

**THE
LIFE OF
MARIE DE MEDICIS
Queen of France
CONSORT OF HENRI IV,
AND REGENT OF THE KINGDOM UNDER LOUIS XIII**

**By
JULIA PARDOE**



PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

All the existing records of European royalty do not, probably, comprise the annals of a life of greater vicissitude than that which has been chosen as the subject of the present work. We find numerous examples in history of Queens who have suffered exile, imprisonment, and death; but we believe that the unfortunate Marie de Medicis is the only authenticated instance of a total abandonment on the part alike of her family and friends, which terminated almost in starvation. Certain it is that after having occupied the throne of France, presided over its Councils, and given birth to the ancestor of a long line of Princes, she was ultimately indebted to the sympathy and attachment of a foreign artist, of whom she had once been the zealous patron, for a roof under which to terminate her miserable existence! The whole life of this ill-fated Queen is, indeed, full of startling contrasts from which the mind shrinks back appalled; and her entire career is so freighted with alternate grandeur and privation that it is difficult to reconcile the possibility of their having fallen to the share of the same individual; and this too in an age when France, above all other nations, boasted of its chivalry, and when some of the greatest names that have ever figured in its annals gave grace and glory to its history.

The times were, moreover, as remarkable as the men by whom they were illustrated; for despite the civil and foreign wars by which they were so unhappily distinguished, the arts flourished, and the spread of political liberty became apparent; although it is equally certain that they were at the same time fatal alike to the aristocracy and to the magistrature; and that they rapidly paved the way to the absolutism of Louis XIV, to the shameless saturnalia of the Regency, and to the dishonouring and degrading excesses of Louis XV, who may justly be said to have prepared by his licentiousness the scaffold of his successor.

During several centuries the French monarchs had indulged in a blind egotism, which rendered them unable to appreciate the effects of their own errors upon their subjects. L'ÉTAT C'EST MOI had unfortunately been practically their ruling principle long ere Louis XIV ventured to put it into words. To them the Court was the universe, the aristocracy the nation, and the Church the corner-stone of the proud altar upon which they had enthroned themselves, and beyond which they cared not either to look or listen. A fatal mistake fatally expiated! Yet, as we have already remarked, the system, dangerous and hollow as it was, endured for centuries--endured until crime was heaped on crime, and the fearful holocaust towered towards Heaven as if to appeal for vengeance. And that vengeance came! It had been long delayed; so long indeed that when the brilliant courtiers of Versailles were told of disaffection among the masses, and warned to conciliate ere it was too late the goodwill of their inferiors, they listened with contemptuous carelessness to the tardy caution, and scorned to place themselves in competition with those untitled classes whom they had long ceased to regard as their fellow-men. But the voice of the people is like the stroke of the hammer upon the anvil; it not only makes itself heard, but, however great may be the original resistance, finishes by fashioning the metal upon which it falls after its own will.

During the reign of Louis XIII this great and fatal truth had not yet been impressed upon the French nation, for the popular voice was stifled beneath the ukase of despotism; and even the *tiers-état*--important as the loyalty of that portion of a kingdom must ever be to its rulers--were treated with disdain and contumely; but beneath all the workings of his government (or rather the government of his minister, for the son of Marie de Medicis was a monarch only in name), may be traced the undercurrent of popular indignation and discontent, which, gradually swelling and rising during the two succeeding reigns, finally overthrew with its giant waves the last frail barrier which still upreared itself before a time-honoured throne.

The incapacity of the King, the venality of the Princes, the arrogance of the hierarchy, the insubordination of the nobles, the licentiousness of the Court, the despotism of the

Marie de Medicis

Government; all the errors and all the vices of their rulers, were jealously noted and bitterly registered by an oppressed and indignant people; but it required time to shake off a yoke which had been so long borne that it had eaten into the flesh; nor, moreover, were the minds of the masses in that age sufficiently awakened to a sense of their own collective power to enable them, as they did in the following century, to measure their strength with those upon whom they had been so long accustomed to look with fear and awe.

There cannot, moreover, exist the slightest doubt that the wantonness with which Richelieu, in furtherance of his own private interests, poured out so freely on the scaffold some of the proudest blood of France, did much towards destroying that prestige which had hitherto environed the high nobility. When Biron perished upon the block, although his death was decreed by the sovereign, and that sovereign, moreover, was their own idolized Henri IV, the people marvelled and even murmured; but in after-years they learned through the teaching of the Cardinal that nobles were merely men; while the exile of the persecuted Marie de Medicis, and the privations to which she was exposed through his agency, taught them that even royalty itself was not invulnerable to the malice or vengeance of its opponents; and unhappily for those by whom Richelieu was succeeded in power, the lesson brought forth its fruits in due season.

Thus much premised, I shall confine myself to a brief explanation of the manner in which I have endeavoured to perform my self-imposed task. For one wilful, but as I trust excusable, inaccuracy, I throw myself on the indulgence of my critics. Finding my pages already overloaded with names, and that they must consequently induce a considerable strain upon the memory of such readers as might not chance to be intimately acquainted with the domestic history of the period under consideration, I have, from the commencement of the work, designated the Duc de Sully by the title which he ultimately attained, and by which he is universally known, rather than confuse the mind of my readers by allusions to M. de Béthune, M. de Rosny, and finally M. de Sully, when each and all merely signified the same individual; and I feel persuaded that this arrangement will be generally regarded as a judicious one, inasmuch as it tends to lessen a difficulty already sufficiently great; a fact which will be at once apparent on reference to the biographical table at the head of each volume.

On the other hand I have, contrary to my previous system, but in justice to myself, carefully, and even perhaps somewhat elaborately, multiplied the footnotes, in order to give with precision the several authorities whence I deduced my facts; and I must be excused should this caution appear uselessly tedious or pedantic to the general reader, as I am anxious on this occasion to escape the accusation which was once brought against me when it was equally undeserved, of having "quoted at second-hand", and even drawn my materials from "historical romances of the time". It is, of course, easy to make assertions of this nature at random; but when a writer feels that he or she has conscientiously performed a duty voluntarily undertaken, it is painful to be misjudged; especially when, as in the present instance, nearly three years have been devoted to the work.

For the facsimile letters by which my volumes are enriched I am indebted to the kindness of M. de la Plane, a member of the Institut Royal de France, of whose extensive and valuable cabinet of ancient records they now form a part; and by whom their publication was obligingly authorized. The authenticity of these letters admits of no doubt, as it is known that they originally formed a portion of the rich collection of autographs in the possession of the Maréchal de Bassompierre, to whom they were severally addressed; and that at his death they were transferred to the library of the Fathers of the Oratory at St. Magloire in Paris; whence (it is believed at the Revolution) they fell into the hands of a member of that celebrated society, Le Père de Mevolhon, formerly Canon and Vicar-General of the diocese of St. Omer, by whom they were presented to M. de la Plane.

At the time when he so kindly entrusted to me the letters above named, the same obliging friend also confided to my care, with full permission to make whatever use of it I should see fit, an unpublished MS. consisting of nearly twelve thousand pages closely written, and divided into twenty-four volumes small quarto, all undeniably the work of one hand. This

Marie de Medicis

elaborate MS. was entitled “Memoirs of M. le Commandeur de Rambure, Captain of the regiment of French Guards, Gentleman of the Bedchamber under the Kings Henri IV, Louis XIII, and Louis XIV surnamed the Great, with all the most memorable events which took place during the reigns of those three Majesties, from the year 1594 to that of 1660”.

The author of this voluminous MS., who, at the age of eighty-one, inscribes his work to his *uncle*, Monseigneur de Rambure, Bishop of Vannes, and who professes to have ventured thus tardily upon his Herculean undertaking at the request, and for the instruction, of his nephew the Marquis de Rambure, lays strict injunctions upon his successors to keep the record of his life to themselves; alleging as his reason a dread of injuring by his revelations the interests of the young courtier, who had succeeded to his own post of Gentleman of the Bedchamber; “and that”, as he proceeds to say, “to the greatest King in the world, by whom he has the honour to be loved and esteemed; therefore I pray you that this writing may never be printed, in order not to make him enemies, who are too ready to come without being sought by our imprudence; and because I have only composed these Memoirs for myself and my kindred”.

The author states that the work is not in his own handwriting, but in that of his secretary, to whom he dictated during eleven years four hours each day, two in the morning, and two in the afternoon--and that he commenced his formidable task in the year 1664, when he was living in retirement in his Commanderie of St. Eugène in Limousin; and, despite his advanced age, “in possession of all his faculties as perfectly as when he had only reached his twenty-fifth year”.

It is but recently that the present proprietor of the Memoirs, rightly judging that the time has elapsed in which the disclosures of the chronicler in question could conduce to the injury of any one connected with him, has consented to permit of their perusal; and that only by a few literary friends, all of whom have been astonished by their extraordinary variety of information, marvellous detail, and intimate acquaintance, not only with the principal events of the seventeenth century (the writer having lived to the patriarchal age of ninety-six years), but also with the leading actors in each of them.

In conclusion, I may say that these volumes are, through the kindness of MM. d'Inguibert and de la Plane, enriched by numerous curious extracts from these unpublished Memoirs, no part of which has previously appeared in print.

LONDON, *May* 1852.

Marie de Medicis

BOOK I

MARIE DE MEDICIS AS QUEEN

CHAPTER I. 1572-99

CHAPTER II. 1599-1601

CHAPTER III. 1602

CHAPTER IV. 1603-4

CHAPTER V. 1605

CHAPTER VI. 1606

CHAPTER VII. 1607-8

CHAPTER VIII. 1609-10

CHAPTER IX. 1610

BOOK II

MARIE DE MEDICIS AS REGENT

CHAPTER I. 1610

CHAPTER II. 1610

CHAPTER III. 1611

CHAPTER IV. 1612

CHAPTER V. 1613

CHAPTER VI. 1614

CHAPTER VII. 1615-16

CHAPTER VIII. 1616

CHAPTER IX. 1617

CHAPTER X. 1617

BOOK III

MARIE DE MEDICIS AS EXILE

CHAPTER I. 1618

CHAPTER II. 1619

CHAPTER III. 1620

CHAPTER IV. 1621-24

CHAPTER V. 1625-28

CHAPTER VI. 1629

CHAPTER VII. 1630

CHAPTER VIII. 1631

CHAPTER IX. 1632

Marie de Medicis

CHAPTER X. 1633

CHAPTER XI. 1634

CHAPTER XII. 1635-38

CHAPTER XIII. 1639-42

Marie de Medicis

BOOK I
MARIE DE MEDICIS AS QUEEN
CHAPTER I
1572



However celebrated he was destined to become as a sovereign, Henri IV of France was nevertheless fated to be singularly unfortunate as a husband. Immediately after the death of his mother, the high-hearted Jeanne d'Albret, whom he succeeded on the throne of Navarre, political considerations induced him to give his hand to Marguerite, the daughter of Henri II

Marie de Medicis

and Catherine de Medicis, a Princess whose surpassing beauty and rare accomplishments were the theme and marvel of all the European courts, and whose alliance was an object of ambition to many of the sovereign princes of Christendom.

Marguerite de Valois was born on the 14th of May 1552, and became the wife of Henry of Navarre on the 18th of August 1572, when she was in the full bloom of youth and loveliness; nor can there be any doubt that she was one of the most extraordinary women of her time; for while her grace and wit dazzled the less observant by their brilliancy, the depth of her erudition, her love of literature and the arts, and the solidity of her judgment, no less astonished those who were capable of appreciating the more valuable gifts which had been lavished upon her by nature. A dark shadow rested, however, upon the surface of this glorious picture. Marguerite possessed no moral self-government; her passions were at once the bane and the reproach of her existence; and while yet a mere girl her levity had already afforded ample subject for the comments of the courtiers.

Fortunately, in the rapid sketch which we are compelled to give of her career, it is unnecessary that we should do more than glance at the licentiousness of her private conduct; our business is simply to trace such an outline of her varying fortunes as may suffice to render intelligible the position of Henri IV at the period of his second marriage.

After the death of Francis II, when internal commotion had succeeded to the feigned and hollow reconciliation which had taken place between Charles IX and Henri de Lorraine, Duc de Guise, Marguerite and her younger brother, the Duc d'Alençon, were removed to the castle of Amboise for greater security; and she remained in that palace-fortress from her tenth year until 1564, when she returned to Court, and thenceforward became one of the brightest ornaments of the royal circle. Henri de Guise was not long ere he declared himself her ardent admirer, and the manner in which the Princess received and encouraged his attentions left no doubt that the affection was reciprocal. So convinced, indeed, were those about her person of the fact, that M. du Gast, the favourite of the King her brother, earnestly entreated His Majesty no longer to confide to the Princess, as he had hitherto done, all the secrets of the state, as they could not, he averred, fail, under existing circumstances, to be communicated to M. de Guise; and Charles IX so fully appreciated the value of this advice, that he hastened to urge the same caution upon the Queen-mother. This sudden distrust and coldness on the part of her royal relatives was peculiarly irritating to Marguerite; nor was her mortification lessened by the fact that the Duc de Guise, first alarmed, and ultimately disgusted, by her unblushing irregularities, withdrew his pretensions to her hand; and, sacrificing his ambition to a sense of self-respect, selected as his wife Catherine de Clèves, Princesse de Portien.

At this period Marguerite de Valois began to divide her existence between the most exaggerated devotional observances and the most sensual and degrading pleasures. Humbly kneeling before the altar, she would assist at several masses during the day; but at twilight she cast off every restraint, and careless of what was due, alike to her sex and to her rank, she plunged into the grossest dissipation; and after having played the guest at a riotous banquet, she might be seen sharing in the disgraceful orgies of a masquerade. A short time after the marriage of the Duc de Guise, the hand of the Princess was demanded by Don Sebastian, King of Portugal; but the Queen-mother, who witnessed with alarm the increasing power of the Protestant party, and the utter impossibility of inspiring confidence in their leaders save by some bold and subtle stroke of policy, resolved to profit by the presence of the Huguenot King of Navarre, in order to overcome the distrust which not even the edict of 1570 had sufficed to remove; and to renew the project which had been already mooted during the lifetime of Jeanne d'Albret, of giving Marguerite in marriage to the young Prince, her son.

The consciousness that she was sacrificing her daughter by thus bestowing her hand upon the sovereign of a petty kingdom might perhaps have deterred Catherine, had she not already decided upon the means by which the bonds of so unequal an alliance might be rent assunder; and it is even possible that the hatred which she bore to the reformed faith would in itself have sufficed to render such an union impossible, had not the crafty and compunctionless spirit by which she was animated inspired her with a method which would

Marie de Medicis

more than expiate the temporary sin. It is at all events certain that having summoned Henry of Navarre to her presence, she unhesitatingly, and with many professions of regard for himself, informed him of the overtures of the Portuguese monarch, assuring him at the same time, that although the King of Spain was opposed to the alliance from motives of personal interest, it was one which would prove highly gratifying to Gregory XIII; but adding that both Charles IX and herself were so anxious to perform the promise which they had made to his mother, and to prove their good faith to his own person, that they were willing to refuse the crown of Portugal and to accept that of Navarre for the Princess.

