extraordinary and an enviable man, for he had not only devoted servants and faithful friends, but also an accommodating church." *

King Louis XVIII., weary of the incessant intrigues with which his courtiers occupied themselves, withdrew himself more and more into the retirement of his palace, and left the affairs of state to the care of M. de Blacas,

* Mémoires d'une Femme de Qualité, vol. v., p. 35.

who, with all his arrogance and egotism, knew very little about governing.

The king preferred to entertain himself with his friends, to read them portions of his memoirs, to afford them an opportunity of admiring his verses, and to regale them with his witty and not always chaste anecdotes; he preferred all these things to tedious and useless disputes with his ministers. He had given his people the charter, and his ministers might now govern in accordance with this instrument.

"The people demand liberty," said the king. "I give them enough of it to protect them against despotism, without according them unbridled license. Formerly, the taxes appointed by my mere will would have made me odious; now the people tax themselves. Hereafter, I have nothing to do but to confer benefits and show mercy, for the responsibility for all the evil that is done will rest entirely with my ministers." *

While his ministers were thus governing according to the charter, and "doing evil," the king, who now had nothing but "good" to do, was busying himself in settling the weighty questions of the old etiquette.

One of the most important features of this etiquette was the question of the fashions that should now be introduced at court; for it was, of course, absurd to think of adopting the fashions of the empire, and thereby recognize at court that there had really been a change since 1789.

* *Mémoires d'une Femme de Qualité*, vol. i., p. 410.

They desired to effect a counter-revolution, not only in politics, but also in fashions; and this important matter occupied the attention of the grand dignitaries of the court for weeks before the first grand levee that the king was to hold in the Tuileries. But, as nothing was accomplished by their united wisdom, the king finally held a private consultation with his most intimate gentleman and lady friends on this important matter, that had, unfortunately, not been determined by the charter.

The grand-master of ceremonies, M. de Bregé, declared to the king that it was altogether improper to continue the fashions of the empire at the court of the legitimate King of France.

"We are, therefore, to have powder, coats-of-mail, etc.," observed the king.

M. de Bregé replied, with all gravity, that he had given this subject his earnest consideration day and night, but that he had not yet arrived at a conclusion worthy of the grand-master of ceremonies of the legitimate king.

"Sire," said the Duke de Chartres, smiling, "I, for my part, demand knee-breeches, shoe-buckles, and the cue."

"But I," exclaimed the Prince de Poir, who had remained in France during the empire, "I demand damages, if we are to be compelled to return to the old fashions and clothing before the new ones are worn out!"

The grand-master of ceremonies replied to this jest at his expense with a profound sigh only; and the king at

last put an end to this great question, by deciding that every one should be permitted to follow the old or new fashions, according to his individual taste and inclination.

The grand-master of ceremonies was compelled to submit to this royal decision; but in doing so he observed, with profound sadness: "Your majesty is pleased to smile, but dress makes half the man; uniformity of attire confounds the distinctions of rank, and leads directly to an agrarian law."

"Yes, marquis," exclaimed the king, "you think precisely as Figaro. Many a man laughs at a judge in a short dress, who trembles before a procurator in a long gown."*

But while the king suppressed the counter-revolution in fashions, he allowed the grand-master of ceremonies to reintroduce the entire etiquette of the old era. In conformity with this etiquette, the king could not rise from his couch in the morning until the doors had been opened to all those who had the *grande entrée*—that is to say, to the officers of his household, the marshals of France, several favored ladies; further, to his *cafetier*, his tailor, the bearer of his slippers, his barber, with two assistants, his watchmaker, and his apothecaries.

The king was dressed in the presence of all these favored individuals, etiquette permitting him only to adjust his necktie himself, but requiring him, however, to empty his pockets of their contents of the previous day.

* Mémoires d'une Femme de Qualité, vol. i., p. 384.

The usage of the old era, "the public dinner of the royal family," was also reintroduced; and the grand-master of ceremonies not only found it necessary to make preparations for this dinner weeks beforehand, but the king was also compelled to occupy himself with this matter, and to appoint for this great ceremony the necessary "officers of provisions"—that is to say, the wine-taster, the cup-bearers, the grand doorkeepers, and the cook-in-chief.

At this first grand public dinner, the celebrated and indispensable "ship" of the royal board stood again immediately in front of the king's seat. This old "ship" of the royal board, an antique work of art which the city of Paris had once presented to a King of France, had also been lost in the grand shipwreck of 1792, and the grand-master of ceremonies had been compelled to have a new one made by the court jeweller for the occasion. This "ship" was a work in gilded silver, in form of a vessel deprived of its masts and rigging; and in the same, between two golden plates, were contained the perfumed napkins of the king. In accordance with the old etiquette, no one, not even the princes and princesses, could pass the "ship" without making a profound obeisance, which they were also compelled to make on passing the royal couch.

The king restored yet another fashion of the old era—the fashion of the "royal lady-friends."

Like his brother the Count d'Artois, Louis XVIII. also had his lady-friends; and among these the beautiful

and witty Countess Duçayla occupied the first position. It was her office to amuse the king, and dissipate the dark clouds that were only too often to be seen on the brow of King Louis, who was chained to his arm-chair by ill-health, weakness, and excessive corpulency. She narrated to him the *chronique scandaleuse* of the imperial court; she reminded him of the old affairs of his youth, which the king knew how to relate with so much wit and humor, and which he so loved to relate; it devolved upon her to examine the letters of the "black cabinet," and to read the more interesting ones to the king.

King Louis was not ungrateful to his royal friend, and he rewarded her in a truly royal manner for sometimes banishing *ennui* from his apartments. Finding that the countess had no intimate acquaintance with the contents of the Bible, he gave her the splendid Bible of Royaumont, ornamented with one hundred and fifty magnificent engravings, after paintings of Raphael. Instead of tissue-paper, a thousand-franc note covered each of these engravings.*

On another occasion, the king gave her a copy of the "Charter;" and in this each leaf was also covered with a thousand-franc note, as in the Bible.

For so many proofs of the royal generosity, the beautiful countess, perhaps willingly, submitted to be called "the royal snuff-box," which appellation had its origin in

* *Amours et Galantries des Rois de France*, par St. Edme, vol. ii., p. 383. *Mémoires d'une Femme de Qualité*, vol. i., p. 409.

the habit which the king fondly indulged in of strewing snuff on the countess's lovely shoulder, and then snuffing it up with his nose.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DRAWING-ROOM OF THE DUCHESS OF ST. LEU.

WHILE the etiquette and frivolity of the old era were being introduced anew at the Tuileries, and while M. de Blacas was governing in complacent recklessness, time was progressing, notwithstanding his endeavors to turn it backward in his flight.

While, out of the incessant conflict between the old and the new France, a discontented France was being born, Napoleon, the Emperor of Elba, was forming great plans of conquest, and preparing in secret understanding with the faithful, to leave his place of exile and return to France.

He well knew that he could rely on his old army—on the army who loudly cried, "*Vive le roi!*" and then added, *sotto voce*, "*de Rome, et son petit papa!*"*

Hortense, the new Duchess of St. Leu, took but little part in all these things. She had, notwithstanding her youth and beauty, in a measure taken leave of the world. She felt herself to be no longer the woman, but only the mother; her sons were the objects of all her tenderness and love, and she lived for them only. In her retire-

* Cochelet, *Mémoires sur la Reine Hortense*, vol. iii., p. 121.