

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.

ment at St. Leu, her time was devoted to the arts, to reading, and to study; and, after having been thus occupied throughout the day, she passed the evening in her drawing-room, in unrestrained intellectual conversation with her friends.

For she had friends who had remained true, notwithstanding the obscurity into which she had withdrawn herself, and who, although they filled important positions at the new court, had retained their friendship for the solitary dethroned queen.

With these friends the Duchess of St. Leu conversed, in the evening, in her parlor, of the grand and beautiful past, giving themselves up entirely to these recollections, little dreaming that this harmless relaxation could awaken suspicion.

For the Duke of Otranto, who had succeeded in his shrewdness in retaining his position of minister of police, as well under Louis XVIII. as under Napoleon, had his spies everywhere; he knew of all that was said in every parlor of Paris; he knew also that it was the custom, in the parlors of the Duchess of St. Leu, to look from the dark present back at the brilliant past, and to console one's self for the littleness of the present, with the recollection of the grandeur of departed days! And Fouché, or rather the Duke of Otranto, knew how to utilize everything.

In order to arouse Minister Blacas out of his stupid dream of security, to a realizing sense of the grave events that were taking place, Fouché told him that a

conspiracy against the government was being formed in the parlors of the Duchess of St. Leu; that all those who were secret adherents of Bonaparte were in the habit of assembling there, and planning the deliverance of the emperor from Elba. In order, however, on the other hand, to provide against the possibility of Napoleon's return, the Duke of Otranto hastened to the Duchess of St. Leu, to warn her and conjure her to be on her guard against the spies by whom she was surrounded, as suspicion might be easily excited against her at court.

Hortense paid no attention to this warning; she considered precaution unnecessary, and was not willing to deprive herself of her one happiness—that of seeing her friends, and of conversing with them in a free and unconstrained manner.

The parlors of the duchess, therefore, continued to be thrown open to her faithful friends, who had also been the faithful servants of the emperor; and the Dukes of Bassano, of Friaul, of Ragusa, of the Moskwa, and their wives, as well as the gallant Charles de Labedoyère, and the acute Count Regnault de Saint-Jean d'Angely, still continued to meet in the parlors of the Duchess of St. Leu.

The voice of hostility was raised against them with ever-increasing hostility; the reunions that took place at St. Leu were day by day portrayed at the Tuileries in more hateful colors; and the poor duchess, who lived in sorrow and retirement in her apartments, became an object of hatred and envy to these proud ladies of the old

aristocracy, who were unable to comprehend how this woman could be thought of while they were near, although she had been the ornament of the imperial court, and who was considered amiable, intellectual, and beautiful, even under the legitimate dynasty.

Hortense heard of the ridiculous and malicious reports which had been circulated concerning her, and, for the sake of her friends and sons, she resolved to put an end to them.

"I must leave my dear St. Leu and go to Paris," said she. "There they can better observe all my actions. Reason demands that I should conform myself to circumstances."

She therefore abandoned her quiet home at St. Leu, and repaired with her children and her court to Paris, to again take up her abode in her dwelling in the Rue de la Victoire.

But this step gave fresh fuel to the calumnies of her enemies, who saw in her the embodied remembrance of the empire which they hated and at the same time feared.

The Bonapartists still continued their visits to her parlors, as before; and no appeals, no representations could induce Hortense to close her doors against her faithful friends, for fear that their fidelity might excite suspicion against herself.

In order, however, to contradict the report that adherents of Napoleon only were in the habit of frequenting her parlors, the duchess also extended the hospitalities of her parlors to the strangers who brought letters of

recommendation, and who desired to be introduced to her. Great numbers hastened to avail themselves of this permission.

The most brilliant and select circle was soon assembled around the duchess. There, were to be found the great men of the empire, who came out of attachment; distinguished strangers, who came out of admiration; and, finally, the aristocrats of the old era, who came out of curiosity, who came to see if the Duchess of St. Leu was really so intelligent, amiable, and graceful, as she was said to be.

The parlors of the duchess were therefore more talked of in Paris than they had been at St. Leu. The old duchesses and princesses of the Faubourg St. Germain, with all their ancestors, prejudices, and pretensions, were enraged at hearing this everlasting praise of the charming queen, and endeavored to appease their wrath by renewed hostilities against its object.

It was not enough that she was calumniated, at court and in society, as a dangerous person; the arm of the press was also wielded against her.