Henry of Béarn hesitated. He was aware that the chiefs of the Protestant party, especially the Admiral de Coligny, whom he regarded as a father, were desirous that he should become the husband of Elizabeth of England. Past experience had rendered them suspicious of the French, while an alliance with the English promised them a strong and abiding protection. Nor was Henry himself more disposed to espouse Marguerite de Valois, as her early reputation for gallantry offended his sense of self-respect, while a strong attachment elsewhere rendered him insensible to her personal attractions. As a matter of ambition, the alliance was beyond his hopes, and brought him one step nearer to that throne which, by some extraordinary prescience, both he and his friends anticipated that he was destined one day to ascend; but he could not forget that there were dark suspicions attached to the strange and sudden death of a mother to whom he had been devoted; and he felt doubly repugnant to receive a wife from the very hands which were secretly accused of having abridged his passage to the sovereignty of Navarre. Like Marguerite herself, moreover, he was not heart-whole; and thus he clung to the freedom of an unmarried life, and would fain have declined the honour which was pressed upon him; but the wily Catherine, who instantly perceived his embarrassment, bade him carefully consider the position in which he stood, and the fearful responsibility which attached to his decision. Charles IX, in bestowing upon him the hand of his sister, gave to the Protestants the most decided and unequivocal proof of his sincerity. It was evident, she said, that despite the edict which assured protection to the Huguenot party, they still misdoubted the good-faith of the monarch; but when he had also overlooked, or rather disregarded, the difference of faith so thoroughly as to give a Princess of France in marriage to one of their princes, they would no longer have a pretext for discontent, and the immediate pacification of the kingdom must be the necessary consequence of such a concession. The ultimate issue of so unequal a conflict could not, as she asserted, be for one moment doubtful; but the struggle might be a bloody one, and he would do well to remember that the blood thus spilt would be upon his own head.

Henry then sought, as his mother had previously done, to create a difficulty by alleging that the difference of faith between himself and the Princess must tend to affect the validity of their marriage; but the wily Italian met this objection by reminding him that Charles IX had publicly declared that “rather than that the alliance should not take place, he would permit his sister to dispense with all the rites and ceremonies of both religions”.

It is well known that the motive of the French King in thus urging, or rather insisting upon, a marriage greatly beneath the pretensions of the Princess, was simply to attract to Court all the Huguenot leaders, who, placing little faith in the conciliatory edict, had resolutely abstained from appearing in the capital; but Catherine alluded so slightly to this fact that it awoke no misgivings in the mind of the young monarch.

Thus adjured, Henry of Navarre yielded; nor did the Princess on her part offer any violent opposition to the marriage. She objected, it is true, her religious scruples, and her attachment to her own creed; but her arguments were soon overruled, the hand of the King of Portugal was courteously declined, Philip of Spain was assured that his representations had decided the French Court, and immediate preparations were made for the unhappy union, whose date was to be written in blood. The double ceremony, exacted by the difference of faith in the contracting parties, was performed, as we have said, on the 18th of August 1572, the public betrothal having taken place on the preceding day at the Louvre; and it was accompanied by all the splendour of which it was susceptible. The marriage-service was performed by the Cardinal de Bourbon, on a platform erected in front of the metropolitan

Marie de Medicis

church of Notre-Dame; whence, at its conclusion, the bridal train descended by a temporary gallery to the interior of the Cathedral, and proceeded to the altar, where Henry, relinquishing the hand of his new-made wife, left her to assist at the customary mass, and meanwhile paced to and fro along the cloisters in conversation with the venerable Gaspard de Coligny and others of his confidential friends, the whole of whom were sanguine in their anticipations of a bright and happy future.

At the conclusion of the mass the King of Navarre rejoined his bride, and taking her hand, conducted her to the episcopal palace, where, according to an ancient custom, the marriage-banquet awaited them. The square of the Parvis Notre-Dame was crowded with eager spectators, and the heart of the Queen-mother beat high with exultation as she glanced at the retinue of the bridegroom, and recognised in his suite all the Huguenot leaders who had hitherto refused to pass the gates of the capital.

Save her own, however, all eyes were rivetted upon Marguerite; and many were the devout Catholics who murmured beneath their breath at the policy which had determined the monarch to bestow a Princess of such beauty and genius upon a heretic. In truth, nothing could be more regal or more dazzling than the appearance of the youthful bride, who wore, as Queen of Navarre, a richly-jewelled crown, beneath which her long and luxuriant dark hair fell in waving masses over an ermine cape (or *couet*) clasped from the throat to the waist with large diamonds; while her voluminous train of violet-coloured velvet, three ells in length, was borne by four princesses. And thus in royal state she moved along, surrounded and followed by all the nobility and chivalry of France, amid the acclamations of an admiring and excited people, having just pledged herself to one whose feelings were as little interested in the compact as her own.

The bridal festivities lasted throughout three entire days; and never had such an excess of luxury and magnificence been displayed at the French Court. Towards the Protestants, the bearing both of Charles IX and his mother was so courteous, frank, and conciliating, that the most distrustful gradually threw off their misgivings, and vied with the Catholic nobles both in gallantry and splendour; and meanwhile Catherine, the King, the Duc d'Anjou, and the Guises were busied in organizing the frightful tragedy of St. Bartholomew!

The young Queen of Navarre had scrupulously been left in ignorance of a plot which involved the life of her bridegroom as well as those of his co-religionists; nor was she aware of the catastrophe which had been organised until Paris was already one vast shambles. Startled from her sleep at the dead of night, and hurriedly informed of the nature of the frightful cries that had broken her rest, she at once sprang from her bed, and throwing on a mantle, forced her way to the closet of her royal brother, where, sinking on her knees, she earnestly implored the lives of Henry's Protestant attendants; but for a time Charles was obdurate; nor was it until after he had reluctantly yielded to her prayers that she recognised, with an involuntary cry of joy, the figure of her husband, who stood in the deep bay of a window with his cousin, M. de Condé.

By one of those caprices to which he was subject, the King had refused to sacrifice either of these Princes; and he had accordingly summoned them to his presence, where he had offered them the alternative of an instant abjuration of their heresy.

Shrieks and groans already resounded on all sides; the groans of strong men, struck down unarmed and defenceless, and the shrieks of women struggling with their murderers; while through all, and above all, boomed out the deep-toned bells of the metropolitan churches--one long burial-peal; and amid this ghastly diapason it was the pleasure of the tiger-hearted Charles to accept the reluctant and informal recantation of his two horror-stricken victims; after which he compelled them without remorse to the agony of seeing their friends and followers butchered before their eyes.

Enraged by what they denounced as the weak and impolitic clemency of the King, in having thus shielded two of the most powerful leaders of the adverse faction, Catherine de Medicis and the Guises, having first wreaked their vengeance upon the corpse of the brave and

veteran de Coligny, which they induced the King to dishonour himself by subjecting to the most ignominious treatment, next endeavoured to alienate Marguerite from her husband, and to induce her to solicit a divorce. It had formed no part of the Queen-mother's intention that the Princess should remain fettered by the bonds which she had herself wreathed about her; nor could she brook that after having accomplished a *coup-de-main* which had excited the indignation of half of Europe, Henry of Navarre should be indebted for an impunity which counteracted all her views to the alliance which he had formed with her own family. Marguerite, however, resolutely refused to lend herself to this new treachery, declaring that as her husband had abjured his heresy, she had no plea to advance in justification of so flagrant an act of perfidy; nor could the expostulations of her mother produce any change in her resolve.

It is probable that the perfect freedom of action for which she was indebted to the indifference of her young bridegroom had great influence in prompting this reply, and that the crown which had so recently been placed upon her brow had at the same time flattered her ambition; while the frightful carnage of which she had just been a witness might well cause her to shrink from the probable repetition of so hideous a catastrophe. Be her motives what they might, however, neither threats nor entreaties could shake the resolution of the Princess; and she was supported in her opposition by her favourite brother, the Duc d'Alençon, who had secretly attached himself to the cause of the Protestant Princes.

This was another source of uneasiness to the Queen-mother, who apprehended, from the pertinacity with which Marguerite clung to her husband, that she would exert all her influence to effect an understanding between the two brothers-in-law which could not fail to prove fatal to the interests of the Duc d'Anjou, who, in the event of the decease of Charles IX, was the rightful heir to the throne. Nor was that decease a mere matter of idle speculation, for the health of the King, always feeble and uncertain, had failed more than ever since the fatal night of the 24th of August; and he had even confessed to Ambroise Paré, his body-surgeon, that his dreams were haunted by the spectres of his victims, and that he consequently shrank from the sleep which was so essential to his existence. The Duc d'Anjou meanwhile was absent at the siege of Rochelle, while his brother, d'Alençon, was about the person of the dying monarch, and had made himself eminently popular among the citizens of Paris. The crisis was an alarming one; but it was still destined to appear even more perilous, for, to the consternation of Catherine, intelligence at this period reached the Court that the Polish nation had elected the Duc d'Anjou as their King, and that their ambassadors were about to visit France in order to tender him the crown. In vain did she represent to Charles the impolicy of suffering a warlike prince like Henri d'Anjou to abandon his country for a foreign throne, and urge him to replace the elder by the younger brother, alleging that so long as the Polish people could see a prince of the blood-royal of France at the head of their nation, they would care little whether he were called Henry or Francis; the King refused to countenance such a substitution. He had long been jealous of the military renown of the Duc d'Anjou; while he was also perfectly aware of the anxiety with which both the Queen-mother and the Prince himself looked forward to his own death, in order that Henry might succeed him; and he consequently issued a command that the sovereign-elect should immediately repair to Paris to receive at the hands of the foreign delegates the crown which they were about to offer to him.

The summons was obeyed. The ambassadors, who duly arrived, were magnificently received; Henri d'Anjou was declared King of Poland; and, finally, he found himself compelled to depart for his own kingdom. Unfortunately for Marguerite, she had not sufficient self-control to conceal the joy with which she saw the immediate succession to the French throne thus transferred to her favourite brother; and her evident delight so exasperated the Queen-mother, that she communicated to Charles the suspicions which she herself entertained of the treachery of the Princess; but the King, worn down by both physical and mental suffering, treated her warnings with indifference, and she was consequently compelled to await with patience the progress of events.

The death of the French monarch, which shortly afterwards took place, and the accession of Henri d'Anjou, whom a timely warning had enabled to abandon the crown of

Marie de Medicis

Poland for that of France, for a time diverted the attention of Catherine from the suspected machinations of her daughter, when, as if to convince her of her injustice, she suddenly received secret intelligence from the young Queen of Navarre, that the Duc d'Alençon had entered into a new league with the Bourbon Princes. It is difficult to account for the motive which led Marguerite to make this revelation, when her extraordinary affection for her brother, and the anxiety which she had universally exhibited for the safety of her husband, are remembered; thus much, however, is certain, that she did not betray the conspiracy (which had been revealed to her by a Lutheran gentleman whom she had saved during the massacre of St. Bartholomew) until she had exacted a pledge that the lives of all who were involved in it should be spared. In her anxiety to secure the secret, the Queen-mother, on her side, gave a solemn promise to that effect, and she redeemed her word; while from the immediate precautions which she caused to be taken the plot was necessarily annihilated.

The Princess had, however, by the knowledge which she thus displayed of the movements of the Huguenot party, only increased the suspicions both of the Queen-mother and her son; and the Court of France became ere long so distasteful to Henry of Navarre, from the constant affronts to which he was subjected, and the undisguised *surveillance* which fettered all his movements, that he resolved to effect his escape from Paris, an example in which he was imitated by the Duc d'Alençon and the Prince de Condé, the former of whom retired to Champagne, and the latter to one of his estates, and with both of whom he shortly afterwards entered into a formidable league.

Henri III, exasperated by the departure of the three Princes, declared his determination to revenge the affront upon Marguerite, who had not been enabled to accompany her husband; but the representations of the Queen-mother induced him to forego this ungenerous project, and he was driven to satiate his thirst for vengeance upon her favourite attendant, Mademoiselle de Tournon, of whose services he had already deprived her, on the pretext that so young a Princess should not be permitted to retain about her person such persons as were likely to exert an undue influence over her mind, and to possess themselves of her secrets. In the first paroxysm of his rage, he even sentenced this lady to be drowned; nor is it doubtful that this iniquitous and unfounded sentence would have been really carried into effect, had not the unfortunate woman succeeded in making her escape through the agency of two individuals who were about to rejoin the Duc d'Alençon, and who conducted her safely to Champagne.

One of the first acts of Henry of Navarre on reaching his own dominions had been to protest against the enforced abjuration to which he was compelled on the fatal night of St. Bartholomew, and to evince his sincerity by resuming the practices of the reformed faith, a recantation which so exasperated the French King that he made Marguerite a close prisoner in her own apartments, under the pretext that she was leagued with the enemies of the state against the church and throne of her ancestors. Nor would he listen to her entreaties that she might be permitted to follow her husband, declaring that "she should not live with a heretic"; and thus her days passed on in a gloomy and cheerless monotony, ill suited to her excitable temperament and splendid tastes. Meanwhile, the Duc d'Alençon, weary of his voluntary exile, and hopeless of any successful result to the disaffection in which he had so long indulged, became anxious to effect a reconciliation with the King; and for this purpose he addressed himself to Marguerite, to whom he explained the conditions upon which he was willing to return to his allegiance, giving her full power to treat in his name. Henri III, who, on his side, was no less desirous to detach his brother from the Protestant cause, acceded to all his demands, among which was the immediate liberation of the Princess; and thus she at length found herself enabled to quit her regal prison and to rejoin her royal husband at Béarn.

During the space of five years the ill-assorted couple maintained at least a semblance of harmony, for each apparently regarded very philosophically those delicate questions which occasionally conduce to considerable discord in married life. The personal habits of Henry, combined with his sense of gratitude to his wife for her refusal to abandon him to the virulence of her mother's hatred, induced him to close his eyes to her moral delinquencies, while Marguerite, in her turn, with equal complacency, affected a like ignorance as regarded the pursuits of her husband; and thus the little Court of Pau, where they had established their

Marie de Medicis

residence, rendered attractive by the frank urbanity of the sovereign, and the grace and intellect of the young Queen, became as brilliant and as dissipated as even the daughter of Catherine de Medicis herself could desire. Poets sang her praise under the name of Urania; flatterers sought her smiles by likening her to the goddesses of love and beauty, and she lived in a perpetual atmosphere of pleasure and adulation.

The marriage-portion of Marguerite had consisted of the two provinces of the Agénois and the Quercy, which had been ceded to her with all their royal prerogatives; but even after this accession of revenue the resources of Henry of Navarre did not exceed those of a private gentleman, amounting, in fact, only to a hundred and forty thousand livres, or about six thousand pounds yearly. The ancient kingdom of Navarre, which had once extended from the frontier of France to the banks of the Ebro, and of which Pampeluna had been the capital, shorn of its dimensions by Ferdinand the Catholic at the commencement of the sixteenth century, and incorporated with the Spanish monarchy, now consisted only of a portion of Lower Navarre, and the principality of Béarn, thus leaving to Henry little of sovereignty save the title. The duchy of Albret in Gascony, which he inherited from his great-grandfather, and that of Vendôme, his appanage as a Prince of the Blood-royal of France, consequently formed no inconsiderable portion of his territory: while the title of Governor of Guienne, which he still retained, was a merely nominal dignity whence he derived neither income nor influence; and so unpopular was he in the province that the citizens of Bordeaux refused to admit him within their gates.

Nevertheless, the young monarch who held his court alternately at Pau and at Nérac, the capital of the duchy of Albret, expended annually upon his household and establishment nearly twelve thousand pounds, and that at a period when, according to the evidence of Sully, "the whole Court could not have furnished forty thousand livres"; yet so inadequately were those about him remunerated, that Sully himself, in his joint capacity of councillor of state and chamberlain, received only two thousand annual livres, or ninety pounds sterling. This royal penury did not, however, depress the spirits of the frank and free-hearted King, who eagerly entered into every species of gaiety and amusement. Jousts, masques, and ballets succeeded each other with a rapidity which left no time for anxiety or *ennui*; and Marguerite has bequeathed to us in her memoirs so graphic a picture of the royal circle in 1579-80, that we cannot resist its transcription. "We passed the greater portion of our time at Nérac", she says, "where the Court was so brilliant that we had no reason to envy that of France. The sole subject of regret was that the principal number of the nobles and gentlemen were Huguenots; but the subject of religion was never mentioned; the King, my husband, accompanied by his sister, attending their own devotions, while I and my suite heard mass in a chapel in the park. When the several services were concluded, we again assembled in a garden ornamented with avenues of laurels and cypresses upon the bank of the river; and in the afternoon and evening a ballet was performed".

It is much to be regretted that the royal biographer follows up this pleasing picture by avowals of her own profligacy, and complacent comments upon the indulgence and generosity with which she lent herself to the vices of her husband.

The temporary calm was not, however, fated to endure. Marguerite, even while she indulged in the most unblushing licentiousness, was, as we have already stated, devoted to the observances of her religion; and on her first arrival at Pau she had requested that a chapel might be provided in which the services of her church could be performed. This was a concession which Henry of Navarre was neither willing nor indeed able to make, the inhabitants of the city being all rigid reformers who had not yet forgiven the young monarch either his enforced renunciation of their faith or his Catholic marriage; and accordingly the Queen had been compelled to avail herself of a small oratory in the castle which would not contain more than six or eight persons; while so anxious was the King not to exasperate the good citizens, that no individual was permitted to accompany her to the chapel save the immediate members of her household, and the drawbridge was always raised until she had returned to her own apartments.

Marie de Medicis

Thus, the arrival of Marguerite in the country, which had raised the hopes of the Catholic portion of the population, by no means tended to improve their position; and for a time her co-religionists, disheartened by so signal a disappointment, made no effort to resist the orders of the King; but on the day of Pentecost, 1579, a few zealous devotees, who had by some means introduced themselves secretly into the castle, followed the Queen to her oratory, where they were arrested by Dupin the royal secretary, very roughly treated in the presence of Marguerite herself, and only released on the payment of a heavy fine.

Indignant at the disrespect which had been shown to her, the Princess at once proceeded to the apartment of her husband, where she complained with emphatic bitterness of the insolence of his favourite; and she had scarcely begun to acquaint him with the details of the affair when Dupin entered unannounced, and in the most intemperate manner commented on her breach of good faith in having wilfully abused the forbearance of the sovereign and his Protestant subjects.

It was not without some difficulty that Henry succeeded in arresting this indecent flow of words, when, rebuking Dupin for his want of discretion and self-control, he commanded him immediately to crave the pardon of the Queen for his ill-advised interference and the want of deference of which he had been guilty towards her royal person; but Marguerite refused to listen to any apology, and haughtily and resolutely demanded the instant dismissal of the delinquent. In vain did Henry expostulate, declaring that he could not dispense with the services of so old and devoted a servant; the Princess was inexorable, and the over-zealous secretary received orders to leave the Court. Marguerite, however, purchased this triumph dearly, as the King resented with a bitterness unusual to him the exhibition of authority in which she had indulged; and when she subsequently urged him to punish those who had acted under the orders of the exiled secretary, he boldly and positively refused to give her any further satisfaction, alleging that her want of consideration towards himself left him at equal liberty to disregard her own wishes.

Angry and irritated, Marguerite lost no time in acquainting her family with the affront which she had experienced; and Catherine de Medicis, who believed that she had now found a pretext sufficiently plausible to separate the young Queen from her husband, skilfully envenomed the already rankling wound, not only by awakening the religious scruples of her daughter, but also by reminding her that she had been subjected to insult from a petty follower of a petty court; and, finally, she urged her to assert her dignity by an immediate return to France.

Marguerite, whom the King had not made a single effort to conciliate, obeyed without reluctance; and, in the year 1582, she left Navarre, and on her arrival in Paris took possession of her old apartments in the Louvre. She was received with great cordiality by Henri III, who trusted that her residence in France might induce her husband ere long to follow her; but he soon discovered that not even the warmth of his welcome could cause her to forget the past; and that, under his own royal roof, she was secretly intriguing with the Duc d'Alençon, who was once more in open revolt against him.

For a time, although thoroughly informed that such was the fact, his emissaries were unable to produce any tangible proof of the validity of their accusations; but at length, rendered bold by impunity, Marguerite was so imprudent (for the purpose of forwarding some despatches to the rebel Duke) as to cause the arrest of a royal courier, charged with an autograph letter of two entire sheets from the King to his favourite the Duc de Joyeuse, who was then on a mission at Rome; when the unfortunate messenger, who found himself suddenly attacked by four men in masks, made so desperate an effort to save the packet with which he had been entrusted, that the *sbirri* of the Princess, who had anticipated an easy triumph, became so much exasperated that they stabbed him on the spot.

This occurrence no sooner reached the ears of Henri III, than he sent to desire the presence of his sister, when, utterly regardless of the fact that they were not alone, he so far forgot his own dignity as to overwhelm her with the coarsest and most cutting reproaches; and not satisfied with expatiating upon the treachery of which she had been guilty towards himself,

Marie de Medicis

he passed in review the whole of her ill-spent life, accusing her, among other enormities, of the birth of an illegitimate son, and terminated his invectives by commanding her instantly "to quit Paris, and rid the Court of her presence."

On the morrow Marguerite accordingly left the capital with even less state than she had entered it, for she had neither suite nor equipage, and was accompanied only by Madame de Duras and Mademoiselle de Béthune, her two favourite attendants. She was not, however, suffered to depart even thus without impediment, for she had only travelled a few leagues when, between Saint-Cler and Palaiseau, her litter was stopped by a captain of the royal guard, at the head of a troop of harquebusiers: she was compelled to remove her mask; and her companions, after having been subjected to great discourtesy, were finally conveyed as prisoners to the Abbey of Ferrières, near Montargis, where they underwent an examination, at which the King himself presided, and wherein facts were elicited that were fatal to the character of their mistress. Their replies were then reduced to writing; and Marguerite, who had been detained for this express purpose, was compelled by her inexorable brother to affix her signature to the disgraceful document; when, after she had been subjected to this new indignity, the daughter of Catherine de Medicis was at length permitted to pursue her journey; but she was compelled to do so alone, as her two attendants were forbidden to bear her company.

She had no sooner left Ferrières than Henri III despatched one of the valets of his wardrobe to St. Foix, where the King of Navarre was for the moment sojourning, with an autograph letter, in which he informed him that he had considered it expedient to dismiss from the service of his royal sister both Madame de Duras and Mademoiselle de Béthune, having discovered that they were leading the most dissolute and scandalous lives, and were "*pernicious vermin*" who could not be permitted to remain about the person of a Princess of her rank.

Thus ignominiously driven from the Court of France, Marguerite, who had no resource save in the indulgence of her husband, travelled with the greatest speed to Nérac, where he was then residing, in the hope that she might be enabled by her representations to induce him to espouse her cause against her brother; but although, in order to preserve appearances, Henry received her courteously, and even listened with exemplary patience to her impassioned relation of the indignities to which she had been subjected, the coldness of his deportment, and the stern tone in which he informed her that he would give the necessary orders for a separate residence to be prepared for her accommodation, as he could never again receive her under his own roof, or accord to her the honour and consideration due to a wife, convinced her that she had nothing more to hope from his forbearance.

Even while he thus resented his own wrongs, however, Henry of Navarre no sooner comprehended that Marguerite had been personally exposed to insults which had affected his honour as her consort, than he despatched a messenger to the French King at Lyons, "to entreat him to explain the cause of these affronts, and to advise him, *as a good master*, how he had better act". But this somewhat servile proceeding produced no adequate result, as his envoy received only ambiguous answers, and all he could accomplish was to extort a promise from Henri III that on his return to Paris he would discuss the affair with the Queen-mother and the Duc d'Alençon.

Unaware of the negotiation which was thus opened, Marguerite had, as we have said, lost all confidence in her own influence over her husband; and accordingly, without giving any intimation of her design, she left Nérac and retired to Agen, one of her dower-cities, where she established herself in the castle; but her unbridled depravity of conduct, combined with the extortions of Madame de Duras, her friend and *confidante*, by whom she had been rejoined, soon rendered her odious to the inhabitants.

In vain did she declare that the bull of excommunication which Sixtus V had recently fulminated against the King of Navarre had been the cause of her retiring from his Court, her conscience not permitting her to share the roof of a prince under the ban of the Church. The Agenese, although Catholics and leagued against her husband, evinced towards herself a

Marie de Medicis

disaffection so threatening that her position was rapidly becoming untenable, when the city was stormed and taken by the Maréchal de Matignon in the name of Henri III.

Convinced that the capture of her own person was the sole motive of this unprovoked assault, the fugitive Queen had once more recourse to flight; and her eagerness to escape the power of the French King was so great that she left the city seated on a pillion behind a gentleman of her suite named Lignerac, while Madame de Duras followed in like manner; and thus she travelled four-and-twenty leagues in the short space of two days, attended by such of the members of her little household as were enabled to keep pace with her.

The fortress of Carlat in the mountains of Auvergne offered to her, as she believed, a safe asylum; but although the Governor, who was the brother of M. de Lignerac, received her with respect, and promised her his protection, the enmity of Henri III pursued her even to this obscure place of exile.

At this period even the high spirit of Marguerite de Valois was nearly subdued, for she no longer knew in what direction to turn for safety. She had become contemptible in the eyes of her husband; she was deserted by her mother, hated by her brother, despised by her co-religionists from the licentiousness of her life, and detested by the Protestants as the cause, however innocently, of the fatal massacre of their friends and leaders. The memory of the martyred Coligny was ever accompanied by a curse on Marguerite; and thus she was an outcast from all creeds and all parties. Still, however, confident in the good faith of the Governor of Carlat, she assumed at least a semblance of tranquillity, and trusted that she should be enabled to remain for a time unmolested; but it was not long ere she ascertained that the inhabitants of the town, like those of Agen, were hostile to her interests, and that they had even resolved to deliver her up to the French King.

Under these circumstances, she had no alternative save to become once more a fugitive; and having, with considerable difficulty, succeeded in making her escape beyond the walls, she began to indulge a hope that she should yet baffle the devices of her enemy; she was soon, however, fated to be undeceived, for she had travelled only a few leagues when she was overtaken and captured by the Marquis de Canillac, who conveyed her to the fortress of Usson. As she passed the drawbridge, Marguerite recognised at a glance that there was no hope of evasion from this new and impregnable prison, save through the agency of her gaoler; and she accordingly lost no time in exerting all her blandishments to captivate his reason. Although she had now attained her thirty-fifth year, neither time, anxiety, hardship, nor even the baneful indulgence of her misguided passions, had yet robbed her of her extraordinary beauty; and it is consequently scarcely surprising that ere long the gallant soldier to whose custody she was confided, surrendered at discretion, and laid at her feet, not only his heart, but also the keys of her prison-house.

“Poor man!” enthusiastically exclaims Brantôme, her friend and correspondent; “what did he expect to do? Did he think to retain as a prisoner her who, by her eyes and her lovely countenance, could hold in her chains and bonds all the rest of the world like galley-slaves?”

Certain it is, that if the brave but susceptible marquis ever contemplated such a result, he was destined to prove the fallacy of his hopes; for so totally was he subjugated by the fascinations of the captive Queen, that he even abandoned to her the command of the fortress, which thenceforward acknowledged no authority save her own.

Marguerite had scarcely resided a year at Usson when the death of the Duc d'Alençon deprived her of the last friend whom she possessed on earth; and not even the security that she derived from the impregnability of the fortress in which she had found an asylum could preserve her from great and severe suffering. The castle, with its triple ramparts, its wide moat, and its iron portcullis, might indeed defy all human enemies, but it could not exclude famine; and during her sojourn within its walls, which extended over a period of two-and-twenty years, she was compelled to pawn her jewels, and to melt down her plate, in order to provide food for the famishing garrison; while so utterly destitute did she ultimately become,

Marie de Medicis

that she found herself driven to appeal to the generosity of Elizabeth of Austria, the widow of her brother Charles IX, who thenceforward supplied her necessities.

In the year 1589 Henry of Navarre ascended the throne of France, having previously, for the second time, embraced the Catholic faith; but for a while the *liaisons* which he found it so facile to form at the Court, and his continued affection for the Comtesse de Guiche, together with the internal disturbances and foreign wars which had convulsed the early years of his reign, so thoroughly engrossed his attention, that he had made no attempt to separate himself from his erring and exiled wife; nor was it until 1598, when the Edict of Nantes had ensured a lasting and certain peace to the Huguenots; and that *la belle Gabrielle* had replaced Madame de Guiche, and by making him the father of two sons, had induced him to contemplate (as he had done in a previous case with her predecessor) her elevation to the throne, that he became really anxious to liberate himself from the trammels of his ill-omened marriage.

Having ascertained that the Duc de Bouillon, notwithstanding the concessions which he had made to the Protestant party, had been recently engaged, in conjunction with D'Aubigny and other zealous reformers, in endeavouring to create renewed disaffection among the Huguenots, Henry resolved to visit Brittany, and personally to express to the Duke his indignation and displeasure.