As we have said, Hortense was the embodied remembrance of the empire, and it was therefore determined that she should be destroyed. *Brochures* and pamphlets were published, in which the king was appealed to, to banish from Paris, and even from France, the dangerous woman who was conspiring publicly, and even under the very eyes of the government, for Napoleon, and to banish with her the two children also, the two Napoleons;

"for," said these odious accusers, "to leave these two princes here, means to raise in France wolves that would one day ravage their country." \*

Hortense paid but little attention to these reports and calumnies. She was too much accustomed to being misunderstood and wrongly judged, to allow herself to be disquieted thereby. She knew that calumnies were never refuted by contradiction, and that it was therefore better to meet them with proud silence, and to conquer them by contempt, instead of giving them new life by combating and contradicting them.

She herself entertained such contempt for calumny that she never allowed anything abusive to be said in her presence that would injure any one in her estimation. When, on one occasion, while she was still Queen of Holland, a lady of Holland took occasion to speak ill of another lady, on account of her political opinions, the queen interrupted her, and said: "Madame, here I am a stranger to all parties, and receive all persons with the same consideration, for I love to hear every one well spoken of; and I generally receive an unfavorable impression of those only who speak ill of others." †

And, strange to say, she herself was ever the object of calumny and accusation.

"During twenty-five years, I have never been separated from Princess Hortense," says Louise de Cochelet, "and I have never observed in her the slightest feeling

\* Cochelet, Mémoires sur la Reine Hortense, vol. ii., p. 230.

† Cochelet, vol. i., p. 378.

of bitterness against any one; ever good and gentle, she never failed to take an interest in those who were unhappy; and she endeavored to help them whenever and wherever they presented themselves. And this noble and gentle woman was always the object of hatred and absurd calumnies, and against all this she was armed with the integrity and purity of her actions and intentions only." \*

Nor did Hortense now think of contradicting the calumnies that had been circulated concerning her. Her mind was occupied with other and far more important matters.

An ambassador of her husband, who resided in Florence, had come to Paris in order to demand of Hortense, in the name of Louis Bonaparte, his two sons.

After much discussion, he had finally declared that he would be satisfied, if his wife would send him his eldest son, Napoleon Louis, only.

But the loving mother could not and would not consent to a separation from either of her children; and as, in spite of her entreaties, her husband persisted in refusing to allow her to retain both of them, she resolved, in the anguish of maternal love, to resort to the most extreme means to retain the possession of her sons.

She informed her husband's ambassador that it was her fixed purpose to retain possession of her children, and appealed to the law to recognize and protect them,

\* Cochelet, vol. i., p. 378.

and not allow her sons to be deprived of their rights as Frenchmen, by going into a compulsory exile.

While the Duchess of St. Leu was being accused of conspiring in favor of Napoleon, her whole soul was occupied with the one question, which was to decide whether one of her sons could be torn from her side or not; and, if she conspired at all, it was only with her lawyer in order to frustrate her husband's plans.

But the calumnies and accusations of the press were nevertheless continued; and at last her friends thought it necessary to lay before the queen a journal that contained a violent and abusive article against her, and to request that they might be permitted to reply to it.

With a sad smile, Hortense read the article and returned the newspaper.

"It is extremely mortifying to be scorned by one's countrymen," said she, "but it would be useless to make any reply. I can afford to disregard such attacks—they are powerless to harm me."

But when on the following morning the same journal contained a venomous and odious article levelled at her husband, Louis Bonaparte, her generous indignation was aroused, and, oblivious of all their disagreements, and even of the process now pending between them, she remembered only that it was the father of her children whom they had dared to attack, and that he was not present to defend himself. It therefore devolved upon her to defend him.

"I am enraged, and I desire that M. Després shall re-

ply to this article at once," said Hortense. "Although paternal love on the one side, and maternal love on the other, has involved us in a painful process, it nevertheless concerns no one else, and it disgraces neither of us. I should be in despair, if this sad controversy were made the pretext for insulting the father of my children and the honored name he bears. For the very reason that I stand alone, am I called on to defend the absent to the best of my ability. Therefore let M. Després come to me; I will instruct him how to answer this disgraceful article!"

On the following day, an able and eloquent article in defence of Louis Bonaparte appeared in the journal—an article that shamed and silenced his accusers—an article which the prince, whose cause it so warmly espoused, probably never thought of attributing to the wife to whose maternal heart he had caused such anguish. \*

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## CHAPTER IX.

### THE BURIAL OF LOUIS XVI. AND HIS WIFE.

THE earnest endeavors of the Bourbon court to find the resting-place of the remains of the royal couple who had died on the scaffold, and who had expiated the crimes of their predecessors rather than their own, were at last successful. The remains of the illustrious martyrs had

\* Cochelet, vol. i., p. 303.