On his arrival at Rennes, where M. de Bouillon was confined to his bed by a violent attack of gout, the King accordingly proceeded to his residence; where, after having expressed his regret at the state of suffering in which he found him, he ordered all the attendants to withdraw, and seating himself near the pillow of the invalid, desired him to listen without remark or interruption to all that he was about to say. He then reproached him in the most indignant terms with his continual and active efforts to disturb the peace of the kingdom, recapitulating every act, and almost every word, of his astonished and embarrassed listener, with an accuracy which left no opportunity for denial; and, finally, he advised him to be warned in time, and, if he valued his own safety, to adopt a perfectly opposite line of conduct; assuring him, in conclusion, that should he persist in his present contumacy, he should himself take measures, as his sovereign and his master, to render him incapable of working further mischief.

The bewildered Duke would have replied, but he was instantly silenced by an imperious gesture from the King, who, rising from his seat, left the chamber in silence.

The presence of Henri IV in Brittany was the signal for festivity and rejoicing, and all that was fair and noble in the province was soon collected at Rennes in honour of his arrival; but despite these demonstrations of affection and respect, his watchful and anxious minister, the Duc de Sully, remarked that he occasionally gave way to fits of absence, and even of melancholy, which were quite unusual to him, and which consequently excited the alarm of the zealous Duke. He had, moreover, several times desired M. de Sully's attendance in a manner which induced him to believe that the King had something of importance to communicate, but the interviews had successively terminated without any such result; until, on one occasion, a few days after his interview with the Duc de Bouillon, Henry once more beckoned him to his side, and turning into a large garden which was attached to his residence, he there wreathed his fingers in those of the minister, as was his constant habit, and drawing him into a retired walk, commenced the conversation by relating in detail all that had passed between himself and the ducal rebel. He then digressed to recent political measures, and expressed himself strongly upon the advantages which tranquillity at home, as well as peace abroad, must ensure to the kingdom; after which, as if by some process of mental retrogression, he became suddenly more gloomy in his discourse; and observed, as if despite himself, that although he would struggle even to the end of his existence to secure these national advantages, he nevertheless felt that as the Queen had given him no son, all his endeavours must prove fruitless; since the contention which would necessarily arise between M. de Condé and the other Princes of the blood, when the important subject of the succession gave a free and sufficient motive for their jealousy, could not fail to renew the civil anarchy which he had been so anxious to terminate. He then, after a moment's silence, referred to the desire which had

Marie de Medicis

been formally expressed to him by the Parliament of Paris, that he should separate himself from Marguerite de Valois, and unite himself with some other princess who might give a Dauphin to France, and thus transmit to a son of his own line the crown which he now wore.

Sully, who was no less desirous than himself to ensure the prosperity of the nation to which he had devoted all the energies of his powerful and active mind, did not hesitate to suggest the expediency of his Majesty's immediate compliance with the prayer of his subjects, and entreat him in his turn to obtain a divorce, which by leaving him free, would enable him to make a happier choice; and he even assured the anxious monarch that he had already taken steps to ascertain that the Archbishop of Urbino and the Pope himself (who was fully aware of the importance of maintaining the peace of Europe, which must necessarily be endangered by a renewal of the intestine troubles in France) would both readily facilitate by every means in their power so politic and so desirable a measure.

Henry urged for a time his disinclination to contract a second marriage, alleging that his first had proved so unfortunate in every way, that he was reluctant to rivet anew the chain which had been so rudely riven asunder; but the unflinching minister did not fail to remind him that much as he owed to himself, he still owed even more to a people who had faith in his wisdom and generosity; and the frank-hearted King suffered himself, although with evident distaste, to be ultimately convinced.

He then began to pass in review all the marriageable princesses who were eligible to share his throne, but to each in succession he attached some objection which tended to weaken her claim. After what he had already undergone, as he declared, there were few women, and still fewer women of royal blood, to whom he would willingly a second time confide his chance of happiness. "In order not to encounter once more the same disappointment and displeasure", he said at length, "I must find in the next woman whom I may marry seven qualities with which I cannot dispense. She must be handsome, prudent, gentle, intellectual, fruitful, wealthy, and of high extraction; and thus I do not know a single princess in Europe calculated to satisfy my idea of feminine perfection".

Then, after a pause during which the minister remained silent, he added, with some inconsistency: "I would readily put up with the Spanish Infanta, despite both her age and her ugliness, did I espouse the Low Countries in her person; neither would I refuse the Princess Arabella of England, if, as it is alleged, the crown of that country really belonged to her, or even had she been declared heiress presumptive; but we cannot reasonably anticipate either contingency. I have heard also of several German princesses whose names I have forgotten, but I have no taste for the women of that country; besides which, it is on record that a German Queen nearly proved the ruin of the French nation; and thus they inspire me only with disgust".

Still Sully listened without reply, the King having commenced his confidence by assuming a position which rendered all argument worse than idle.

"They have talked to me likewise", resumed Henry more hurriedly, as disconcerted and annoyed by the expressive silence of his companion he began to walk more rapidly along the shaded path in which this conference took place; "they have talked to me of the sisters of Prince Maurice; but not only are they Huguenots, a fact which could not fail to give umbrage at the Court of Rome, but I have also heard reports that would render me averse to their alliance. Then the Duke of Florence has a niece, who is stated to be tolerably handsome, but she comes of one of the pettiest principalities of Christendom; and not more than sixty or eighty years ago her ancestors were merely the chief citizens of the town of which their successors are now the sovereigns; and, moreover, she is a daughter of the same race as Catherine de Medicis, who has been alike my own enemy and that of France".

Once more the King paused for breath, and glanced anxiously towards his minister, but Sully was inexorable, and continued to listen respectfully and attentively without uttering a syllable.

Marie de Medicis

“So much for the foreign princesses”, continued Henry with some irritation, when he found that his listener had resolved not to assist him either by word or gesture; “at least, I know of no others. And now for our own. There is my niece, Mademoiselle de Guise; and she is one of those whom I should prefer, despite the naughty tales that are told of her, for I place no faith in them; but she is too much devoted to the interests of her house, and I have reason to dread the restless ambition of her brothers”.

The Princesses of Mayenne, of Aumale, and of Longueville, were next the subject of the royal comments; but they were all either too fair or too dark, too old or too plain; nor were Mesdemoiselles de Rohan, de Luxembourg, or de Guéménée more fortunate: the first was a Calvinist, the second too young, and the third not to his taste.

Long ere the King had arrived at this point of his discourse, the keen-sighted minister had fathomed his determination to raise some obstacle in every instance; and he began to entertain a suspicion that this was not done without a powerful motive, which he immediately became anxious to comprehend. Thus, therefore, when Henry pressed him to declare his sentiments upon the subject, he answered cautiously: “I cannot, in truth, hazard an opinion, Sire; nor can I even understand the bent of your own wishes. Thus much only do I comprehend--that you consent to take another wife, but that you can discover no princess throughout Europe with whom you are willing to share the throne of France. From the manner in which you spoke of the Infanta, it nevertheless appeared as though a rich heiress would not be unacceptable; but surely you do not expect that Heaven will resuscitate in your favour a Marguerite de Flandres, a Marie de Bourgogne, or even permit Elizabeth of England to grow young again”.

“I anticipate nothing of the kind”, was the sharp retort; “but how know I, even were I to marry one of the princesses I have enumerated, that I should be more fortunate than I have hitherto been? If beauty and youth could have ensured to me the blessing of a Dauphin, had I not every right to anticipate a different result in my union with Madame Marguerite? I could not brook a second mortification of the like description, and therefore I am cautious. And now, as I have failed to satisfy myself upon this point, tell me, do you know of any one woman in whom are combined all the qualities which I have declared to be requisite in a Queen of France?”

“The question is one of too important a nature, Sire, to be answered upon the instant,” said Sully, “and the rather that I have never hitherto turned my attention to the subject”.

“And what would you say”, asked Henry with ill-concealed anxiety, “were I to tell you that such an one exists in my own kingdom?”

“I should say, Sire, that you have greatly the advantage over myself; and also that the lady to whom you allude must necessarily be a widow”.

“Just as you please”, retorted the King; “but if you refuse to guess, I will name her”.

“Do so”, said Sully with increasing surprise; “for I confess that the riddle is beyond my reach”.

“Rather say that you do not wish to solve it”, was the cold reply; “for you cannot deny that all the qualities upon which I insist are to be found combined in the person of the Duchesse de Beaufort”.

“Your mistress, Sire!”

“I do not affirm that I have any intention, in the event of my release from my present marriage, of making the Duchess my wife”, pursued Henry with some embarrassment; “but I was anxious to learn what you would say, if, unable to find another woman to my taste, I should one day see fit to do so”.

“Say, Sire?” echoed the minister, struggling to conceal his consternation under an affected gaiety; “I should probably be of the same opinion as the rest of your subjects”.

Marie de Medicis

The King had, however, made so violent an effort over himself, in order to test the amount of forbearance which he might anticipate in his favourite counsellor, and was so desirous to ascertain his real sentiments upon this important subject, that he exclaimed impatiently: "I command you to speak freely; you have acquired the right to utter unpalatable truths; do not, therefore, fear that I shall take offence whenever our conversation is purely confidential, although I should assuredly resent such a liberty in public".

The reply of the upright minister, thus authorized, was worthy alike of the monarch who had made such an appeal, and of the man to whom it was addressed. He placed before the eyes of his royal master the opprobrium with which an alliance of the nature at which he had hinted must inevitably cover his own name, and the affront it would entail upon every sovereign in Europe. He reminded him also that the legitimation of the sons of Madame de Beaufort, and the extraordinary and strictly regal ceremonies which he had recently permitted at the baptism of the younger of the two (throughout the whole of which the infant had been recognized as a prince of the blood-royal, although the King had himself refused to allow the registry of the proceedings until they were revised, and the obnoxious passages rescinded), could not fail, should she ever become Queen of France, in the event of her having other children, to plunge the nation into those very struggles for the succession from which he had just declared his anxiety to preserve it.

"And this strife, Sire", he concluded fearlessly, "would be even more formidable and more frightful than that to which you so anxiously alluded; for you will do well to remember that not only the arena in which it must take place will be your own beloved kingdom of France, while the whole of civilised Europe stands looking on, but that it will be a contest between the son of M. de Liancourt and the King's mistress--the son of Madame de Monceaux, the divorced wife of an obscure noble, and the declared favourite of the sovereign; and, finally, between these, the children of shame, and the Dauphin of France, the son of Henri IV and his Queen. I leave you, Sire, to reflect upon this startling fact before I venture further".

"And you do well", said the monarch, as he turned away; "for truly you have said enough for once".

It will be readily conceived that at the close of this conference M. de Sully was considerably less anxious than before to effect the divorce of the infatuated sovereign; nor was he sorry to remind Henry, when he next touched upon the subject, that they had both been premature in discussing the preliminaries of a second marriage before they had succeeded in cancelling the first. It was true that Clement VIII, in his desire to maintain the peace of Europe, had readily entered into the arguments of MM. de Marquemont, d'Ossat, and Duperron, whom the Duke had, by command of the monarch, entrusted with this difficult and dangerous mission, when they represented that the birth of a dauphin must necessarily avert all risk of a civil war in France, together with the utter hopelessness of such an event unless their royal master were released from his present engagements; and that the sovereign-pontiff had even expressed his willingness to second the wishes of the French monarch. But the consent of Marguerite herself was no less important; and with a view to obtain this, the minister addressed to her a letter, in which he expressed his ardent desire to effect a reconciliation between herself and the King, in order that the prayers of the nation might be answered by the birth of a Dauphin; or, should she deem such an event impossible, to entreat of her to pardon him if he ventured to take the liberty of imploring her Majesty to make a still greater sacrifice.

Sully had felt that it was unnecessary to explain himself more clearly, as a reconciliation between Henri IV and his erring consort had, from the profligate life which she was known to have led at Usson, become utterly impossible; nor could she doubt for an instant the nature of the sacrifice which was required at her hands. It was not, therefore, without great anxiety that he awaited her reply, which did not reach him for the space of five months; at the expiration of which period he received a letter, wherein she averred her willingness to submit to the pleasure of the King, for whose forbearance she expressed herself grateful; offering at the same time her acknowledgments to the Duke himself for the interest which he exhibited towards her

Marie de Medicis

person. From this period a continued correspondence was maintained between the exiled Queen and the minister; and she proved so little exacting in the conditions which she required as the price of her concession, that the affair would have been concluded without difficulty, had not the favourite, who was privy to the negotiation, calculating upon her influence over the mind of the monarch, suddenly assumed an attitude which arrested its progress.

For a considerable time she had aspired to the throne; but it was not until she learnt that the agents of the King in Rome were labouring to effect the dissolution of his marriage with Marguerite de Valois, and that the Duc de Luxembourg was also about to visit the Papal Court in order to hasten the conclusion of the negotiations, that she openly declared her views to Sillery, whom she knew to be already well affected towards her, declaring that should he be instrumental in inducing the King to make her his wife, she would pledge herself to obtain the seals for him on his return from Rome, as well as the dignity of chancellor so soon as it should be vacant.

Sillery, whose ambition was aroused, was not slow to obey her wishes; and, finding the Pope unwilling to lend himself to the haste which was required of him, he not only informed him privately that, in the event of a divorce, his royal master was ready to espouse the Princesse Marie de Medicis, his kinswoman (although at this period Henry evinced no inclination towards such an alliance), but even when he discovered that his Holiness remained unmoved by this prospect of family aggrandizement, he ventured so far as to hint, in conjunction with the Cardinal d'Ossat, that it was probable, should the Pontiff continue to withhold his consent to the annulment of the King's present marriage, he would dispense with it altogether, and make the Duchesse de Beaufort Queen of France: a threat which so alarmed the sovereign-prelate that, immediately declaring that he placed the whole affair in the hands of God, he commanded a general fast throughout Rome, and shut himself up in his oratory, where he continued for a considerable time in fervent prayer. On his reappearance he was calm, and simply remarked: "God has provided for it".

A few days subsequently a courier arrived at Rome with intelligence of the death of the Duchess.

Meanwhile Gabrielle, by her unbridled vanity, had counteracted all the exertions of her partisans. Aware of her power over the King, and believing that this divorce from Marguerite once obtained, she should find little difficulty in overcoming all other obstacles, she was unguarded enough prematurely to assume the state and pretensions of the regality to which she aspired, affecting airs of patronage towards the greatest ladies of the Court, and lavishing the most profuse promises upon the sycophants and flatterers by whom she was surrounded. The infatuation of the King, whose passion for his arrogant mistress appeared to increase with time, tended, as a natural consequence, to encourage these unseemly demonstrations; nor did the friends of the exiled Queen fail to render her cognizant of every extravagance committed by the woman who aspired to become her successor; upon which Marguerite, who, morally fallen as she was in her own person, had never forgotten that she was alike the daughter and the consort of a king, suddenly withdrew her consent to the proposed divorce; declaring, in terms more forcible than delicate, that no woman of blighted character should ever, through her agency, usurp her place.

The sudden and frightful death of the Duchess, which shortly afterwards supervened, having, however, removed her only objection to the proposed measure, her marriage with the King was, at length, finally declared null and void, to the equal satisfaction of both parties. The event which Marguerite had dreaded had now become impossible, and she at once forwarded a personal requisition to Rome, in which she declared that "it was in opposition to her own free will that her royal brother King Charles IX and the Queen-mother had effected an alliance to which she had consented only with her lips, but not with her heart; and that the King her husband and herself being related in the third degree, she besought his Holiness to declare the nullity of the said marriage".

On the receipt of this application, the Pontiff--having previously ascertained that the demand of Henry himself was based on precisely the same arguments, and still entertaining

Marie de Medicis

the hope held out to him by Sillery that the King would, when liberated from his present wife, espouse one of his own relatives--immediately appointed a committee, composed of the Cardinal de Joyeuse, the Archbishop of Arles, and the Bishop of Modena, his nuncio and nephew, instructing them, should they find all circumstances as they were represented, to declare forthwith the dissolution of the marriage.

Meanwhile the King, whose first burst of grief at the loss of the Duchess had been so violent that he fainted in his carriage on receiving the intelligence, and afterwards shut himself up in the palace of Fontainebleau during several days, refusing to see the princes of the blood and the great nobles who hastened to offer their condolences, and retaining about his person only half a dozen courtiers to whom he was personally attached, had recovered from the shock sufficiently to resume his usual habits of dissipation and amusement. In the extremity of his sorrow he had commanded a general Court mourning, and himself set the example by assuming a black dress for the first week; but as his regret became moderated, he exchanged his sables for a suit of violet, in which costume he received a deputation from the Parliament of Paris which was sent to condole with him upon the bereavement that he had undergone! while the intelligence which reached him of the presumed treachery of the Duc de Biron, by compelling his removal to Blois, where he could more readily investigate the affair, completed a cure already more than half accomplished. There the sensual monarch abandoned himself to the pleasures of the table, to high play, and to those exciting amusements which throughout his whole life at intervals annihilated the monarch in the man: while the circle by which he had surrounded himself, and which consisted of M. le Grand, the Comte de Lude, MM. de Thermes, de Castelnau, de Calosse, de Montglat, de Frontenac, and de Bassompierre, was but ill calculated to arouse in him better and nobler feelings. Ambitious, wealthy, witty, and obsequious, they were one and all interested in flattering his vanity, gratifying his tastes, and pandering to his passions; and it is melancholy to contemplate the perfect self-gratulation with which some of the highest-born nobles of the time have in their personal memoirs chronicled the unblushing subserviency with which they lent themselves to the encouragement of the worst and most debasing qualities of their sovereign. Even before his departure for Blois, and during the period of his temporary retirement from the Court, while Henry still wore the mourning habits which he had assumed in honour of his dead mistress, the more intimate of his associates could discover no means of consolation more effective than by inducing him to select another favourite.

“All the Court”, says a quaint old chronicler, himself a member of the royal circle, “were aware that the King had a heart which could not long preserve its liberty without attaching itself to some new object, a knowledge which induced the flatterers at Court who had discovered his weakness for the other sex to leave nothing undone to urge him onward in this taste, and to make their fortunes by his defeat”.

Unfortunately the natural character of the King lent itself only too readily to their designs; and, as already stated, they had profited by the opportunity afforded to them during the short retreat at Fontainebleau to arouse the curiosity of Henry on the subject of a new beauty. Whether at table, at play, or lounging beneath the shady avenues of the stately park, the name of Catherine Henriette d'Entragues was constantly introduced into the conversation, and always with the most enthusiastic encomiums; nor was it long ere their pertinacity produced the desired effect, and the monarch expressed his desire to see the paragon of whom they all professed to be enamoured. A hunting-party was accordingly organized in the neighbourhood of the château of Malesherbes, where the Marquis d'Entragues was then residing with his family; and the fact no sooner became known to the mother of the young beauty, whose ambition was greater than her morality, and who was aware of the efforts which had been made to induce Henry to replace the deceased Duchess by a new favourite, than she despatched a messenger to entreat of his Majesty to rest himself under her roof after the fatigue of the chase. The invitation was accepted, and on his arrival Henriette was presented to the King, who was immediately captivated by her wit, and that charm of youthfulness which had for some time ceased to enhance the loveliness of the once faultless Gabrielle. At this period Mademoiselle d'Entragues had not quite attained her twentieth year, but she was already well versed in the art of fascination. Advisedly overlooking the monarch in the man,

she conversed with a perfect self-possession, which enabled her to display all the resources of a cultivated mind and a lively temperament; while Henry was enchanted by a gaiety and absence of constraint which placed him at once on the most familiar footing with his young and brilliant hostess; and thus instead of departing on the morrow, as had been his original design, he remained during several days at Malesherbes, constantly attended by the Marquise and her daughter, who were even invited to share the royal table.

The Duchesse de Beaufort had been dead only three weeks, and already the sensual monarch had elected her successor.

Less regularly handsome than Gabrielle d'Estrées, Mademoiselle d'Entragues was even more attractive from the graceful vivacity of her manner, her brilliant sallies, and her aptitude in availing herself of the resources of an extensive and desultory course of study. She remembered that, in all probability, death alone had prevented Gabrielle d'Estrées from ascending the French throne; and she was aware that, although less classically beautiful than the deceased Duchess, she was eminently her superior in youth and intellect, and, above all, in that sparkling conversational talent which is so valuable amid the *ennui* of a court. Well versed in the nature of the monarch with whom she had to deal, Mademoiselle d'Entragues accordingly gave free course to the animation and playfulness by which Henry was so easily enthralled; skilfully turning the sharp and almost imperceptible point of her satire against the younger and handsomer of his courtiers, and thus flattering at once his vanity and his self-love. Still, the passion of the King made no progress save in his own breast. At times Mademoiselle d'Entragues affected to treat his professions as a mere pleasantry, and at others to resent them as an affront to her honour; at one moment confessing that he alone could ever touch her heart, and bewailing that destiny should have placed him upon a throne, and thus beyond the reach of her affection; and at another declaring herself ready to make any sacrifice rather than resign her claim upon his love, save only that by which she could be enabled to return it. This skilful conduct served, as she had intended that it should do, merely to irritate the passion of the monarch, who, unconscious of the extent of her ambition, believed her to be simply anxious to secure herself against future disappointment and the anger of her family; and thus finding that his entreaties were unavailing, he resolved to employ another argument of which he had already frequently tested the efficacy, and on his return to Fontainebleau he despatched the Comte de Lude to the lady with what were in that age termed "propositions".

It is, from this circumstance, sufficiently clear that Henry himself was far from feeling any inclination to share his throne with the daughter of Charles IX's mistress; and that, despite the infatuation under which he laboured, he already estimated at its true price the value of Henrietta's affection. Nevertheless, the wily beauty remained for some short time proof against the representations of the royal envoy; nor was it until the equally wily courtier hinted that Mademoiselle d'Entragues would do well to reflect ere she declined the overtures of which he was the bearer, as there was reason to believe that the King had, on a recent visit to the widowed Queen Louise at Chenonceaux, become enamoured of Mademoiselle la Bourdaisière, one of her maids of honour, that the startled beauty, who had deemed herself secure of her royal conquest, was induced to affix a price to the concession which she was called upon to make, and that M. de Lude returned bearing her *ultimatum* to the King.

This *ultimatum* amounted to no less than a hundred thousand crowns; and, setting aside the voluntary degradation of the lady--a degradation which would appear to have been more than sufficient to disgust any man of delicacy who sought to be loved for his own sake--it was a demand which even startled the inconsiderate monarch himself, although he had not sufficient self-command to meet it with the contempt that it was calculated to excite. Well had it been, alike for himself and for the nation generally, had he suffered his better judgment on this occasion to assume the ascendant, and misdoubted, as he well might, the tears and protestations of so interested a person; particularly, when he could not fail to remember that he had been deceived even by Gabrielle d'Estrées, whom he had overwhelmed with riches and honours, and who had voluntarily given herself to him when he was young and handsome; whereas he was now in the decline of life, and was suing for the love of one so much his junior. Unfortunately, however, reason waged a most unequal warfare with passion in the breast of

Marie de Medicis

the French sovereign; and voluntarily overlooking alike the enormity of the demand, and the circumstances under which it was made, he at once despatched an order to the finance-minister to supply the required sum. Sully had no alternative save obedience; he did not even venture upon expostulation; but he did better. When admitted to the royal closet, he alluded in general terms to the extreme difficulty which he anticipated in raising the required amount of four millions for the renewal of the Swiss alliance; and then, approaching the table beside which the King was seated, he proceeded slowly and ostentatiously to count the hundred thousand crowns destined to satisfy the cupidity of Mademoiselle d'Entragues. He had been careful to cause the whole amount to be delivered in silver; and it was not, therefore, without an emotion which he failed to conceal, that Henry saw the numerous piles of money which gradually rose before him and overspread the table.

Nevertheless, although he could not control an exclamation of astonishment, he made no effort to retrieve his error; but, after the departure of M. de Sully, placed the required amount in the hands of the Comte de Lude, who hastened to transfer it to those of the frail beauty. It was not until after the receipt of this enormous present that the Marquis d'Entragues and his step-son affected to suspect the design of the King, and upbraided M. de Lude with the part which he had acted, desiring him never again to enter a house which he sought only to dishonour; an accusation which, from the lips of the husband of Marie Touchet, was a mere epigram. He, however, followed up this demonstration by removing his daughter from Malesherbes to Marcoussis, although with what intention it is difficult to determine, as the King at once proceeded thither, and at once obtained an interview.

Little accustomed to indulge in a prodigality so reckless, Henry had flattered himself that the affair was concluded; but such was by no means the intention of the young lady and her family. Henriette, indeed, received her royal lover with the most exaggerated assurances of affection and gratitude; but she nevertheless persisted in declaring that she was so closely watched as to be no longer mistress of her own actions, and so intimidated by the threats of her father that she dared not act in opposition to his will. In vain did the King remonstrate, argue, and upbraid; the lady remained firm, affecting to bewail the state of coercion in which she was kept, and entreating Henry to exert his influence to overcome the repugnance of her family to their mutual happiness. To his anger she opposed her tears; to his resentment, her fascinations; and when at length she discovered that the royal patience was rapidly failing, although her power over his feelings remained unshaken, she ventured upon the last bold effort of her ambition, by protesting to the infatuated sovereign that her father had remained deaf to all her entreaties, and that the only concession which she could induce him to make was one which she had not courage to communicate to his Majesty. As she had, of course, anticipated, Henry at once desired her to inform him of the nature of the fresh demand which was to be made upon his tenderness; when, with well-acted reluctance, Mademoiselle d'Entragues repeated a conversation that she had held with the Marquis, at the close of which he had assured her that he would never consent to see her the mistress of the King until she had received a written promise of marriage under the royal hand, provided she became, within a year, the mother of a son.

“In vain, Sire”, she pursued hurriedly, as she perceived a cloud gather upon the brow of the monarch—“in vain did I seek to overcome the scruples of my parents, and represent to them the utter inutility of such a document; they declared that they sought only to preserve the honour of their house. And you well know, Sire”, she continued with an appealing smile, “that, as I ventured to remind them, your word is of equal value with your signature, as no mere subject could dare to summon a great king like yourself to perform any promise--you, who have fifty thousand men at your command to enforce your will! But all my reasoning was vain. Upon this point they are firm. Thus then, since there is no other hope, and that they insist upon this empty form, why should you not indulge their whim, when it cannot involve the slightest consequence? If you love as I do, can you hesitate to comply with their desire? Name what conditions you please on your side, and I am ready to accept them--too happy to obey your slightest wish”.

Marie de Medicis

Suffice it that the modern Delilah triumphed, and that the King was induced to promise the required document; a weakness rendered the less excusable, if indeed, as Sully broadly asserts: "Henry was not so blind but that he saw clearly how this woman sought to deceive him. I say nothing of the reasons which he also had to believe her to be anything rather than a vestal; nor of the state intrigues of which her father, her mother, her brother, and herself had been convicted, and which had drawn down upon all the family an order to leave Paris, which I had quite recently signified to them in the name of his Majesty".

As it is difficult to decide which of the two the Duke sought in his *Memoirs* to praise the most unsparingly, the sovereign or himself, the epithet of "this weak Prince", which he applies to Henry on the present occasion, proves the full force of his annoyance. He, moreover, gives a very detailed account of an interview which took place between them upon the subject of the document in question; even declaring that he tore it up when his royal master placed it in his hands; and upon being asked by the King if he were mad, had replied by saying: "Would to God that I were the only madman in France!" As, however, I do not find the same anecdote recorded elsewhere by any contemporaneous authority, I will not delay the narrative by inserting it at length; and the rather as, although from the influence subsequently exercised over the fortunes of Marie de Medicis by the frail favourite I have already been compelled to dwell thus long upon her history, it is one which I am naturally anxious to abridge as much as possible. I shall therefore only add that the same biographer goes on to state that the contract which he had destroyed was rewritten by the King himself, who within an hour afterwards was on horseback and on his way to Malesherbes, where he sojourned two days. It is, of course, impossible to decide whether Henry had ever seriously contemplated the fulfilment of so degrading an engagement; but it is certain that only a few months subsequently he presented to Mademoiselle d'Entragues the estate of Verneuil, and that thenceforward she assumed the title of Marquise, coupled with the name of her new possession.

CHAPTER II

1599



Marie de Medicis

The infatuation of the King for his new favourite decided M. de Sully to hasten by every means in his power the marriage of the sovereign with some European princess worthy to share his throne, and he accordingly instructed the royal agents at Rome to demand forthwith the hand of Marie de Medicis for the French monarch; while Henry, absorbed in his passion, permitted him to act as he saw fit, offering neither assistance nor impediment to a negotiation on which his domestic happiness was in future to depend. Nor was it until the Duke urged upon him the necessity of selecting such of his nobility as it was his pleasure to entrust with the management of the affair in conjunction with the ambassador whom the Grand Duke, her uncle, was about to despatch to Paris, that, by dint of importunity, he was induced to name M. de Sully himself, the Constable, the Chancellor, and the Sieur de Villeroy, whose son, M. d'Alincourt, had previously been sent to Rome to offer the acknowledgments of Henry to his Holiness for the dissolution of his marriage with Queen Marguerite, and to apprise him of that which he was desirous to contract with Marie de Medicis. This duty performed, M. d'Alincourt solicited the permission of the Pope to accompany Sillery to Florence to pay his respects to the Princess and to negotiate the alliance; and having obtained the required sanction, the two nobles set forth upon their embassy, quite unaware that the preliminaries were already nearly concluded. So determined, indeed, had been the minister that no time should be afforded to the King to redeem the pledge which he had given to the favourite that Joannini, the agent of the Grand Duke, had not been many days in Paris before the articles were drawn up and signed on both sides, and Sully was commissioned by the other contracting parties to communicate the termination of their labours to his royal master. The account given by the minister of this interview is highly characteristic.

“He had not”, says the chronicler, “anticipated such expedition; and thus when I had answered his question of where I had come from by ‘We come, Sire, from marrying you’, the Prince remained for a quarter of an hour as though he had been stricken by thunder; then he began to pace the chamber with long strides, biting his nails, scratching his head, and absorbed by reflections which agitated him so violently that he was a considerable time before he was able to speak to me. I entertained no doubt that all my previous representations were now producing their effect; and so it proved, for ultimately recovering himself like a man who has at length taken a decided resolution: ‘Well’, said he, striking his hands together, ‘well, then, so be it; there is no alternative, since for the good of my kingdom you say that I must marry’.”

Such was the ungracious acceptance of the haughty Florentine Princess at the hands of her future bridegroom.

The indignation of Madame de Verneuil was unbounded when she ascertained that she had for ever lost all hope of ascending the throne of France; but it is nevertheless certain that she was enabled to dissimulate sufficiently to render her society indispensable to the King, and to accept with a good grace the equivocal honours of her position. Her brother, the Comte d'Auvergne, was, however, less placable; he had always affected to believe in the validity of her claim upon the King, and his naturally restless and dissatisfied character led him, under the pretext of avenging her wrongs, to enter into a conspiracy which had recently been formed against the person of the King, whom certain malcontents sought to deprive alike of his throne and of his liberty, and to supersede in his sovereignty by one of the Princes of the Blood. Among others, the Duke of Savoy, who, during the troubles of 1588, had taken possession of the marquisate of Saluzzo, which he refused to restore, was said to be implicated in this plot; and he was the more strongly suspected as it had been ascertained that he had constant communication with several individuals at the French Court, and that he had tampered with certain of the nobles; among others, with the Duc de Biron. He had also succeeded in attaching to his interests the Duchesse de Beaufort; and had, during her lifetime, proposed to the King to visit France in person in order to effect a compromise, which he anticipated that, under her auspices, he should be enabled to conclude with advantage to himself. Henry had accepted the proposition; and although after the death of the Duchess, M. de Savoie endeavoured to rescind his resolution, he found himself so far compromised that he was compelled to carry out his original purpose; and accordingly, on the 1st of December, he left Chambéry with a train of twelve hundred horse, accompanied by the greater part of his ministers, his nobles, and the most magnificent members of his Court. As the French King had issued orders that he should,

Marie de Medicis

in every city through which he passed, he received with regal honours, he did not reach Fontainebleau until the 14th of the same month, where he arrived just as his royal host was mounting his horse to meet him. As he approached Henry he bent his knee, but the King immediately raised and embraced him with great cordiality; and during the seven days which he spent at Fontainebleau the Court was one scene of splendour and dissipation. Balls, jousts, and hunting-parties succeeded each other without intermission, but the Duke soon perceived that the monarch had no intention of taking the initiative on the errand which had brought him to France, a caution from which he justly augured no favourable result to his expedition; while on his side the subject was never alluded to by Sully or any of the other ministers without his giving the most unequivocal proofs of his determination to retain the marquisate

Meanwhile his conduct was governed by the most subtle policy; his bearing towards the monarch was at once deferential and familiar; his liberality was unbounded; and his courtesy towards the great nobles and the officials of the Court untiring and dignified.

On the eighth day after the arrival of the Duke at Fontainebleau the Court removed to Paris, where Henry had caused apartments to be prepared for his royal guest in the Louvre; but M. de Savoie, after offering his acknowledgments for the proffered honour, preferred to take up his abode in the house of his relative the Duc de Nemours, near the Augustine convent. The whole of the Christmas festival was spent in a succession of amusements as splendid as those with which he had been originally received; and on the 1st of January 1600, when it is customary in France to exchange presents, the Duke repaid all this magnificence by a profusion almost unprecedented. To the King, his offering was two large bowls and vases of crystal so exquisitely worked as to be considered unrivalled; while he tendered to Madame de Verneuil, who did the honours of the royal circle, and whom he was anxious to attach to his interests, a valuable collection of diamonds and other precious stones. Nor did his liberality end here, for there was not a great noble of the Court who was not enriched by his munificence save the Duc de Biron; who, from policy, declined to accept some magnificent horses which were sent to him in the name of the Prince; and Sully, who, upon being presented by M. des Alimes, one of the principal Savoyard lords, with a snuff-box enriched with diamonds, and estimated at fifteen thousand crowns, containing a portrait of M. de Savoie, at once perceived that the costly offering was intended as a bribe, and declined to receive it, declaring that he had made a vow never to accept any present of value except from his own sovereign.

The King responded to the liberality of his guest by the gift of a diamond star, of which the centre brilliant covered a miniature of Madame de Verneuil, together with other valuable jewels; but the profusion of the Duke was so great that his whole outlay upon this occasion was estimated at no less a sum than four hundred thousand crowns; and when it was believed that he must have exhausted his resources, he still further astonished the French nobles by appearing at a ball which he gave to the Court in a dress entirely covered with precious stones, and valued at a far higher sum than that which he had expended.

That this profusion had been dictated by policy rather than by generosity was sufficiently apparent; and whatever effect it might have produced upon the minds of the courtiers, M. de Savoie was soon made aware that it had been utterly powerless over the resolution of the sovereign; for he no sooner ventured to allude to the subject of his journey, than Henry with his accustomed frankness declared his determination to enforce his right to the marquisate which his guest had usurped; an assurance which determined the Duke to request that a commission might be appointed to examine their conflicting claims.

His demand was conceded; commissioners were appointed on both sides, and the question was rigidly discussed; propositions were mutually made and mutually declined; until finally the King, by the advice of his council, despatched Sebastian Zamet to the Duke of Savoy, with full authority to negotiate either a restitution or an exchange; giving him at the same time three months in which to consult his nobility, and to decide upon the one measure or the other.

So skilfully did the envoy perform his mission, that he ultimately succeeded in inducing M. de Savoie to propose to the King, as compensation for the contested marquisate, the cession

Marie de Medicis

of certain towns and citadels named in a treaty which was signed by the two contracting parties; and this arrangement had no sooner been concluded than the court resumed its career of gaiety; nor was it until the 7th of March that the Duke finally took leave of his royal entertainer, and commenced his homeward journey.

Meanwhile the Court poets had not been idle; and while the Duke of Savoy had recognized the supremacy of the favourite by costly gifts, her favour had been courted by the most popular of those time-serving bards who were accustomed to make their talents subservient to their interests; nor is it the least remarkable feature of the age that the three most fashionable rhymesters in the circles of gallantry were all ecclesiastics, and that the charms and *virtues* of Henriette d'Entragues were celebrated by a cardinal, a bishop, and an abbé!

Her most palmy days were, however, at an end, for hitherto she had reigned undisputed mistress of the King's affections, and she was henceforward to hold at best a divided sway. On the 5th of May, M. d'Alincourt arrived at Fontainebleau from Florence, with the intelligence that, on the 25th of the preceding month, the contract of marriage between the French monarch and the Princesse Marie de Medicis had been signed at the Palazzo Pitti, in the presence of Carlo-Antonio Putéi, Archbishop of Pisa, and the Duke of Bracciano; and that the bride brought as her dowry six hundred thousand crowns, besides jewels and other ornaments of value. He further stated that a *Te Deum* had been chanted, both in the Palazzo Pitti and at the church of the Annunciation at Florence; after which the Princesse Marie, declared Queen of France, had dined in public, seated under a dais above her uncle; and at the conclusion of the repast, the Duke of Bracciano had presented the water to wash her hands, and the Marquis de Sillery, the French Ambassador, the napkin upon which she wiped them. Having made his report, and delivered his despatches, M. d'Alincourt placed in the hands of the King a portrait of Marie richly set in brilliants, which had been entrusted to him for that purpose; and the lover of Madame de Verneuil found himself solemnly betrothed.

This fact, however, produced little visible effect upon the Court circle, and still less upon the King himself; and after having afforded a subject of conversation for a brief interval, it soon appeared to be entirely forgotten amid the more absorbing matters of interest by which the minds of the different individuals were severally engrossed. From policy, the betrothal was never mentioned by the courtiers in the presence of Madame de Verneuil, a restraint which caused it to fall into partial oblivion; and the rather as the month of June had arrived without any demonstration on the part of the Duke of Savoy, who had availed himself of every possible pretext to evade the fulfilment of the treaty of Paris; and who had rendered it evident that force of arms alone could compel him to resign the usurped marquisate. Even the monarch himself became at length convinced of the impolicy of further delay, and resolved forthwith to advance to Lyons, whither Sully had already despatched both troops and artillery. M. de Savoie had, however, during his sojourn in France, made many partisans, who urged upon their sovereign the expediency of still affording to the Duke an opportunity of redeeming his pledge; and Henry, even against his better reason, listened the more complacently to their counsels that Madame de Verneuil was about to become a mother, and he shrank from the idea of separation from her at such a moment. Thus he delayed his journey until Sully, who was not long in discovering the cause of his inaction, renewed his expostulations with still greater emphasis, and finally induced him to make preparations for an immediate departure. As the hour arrived, however, he again wavered, until at length he declared his determination to be accompanied by the Marquise; but this arrangement was, from her state of health, soon found to be impossible; and after considerable difficulty he was persuaded to consent that she should await his return at Monceaux, whither he himself conducted her, with renewed protestations that he loved her well enough to resign even then the alliance with Marie de Medicis, and to make her his wife. This was precisely what the favourite still hoped to accomplish. She was aware of the extraordinary influence which she had obtained over the mind of her royal lover, and she looked forward to the birth of a son as the one thing necessary to her success. Accordingly, before she suffered the King to depart, she compelled him to promise that he would be near her during her illness; and then she reluctantly saw him set forth to Moulins,

Marie de Medicis

where he was detained for a fortnight, his council not being able to agree as to the expediency of the campaign.

There can be little doubt that under other circumstances Henry would have found means to bring them to a decision; but as he was enabled during their discussions to receive daily intelligence of the Marquise, he submitted quietly to a detention which seconded his own wishes.

At length the period arrived in which Madame de Verneuil was about to enforce her claim upon the tenderness of her royal lover, and already he spoke of returning for a while to Monceaux; when a violent storm, and the falling of a thunderbolt in the very chamber of the invalid, so affected her nervous system, that she lost the infant upon which she had based all her anticipations of greatness; and although the King hastened to condole with her upon her disappointment, and even remained in constant attendance upon her sick-bed until she was partially convalescent, the great link between them was necessarily broken; a fact of which she was so well aware that her temper gave way beneath the trial, and she bitterly upbraided her royal lover for the treachery of which she declared him to have been guilty in permitting his ministers to effect his betrothal with Marie de Medicis, when she had herself, as she affirmed, sacrificed everything for his sake. In order to pacify her anger, the King loaded her with new gifts, and consoled her by new protestations; nor did his weakness end there, for so soon as her health was sufficiently re-established, he wrote to entreat of her to join him at Lyons; although not before she had addressed to him a most submissive letter, in which she assured him that her whole happiness depended upon his affection, and that as she had too late become aware that his high rank had placed an inseparable barrier between them, and that her own insignificance precluded the possibility of her ever becoming his wife, she at least implored of him to leave to her the happiness of still remaining his mistress, and to continue to feel for her the same tenderness, with so many demonstrations of which he had hitherto honoured her.

This was an appeal to which the enamoured monarch willingly responded, and the nature of her reception at Lyons tended still further to restore peace between them. What the Lyonnese had previously done in honour of Diane de Poitiers, when, as the accredited and *official* mistress of Henri II, she visited their city, they repeated in honour of Madame de Verneuil, whose entrance within their gates was rather that of a crowned queen than a fallen woman; and this triumph was shortly afterwards augmented by her reception of the standards taken by the King at Charbonnières, which he caused to be conveyed to her as a proof of his devotion, and which she, with ostentatious pomp, transferred to the church of St. Just.

From Lyons, Henry proceeded to Grenoble, still accompanied by Madame de Verneuil, the Duke of Savoy having at length declared that rather than submit to the conditions which had been proposed to him, he would incur the hazard of a war. In consequence of this decision, immediate measures were taken by the French generals to march upon Saluzzo; and the Maréchal de Biron, although already strongly suspected of disaffection to his sovereign, having collected a body of troops, possessed himself of the whole territory of Brescia. The town of Bourg was stormed by Du Terrail, and taken, with the exception of the citadel; while M. de Créquy entered Savoy, and made himself master of the city of Montmelian, although the castle still held out.

Henry then resolved to enter Savoy in person; and having once more taken leave of the Marquise, who returned to Lyons, he marched upon Chambéry, which immediately capitulated; and thence he proceeded to possess himself of the citadels of Conflans and Charbonnières, which had hitherto been deemed impregnable. M. de Savoie, who had confided in the strength of his fortresses of Montmelian and Bourg, and who had continued to affect the most perfect indifference to the approach of the French troops, now became seriously alarmed, and made instant preparations to relieve the Marquis de Brandis, the governor of the former fortress, for which purpose he applied to Spain for assistance. This was, however, refused; and both places fell into the hands of the French monarch, who then successively took Chablais and Faussigny; after which he sat down before the fortress of St. Catherine, which the Savoyards had erected to overawe the Genevese.

Marie de Medicis

During the siege of Fort St. Catherine, intelligence reached the King of the arrival of the young Queen at Marseilles; and meanwhile the gratification of the Pope at an alliance so flattering to his pride had been of essential benefit to the French interest, as he had, in consequence, made no demonstration in favour of the Duke of Savoy, although it was not entirely without anxiety that he had seen the army of Henry approach his own dominions; but, satisfied that at such a conjuncture the French monarch would attempt no aggressive measures against Italy, he had consented to remain passive.

Madame de Verneuil was no sooner apprised of the landing of Marie de Medicis than, after having vehemently reproached the King for a haste which she designated as insulting to herself, she made instant preparations for her return to Paris, resolutely refusing to assist at the ceremonious reception of the new Queen; nor could the expostulations of Henry, even accompanied, as they were, by the most profuse proofs of his continued affection, induce her to rescind her determination. To every representation of the monarch she replied by reminding him that out of all the high nobles of his Court, he had seen fit to select the Duc de Bellegarde as the bearer of his marriage-procuration to the Grand Duke of Florence--thus indemnifying him to the utmost of his power for the mortification to which he had been subjected by the royal refusal to permit him to act personally as his proxy; while she assured him that she was not blind to the fact that this selection was meant as an additional affront to herself, in order to avenge the preposterous notion which his Majesty had adopted, that, after having previously paid his court to the Duchesse de Beaufort during her period of power, the Duke had since transferred his affections to the Marquise de Verneuil.

Under all circumstances, this accusation was most unfortunate and ill-judged, and should in itself have sufficed to open the eyes of the monarch, who had, assuredly, had sufficient experience in female tactics to be quite aware that where a woman is compelled mentally to condemn herself, she is the most anxious to transfer her fault to others, and to blame where she is conscious of being open to censure. Madame de Verneuil had not, however, in this instance at all miscalculated the extent of her influence over the royal mind; as, instead of resenting an impertinence which was well fitted to arouse his indignation, Henry weakly condescended to justify himself, and by this unmanly concession laid the foundation of all his subsequent domestic discomfort.

Madame de Verneuil returned to Paris, surrounded by adulation and splendour, and the King was left at liberty to bestow some portion of his thoughts upon his expected bride. It is probable, indeed, that the portrait of Marie presented to him by the Grand Duchess had excited his curiosity and flattered his self-love; for it was more than sufficiently attractive to command the attention of a monarch even less susceptible to female beauty than himself. Marie was still in the very bloom of life, having only just attained her twenty-fourth year; nor could the King have forgotten that when, some time previously, her portrait had been forwarded to the French Court together with that of the Spanish Infanta, Gabrielle d'Estrées, then in the full splendour of her own surpassing loveliness, had exclaimed as she examined them: "I should fear nothing from the Spaniard, but the Florentine is dangerous". From whatever impulse he might act, however, it is certain that after the departure of the favourite, Henry publicly expressed his perfect satisfaction with the marriage which he had been induced to contract, and lost no time in issuing his commands for the reception of his expected bride.

The Duc de Bellegarde, Grand Equerry of France, had reached Livorno on the 20th of September, accompanied by forty French nobles, all alike eager, by the magnificence of their appearance and the chivalry of their deportment, to uphold the honour of their royal master. Seven days subsequently, he entered Florence, where he delivered his credentials to the Grand Duke, having been previously joined by Antonio de Medicis with a great train of Florentine cavaliers who had been sent to meet him; and the same evening he had an interview with his new sovereign, to whom he presented the letters with which he had been entrusted by the King.

On the 4th of October, the Cardinal Aldobrandini, the nephew and legate of the Pope, who had already been preceded by the Duke of Mantua and the Venetian Ambassador, arrived

Marie de Medicis

in his turn at Florence, in order to perform the ceremony of the royal marriage. His Eminence was received at the gate of the city by the Grand Duke in person, and made his entry on horseback under a canopy supported by eight young Florentine nobles, preceded by all the ecclesiastical and secular bodies; while immediately behind him followed sixteen prelates, and fifty gentlemen of the first families in the duchy bearing halberds. On reaching the church, the Cardinal dismounted, and thence, after a brief prayer, he proceeded to the ducal palace. At the conclusion of the magnificent repast which awaited him, the legate, in the presence of his royal host, of the Dukes of Mantua and Bracciano, the Princes Juan and Antonio de Medicis, and the Sieur de Bellegarde, announced to the young Queen the entire satisfaction of the Sovereign-Pontiff at the union upon which he was about to pronounce a blessing: to which assurance she replied with grace and dignity.

On the morrow a high mass was celebrated by the Cardinal in the presence of the whole Court; and during its solemnization he was seated under a canopy of cloth of gold at the right-hand side of the altar, where a chair had been prepared for him upon a platform raised three steps above the floor. He had no sooner taken his place, than the Duc de Bellegarde, approaching the Princess (who occupied a similar seat of honour, together with her uncle, at the opposite side of the shrine), led her to the right hand of the legate; the Grand Duke at the same time placing himself upon his left, and presenting to his Eminence the procuration by which he was authorized to espouse his niece in the name of the King. The document was then transferred to two of the attendant prelates, by whom it was read aloud; and subsequently the authority given by the Pope for the solemnization of the marriage was, in like manner, made public. The remainder of the nuptial service was then performed amid perpetual salvos of artillery. In the evening a splendid ball took place at the palace, followed by a banquet, at which the new Queen occupied the upper seat, having on her right the legate of his Holiness, the Duke of Mantua, and the Grand Duke her uncle, who, in homage to her superior rank, ceded to her the place of honour; and on her left, the Duchesses of Mantua, Tuscany, and Bracciano; the Duke of Bracciano acting as equerry, and Don Juan, the brother of the Grand Duke, as cup-bearer.

The four following days were passed in a succession of festivities: hunting-parties, jousts, tiltings at the ring, racing, and every other description of manly sport occupying the hours of daylight, while the nights were devoted to balls and ballets, in which the Florentine nobility vied with their foreign visitors in every species of profusion and magnificence. Among other amusements, a comedy in five acts was represented, on which the outlay was stated to have amounted to the enormous sum of sixty thousand crowns.

At the close of the Court festivals, the Cardinal Aldobrandini took his leave of the distinguished party, and proceeded to Chambéry; but the Queen lingered with her family until the 13th of the month, upon which day, accompanied by the Grand-Duchess her aunt, the Duchess of Mantua her sister, her brother Don Antonio, the Duke of Bracciano, and the French Ambassador, she set forth upon her journey to her new kingdom.

Without being strictly beautiful, Marie de Medicis possessed a person at once pleasing and dignified. All the pride of her Italian blood flashed from her large dark eye, while the consciousness of her exalted rank lent a majesty to her deportment which occasionally, however, in moments of irritation, degenerated into haughtiness. Her intellect was quick and cultivated, but she was deficient alike in depth of judgment and in strength of character. Amiable, and even submissive in her intercourse with her favourites, she was vindictive and tyrannical towards those who fell under the ban of her displeasure; and with all the unscrupulous love of intrigue common to her race, she was nevertheless unguarded in her confidences, unstable in her purposes, and short-sighted in her policy. In temper she was hot, impatient, and irascible; in temperament, jealous and exacting; while her vanity and love of power perpetually made her the tool of those who sought to profit by her defects.

It is probable that throughout the whole of Europe no princess could have been selected less constituted to make the happiness of a sovereign who, like Henri IV, had not scrupled to avow to his minister that he dreaded domestic dissension far more than foreign warfare; but

Marie de Medicis

who at the same time did not hesitate, by his own irregularities, to arouse all the worst passions in the bosom of an outraged wife.

On the 17th of October the royal bride reached Livorno, where she made her entry in great pomp, and was received with the most enthusiastic acclamations; and on the following day she embarked in the state-galley of the Grand-Duke, one of the most magnificent vessels which had ever floated upon the blue waters of the Mediterranean. Seventy feet in length, it was impelled by fifty-four oars, and was richly gilded from stem to stern; the borders of the poop being inlaid with a profusion of lapis-lazuli, mother-of-pearl, ivory, and ebony. It was, moreover, ornamented by twenty large circles of iron interlaced, and studded with topaz, emeralds, pearls, and other precious stones; while the splendour of the interior perfectly corresponded with this gorgeous framework. In the principal cabin, which was hung and carpeted with cloth of gold, a seat of state had been arranged for the Queen, opposite to which were suspended the shields of France and of the house of Medicis side by side; the fleurs-de-lis of the former being composed of large diamonds, and the device of the latter represented by five immense rubies and a sapphire, with an enormous pearl above, and a fine emerald in the centre. This fairy vessel was followed by five other galleys furnished by the Pope, and six appertaining to the Grand Duke; and thus escorted Marie de Medicis reached Malta, where she was joined by another fleet which awaited her off that island; but, despite all this magnificence, the voyage of the Queen was anything but propitious, for after arriving at Esperies, where the authorities of Genoa proffered to her, with great respect, the attendance of their own flotilla, she had no sooner reached Portofino than she was compelled to anchor for several days from stress of weather. Unaccustomed as she was, however, to this mode of travelling, the high-spirited young Queen resisted all the entreaties of those about her, who were anxious that she should land until the wind had moderated, simply remarking that the King had given no directions to that effect; and retaining, amid all the dismay and discomfort by which she was surrounded, not only her self-command, but even her cheerfulness.

Meanwhile, Henry had no sooner ascertained the approach of his royal bride, than he forthwith despatched to welcome her, the Constable, the Chancellor, and the Dues de Nemours, de Ventadour, and de Guise; and these princes were followed on the ensuing day by the Cardinals de Joyeuse, de Gondy, and de Sourdis; after which he intimated his pleasure to all the several princesses and great ladies of the Court who were then sojourning at Grenoble in order to be near the royal army, that they should immediately set forth to pay their respects to their new sovereign, and remain in attendance upon her person until her entry into Paris; a command which was so literally obeyed, that three days afterwards the city was utterly stripped of the aspect of gaiety and splendour which had rendered it for a time an epitome of the capital itself.

On the 28th of October the Queen once more put to sea, and two days subsequently she entered the port of Toulon, where she landed under a canopy of cloth of gold, with her fine hair flowing over her shoulders. There she remained for two days, in order to recover from the effects of her voyage; after which she re-embarked and proceeded to Marseilles, where she arrived on the evening of Friday the 3rd of November. A gallery had been constructed from the port to the grand entrance of the palace in which apartments had been prepared for her; and on stepping from her galley, she was welcomed by the Chancellor, who announced to her the orders that he had received from the King relative to her reception, and presented to her Majesty the Connétable--Duc de Montmorency, and the Ducs de Nemours and de Ventadour. The consuls and citizens then tendered to her upon their knees the keys of the city in gold, linked together by a chain of the same precious metal; after which ceremony, the young Queen was conducted to the palace under a rich canopy, preceded by the Constable, surrounded by the Cardinals and prelates who had been sent to welcome her, and followed by the wife of the Chancellor, and the other great ladies of the Court. So long a delay having occurred between her betrothal and her marriage, the Princess had been enabled to render herself mistress of the language of her new country; and the satisfaction of the courtiers was consequently undisguised when she offered her acknowledgments for the courtesy of her reception in their own tongue; a gratification which was enhanced by the fact that Marie had made no effort to assimilate her costume to that of the French Court, but appeared in a robe of cloth of gold on a

Marie de Medicis

blue ground, fashioned in the Italian taste, and with her fine fair hair simply braided and utterly destitute of powder; a circumstance which had already sufficed to awaken the jealousy of the French princesses.

On the following day the Queen held a reception in the great hall of the palace, and graciously listened, surrounded by her august relatives, to the eloquent and celebrated harangue of M. du Vair, the president of the Parliament of Provence; to which she had no sooner replied than she hastened to examine from the balcony a sumptuous state-carriage presented to her by the King, and then retired to her own apartments, attended by her personal suite. Of the royal vehicle in question Cayet gives a minute description, which we transcribe as affording an accurate idea of the taste displayed in that age in the decoration of coaches: "It was", he says, "covered with brown velvet and trimmed with silver tinsel on the outside; and within it was lined with carnation-coloured velvet, embroidered with gold and silver. The curtains were of carnation damask, and it was drawn by four gray horses". These royal conveyances were, however, far less convenient than showy, being cumbrous and ungraceful in form, rudely suspended upon leather straps, and devoid of windows, the use of glass not becoming known until the succeeding reign.

On the morrow during her toilette the Queen received the principal ladies of the city, who had the honour of accompanying her to the temporary chapel which adjoined the principal saloon, where a high mass was performed with all the magnificent accessories of which it was susceptible; the numerous prelates and high dignitaries of the Church then assembled at Marseilles assisting at its celebration. The subsequent days were spent in courtly festivities and a survey of the noble city, where the ponderous and gilded coach of the royal bride was followed by the wondering acclamations of the dazzled and delighted populace, probably little less dazzled and delighted than herself; for Marie de Medicis, young and ambitious, could not but be forcibly struck by the contrast of her present splendour with the comparative obscurity of the Court to which she had been previously habituated.

On the 16th of the month, however, she experienced her first trial, in a separation from the Grand Duchess her aunt, and the Duchess of Mantua her sister, who then took their leave, and returned to Florence in the galleys which were still awaiting them; and they had no sooner left the port than the Queen, followed by the brilliant train by which she had been surrounded since her arrival in France, proceeded to Aix, where she remained two days; and on the morning of the third she made her entry into Avignon escorted by two thousand horsemen, who met her before she reached the city, and officiated as a guard of honour. Every street through which she passed was richly decorated; tapestry and velvet hangings were suspended from the windows, and draped the balconies; triumphal arches and platforms, splendidly decorated and covered with devices and emblems appropriate to the occasion, were to be seen on all sides; and finally, in the great square of the city, her progress was arrested by a stately procession of ecclesiastics, in whose name she was harangued by François Suarés; who having in the course of his address expressed his ardent hope that before the anniversary of her entry into Avignon she might give a Dauphin to France, she momentarily interrupted by exclaiming energetically: "I will pray to God to grant me that grace!"

The royal train then again moved forward, and Marie took possession of the stately abode which had been prepared for her, amid the firing of musketry, the pealing of bells, and the shouts of the excited people, in whom the affability and beauty of their new Queen had aroused the most ardent feelings of loyalty and hope.

On the following day the corporation of the city presented to their young sovereign a hundred and fifty medals of gold, some of which bore on their obverse her own profile, and others that of the King, their reverse being in every case a representation of the town by which the offering was made; and on the ensuing evening she attended a banquet given in her honour by the Papal vice-legate at the palace of Rouvre, where at the conclusion of the ball, as she was about to retire with her suite, the tapestry hangings of the saloon were suddenly withdrawn, and revealed a magnificent collation served upon three separate tables. Among other costly delicacies, the guests were startled by the variety and profusion of the ornamental sugar-work

Marie de Medicis

which glistened like jewellery in the blaze of the surrounding tapers; for not only were there representations of birds, beasts, and fishes, but also fifty statues, each two palms in height, presenting in the same frail material the effigies of pagan deities and celebrated emperors. So marvellous indeed had been the outlay of the prelate on this one luxury, that at the close of the repast three hundred baskets of the most delicate confectionery, consisting chiefly of fruits skilfully imitated in sugar, were distributed among the fair and astonished guests.

During her sojourn at Avignon Marie received from the hands of M. de Rambure, whom the King had despatched from Savoy for that purpose, not only his renewed assurances of welcome, but also the costly gifts which he had prepared for her. "After the departure of the princes and cardinals", says the quaint old chronicler, "his Majesty desired my attendance in his chamber, and I had no sooner entered than he exclaimed: 'Friend Rambure, you must go and meet our future Queen, whom you must overtake two days before her arrival at Lyons; welcome her in my name, and present to her this letter and these two caskets of gems, together with these chests containing all the materials necessary for her first state-toilette; and having done this, bring me back her answer without delay. You will find a relay of horses awaiting you at every second league, both going and coming, in order that you may use all speed, and give me time to reach Lyons so soon as I shall know that she is to be there.'" This order could not, however, be implicitly obeyed, as the courtier was only enabled on his return to the King's presence to inform him that the Princess would enter Lyons that very day; upon which Henry instantly ordered post-horses, and accompanied by Sully, Rambure, and ten more of his favourite nobles, he commenced his journey, making, as he rode along, a thousand inquiries relative to his young wife, her deportment, and her retinue; asking with the utmost earnestness how she had received the presents which he had sent, and finally demanding of M. de Rambure if he were satisfied with the diamond ring that she had presented to him, a question which his messenger was careful to answer in the affirmative, at the same time assuring his Majesty that although he valued the jewel itself at a hundred pistoles, he prized it still more as the gift of so illustrious a Princess and Queen.

On the 3rd of December the Queen reached La Guillotière, one of the faubourgs of Lyons, where she passed the night; and on the following morning she proceeded to Lamothe, where she assisted at the mass, and subsequently dined. At the close of the repast, all the several civic corporations paid their respects to their new sovereign, the Chancellor replying to their harangue in the name of the Queen; who, immediately that they had retired, ascended her carriage, and entered the city gates in the same state, and amid the same acclamations which had accompanied her entry into Avignon. The suave majesty of her demeanour, the magnificence of her apparel, and the flush of health and happiness which glowed upon her countenance, filled the people with enthusiasm.

As her ponderous coach with its heavy curtains drawn back crushed beneath its ungainly wheels the flowers and branches that had been strewn upon her path, she showed herself in all her imperial beauty, dividing her smiles between the richly-attired groups who thronged the windows and balconies and the tumultuous multitude who ran shouting and gesticulating at her side; and the popular enthusiasm was as great as though in her person each individual beheld an earnest of the future prosperity and happiness of the nation over which she had been called to reign. Triumphal arches, floating draperies, and emblematic devices were scattered over the city; and thus welcomed and escorted, she reached the cathedral, where an address was delivered by M. de Bellièvre, and a Te Deum was solemnly performed.

In the course of the afternoon the young Queen received M. de Roquelaure, who had been despatched by the monarch to announce that he was already on his way to Lyons; and her interview with this new messenger had no sooner terminated than she was invited to pass into the great saloon, where several costly vases of gold and silver were presented to her in the name of the citizens; after which she was permitted to take the repose which she so greatly needed while awaiting the arrival of the King.

Marie de Medicis

Meanwhile Henry, who was not expected until the 10th of the month, reached Lyons on the previous evening just as the Queen had taken her seat at the supper-table; and being anxious to form his own judgment of her person and deportment before he declared his identity, he entered the apartment in an undress military uniform, trusting in this disguise to pass unnoticed among the throng of attendants. The Chancellor had, however, hurriedly seized an opportunity of intimating to Marie the arrival of her royal consort; while the King had no sooner crossed the threshold than he was recognized by several of the nobles; who, by hastily stepping aside to enable him to pass, created a movement which the quick eye of the Princess instantly detected, and of whose cause she did not remain one instant in doubt. Nevertheless, she betrayed no sign of her consciousness of the monarch's presence; while he, on his side, aware that all further incognito had become impossible, hastily retired.

When he had withdrawn, the Queen instantly ceased eating; and, as each succeeding dish was presented to her, silently motioned its removal. Thus the remainder of the repast was rapidly terminated; and at its close, she rose and retired to her private apartments, which she had scarcely reached when a loud stroke upon the door of the ante-room, so authoritatively given that she was at once made aware of the approach of her royal consort, caused her to rise from the arm-chair in which she was seated, and to advance to the centre of the floor. She had scarcely done so when the tapestry hanging was drawn aside, and M. le Grand entered, followed by the impatient monarch. In an instant she was at his feet, but in the next she found herself warmly and affectionately welcomed; nor was it until he had spent half an hour in conversation with her, that the King, weary and travel-worn as he was, withdrew to partake of the refreshment which had been prepared for him. On the following afternoon their Majesties, occupying the same carriage, attended vespers with great pomp at the Abbey of Aisnay; after which they passed the ensuing days in a succession of the most splendid festivities, at which the whole of the Court were present (the cost of those of the 13th being entirely at the expense of the monarch, in celebration of his birthday), until the arrival of the Cardinal Aldobrandini, whom the King had invited from Chambéry to be present at the public celebration of his nuptials, and who entered the city in state, when preparations were immediately made for the august rite upon which he was to confer his benediction.

At the close of a state dinner on the morrow (17th of December), the royal couple proceeded, accompanied by all the princes and great nobles of the Court, to the church of St. John; where the Papal legate, surrounded by the Cardinals de Joyeuse, de Gondy, and de Sourdis, together with the prelates then residing in the city, were already awaiting them. The royal bride retained her Tuscan costume, which was overlaid with the splendid jewels that formed so considerable a portion of her dowry; the most conspicuous among them being an ornament serving as a stomacher, which immediately obtained the name of "the Queen's Brilliant". This costly decoration consisted of an octagonal framework of large diamonds, divided into sections by lesser stones, each enclosing a portrait in enamel of one of the princes of her house, beneath which hung three immense pear-shaped pearls. The King was attired in a vest and haut-de-chausses of white satin, elaborately embroidered with silk and gold, and a black cape; and wore upon his head the velvet *toque* that had been introduced at the French Court by Henri III, to which a string of costly pearls was attached by a star of diamonds. Nor were the ladies and nobles of the royal retinue very inferior in the splendour of their appearance even to the monarch and his bride; feathers waved and jewels flashed on every side; silks and velvets swept the marble floor; and the brilliant uniforms of the royal guard were seen in startling contrast with the uncovered shoulders of the Court dames, which were laden with gems; while, to complete the gorgeousness of the picture, the high altar blazed with light, and wrought gold, and precious stones; and the magnificent robes of the prelates and priests who surrounded the shrine, formed a centre worthy of the rich framework by which it was enclosed.

At the termination of the ceremony, gold and silver coins were thrown to the crowd, and the procession returned to the palace in the same order as it had reached the church.

Great, however, as was the satisfaction which Henri IV had publicly expressed at his marriage, and lavish as were the encomiums that he had passed upon the grace and beauty of

his wife, it is, nevertheless, certain that he by no means permitted this legitimate admiration to interfere with his passion for Madame de Verneuil, to whom he constantly despatched couriers, charged with both letters and presents; and whom he even permitted to speak of the Queen in her replies in a disrespectful manner. But the crowning proof of the inequality of the struggle which was about to ensue between the wife and the mistress, was the departure of the King from Lyons on the 18th of December, the second day after his marriage; when, announcing his intention of travelling post to Paris, he left the Queen and her suite to follow at their leisure. That the haughty spirit of Marie de Medicis was stung by this abrupt abandonment, and that her woman-pride revolted, will admit of no doubt; nor is it wonderful that her indignation and jealousy should have been aroused when she discovered that, instead of pursuing his way to the capital, where the public arrangements necessitated by the peace with Savoy, which he had just concluded, required his presence, the King had embarked at Roanne, and then proceeded from Briare, where he landed, to Fontainebleau, whence on the morrow, after dining at Villeneuve, he had travelled at once to Verneuil, and remained there three days before he entered Paris. Nor even after his arrival in the capital was his conduct such as to reassure her delicacy; for Bassompierre has left it upon record that the newly-wedded sovereign took up his abode with M. de Montglat, at the priory of St. Nicolas-du-Louvre, where he constantly entertained ladies at supper, as well as several of his confidential courtiers.

So singular and insulting a commencement of her married life was assuredly well calculated to alarm the dignity of the Tuscan Princess; and even brief as had been her residence in France, she had already several individuals about her person who did not suffer her to remain in ignorance of the movements of her royal consort; while, unhappily for her own peace, her Italian followers--revolted by an indifference on the part of the monarch which they considered as an insult to their mistress--instead of endeavouring to allay the irritation which she did not attempt to conceal, exasperated her feelings by the vehemence of their indignation. It was indeed but too manifest that the favourite retained all her influence; and the arrangements which had been formally made for the progress of the Queen to the capital involved so much delay, that it was not possible for her to remain blind to the fact that they had been organised with the view of enabling the monarch to enjoy uninterruptedly for a time the society of his mistress. In consequence of these perpetual stoppages on the road, the harangues to which she was constrained to listen, and the dreary ceremonies to which she was condemned, it was not until the 1st of February 1601 that Marie de Medicis reached Nemours, where she was met by the King, who conducted her to Fontainebleau, at which palace the royal couple made a sojourn of five or six days; and, finally, on the 9th of the month, the young Queen entered Paris, where the civic authorities were anxious to afford to her a magnificent state reception; a purpose which was, however, negatived by the monarch, who alleged as his reason the enormous outlay that they had previously made upon similar occasions, and who commanded that the ceremony should be deferred. Whatever may have been the real motive of Henry for exhibiting this new slight towards his royal bride, it is certain that the partisans of Marie did not fail to attribute it to the malevolence of Madame de Verneuil; and thus another subject of animosity was added to the list.

Under these circumstances, the Queen entered the metropolitan city of her new kingdom without any of that pomp which had characterised her progress through the provinces; and alighted at the residence of M. de Gondy, where the Princesses and the principal ladies of the Court and city hastened to pay their respects to her Majesty on her arrival.

It was rumoured that one motive for the visit of the King to Verneuil had been his anxiety to induce the insolent favourite (whom he resolved to present to the Queen in order that she might be authorized to maintain her place at Court) to treat her new sovereign with becoming respect; and with a view to render her presentation as dignified as possible, he commanded the Duchesse de Nemours to officiate as her sponsor. The pride of Anne de Savoie revolted, however, against the function which was assigned to her, and she ventured respectfully to intimate her reluctance to undertake so onerous an office, alleging as her reason, that such a measure on her part must inevitably deprive her of the confidence of her

Marie de Medicis

royal mistress. Nevertheless the King insisted on her obedience; and, accordingly, the mortified Duchess was compelled to lead the mistress of the monarch into the circle, and to name her to the agitated and outraged Queen. Marie de Medicis in this trying emergency was sustained by her Italian blood; and although her lip quivered, she vouchsafed no other token of displeasure; but after coldly returning the curtsey of the favourite, who was blazing with jewels and radiant with triumph, she turned abruptly aside to converse with one of the Court ladies, leaving the Marquise still standing before her, as though she had suddenly become unconscious of her existence. Nor did the Duchesse de Nemours receive a more gracious welcome when, having ventured to interpose in the conversation, she sought the eye of the Queen; for that eye was instantly averted, and she became aware that she had in truth incurred the displeasure which she had so justly apprehended.

But although the high-born and exemplary Duchess shrank from the anger of her young sovereign, the *parvenue* Marquise was far from feeling equally abashed. With a steady step, and a proud carriage she advanced a pace nearer to Marie, and in her turn took up the thread of the discourse; nor did the haughtiness of the Queen's deportment disturb her serenity for a moment. The great fascination of Madame de Verneuil existed, as we have already remarked, in her extraordinary wit, and the vivacity of her conversation; while so ably did she on this occasion profit by her advantage, that the disgust of Marie was gradually changed into wonder; and when, at the close of one of her most brilliant sallies, the insolent favourite even carried her audacity so far as to address her royal mistress personally, the Queen was startled into a reply. She soon, however, recovered her self-possession; and pleading fatigue, broke up the circle by retiring to her own apartments.

The mortification of Madame de Nemours, whose highest ambition had been to secure the affection of her new sovereign, and whose pride had been sorely wounded by the undignified office that she had been compelled to fulfil, had not, however, yet reached its culminating point; for as on the approach of the King, who was in his turn preparing to withdraw, she awaited some acknowledgment of the submission with which she had obeyed his commands, she was startled to see a frown gather upon his brow as their eyes met; and still more so to hear herself rebuked for the ungracious manner in which she had performed her task; an exhibition of ill-will to which, as he averred, Madame de Verneuil was solely indebted for the coldness of her reception.

The Duchess curtseyed in silence; and Henry, without any other salutation, slowly pursued his way to the ante-room, followed by the officers of his household.

On the 12th of the month the Queen changed her residence, and took up her abode in the house of Zamet, where she was to remain until the Louvre was prepared for her reception, a precaution which Henry had utterly neglected; and on the 15th she at length found herself established in the palace which had been opened to her with so much apparent reluctance. On the morrow Marie appeared in the costume of the French Court, with certain modifications which at once became popular. Like those by whom she was now surrounded, she wore her bosom considerably exposed, but her back and shoulders were veiled by a deep ruff which immediately obtained the name of the Medicis, and which bore a considerable resemblance to a similar decoration much in vogue during the sixteenth century. The Medicis was composed of rich lace, stiffened and supported by wire, and rose behind the neck to the enormous height of twelve inches. The dress to which this ruff was attached was of the most gorgeous description, the materials employed being either cloth of gold or silver, or velvet trimmed with ermine; while chains of jewels confined it across the breast, descending from thence to the waist, where they formed a chatelaine reaching to the feet. Nor did the young Queen even hesitate to sacrifice to the prejudices of her new country the magnificent hair which had excited so much astonishment on her arrival; but, in conformity with the taste of the French Court, instead of suffering it, as she had previously done, to flow loosely over her shoulders, or to display its luxuriant braids like a succession of glossy diadems around her head, she caused it to be closely cut, and arranged in stiff rows of thickly-powdered curls.

Marie de Medicis

Hitherto, since the accession of Henri IV, the French Court had been one of the least splendid in Europe; if, indeed, it could in reality have been said to exist at all--a circumstance to which many causes had conduced. During his separation from Marguerite, and before his second marriage, Henry had cared little for the mere display of royalty. His previous poverty had accustomed him to many privations as a sovereign, which he had sought to compensate by self-indulgence as a man; and thus he made a home in the houses of the most wealthy of his courtiers, such as Zamet, Gondy, and other dissipated and convenient sycophants, with whom he could fling off the trammels of rank, and indulge in the ruinously high play or other still more objectionable amusements to which he was addicted. On the arrival of the Tuscan Princess, however, all was changed; and, as though he sought to compensate to her by splendour and display for the mortifications which awaited her private life, the King began forthwith to revive the traditional magnificence of the Court.

Two days after their arrival at the Louvre, Henry conducted his Queen to the royal palaces of Fontainebleau and St. Germain; and on the 18th of the month, their Majesties, attended by the whole of their respective households, and accompanied by all the princes and great nobles then resident in the capital, partook of a superb banquet at the Arsenal, given by Sully in honour of his appointment as Grand-Master of the Artillery. At this festival the minister, casting aside the gravity of his functions and the dignity of his rank, and even forgetful, as it would appear, of the respect which he owed to his new sovereign, not satisfied with pressing upon his guests the costly viands that had been prepared for them, no sooner perceived that the Italian ladies of her Majesty's suite were greatly attracted by the wine of Arbois, of which they were partaking freely, quite unconscious of its potency, than he caused the decanters containing the water that they mingled with it to be refilled with another wine of equal strength, but so limpid as to be utterly undistinguishable to the eye from the purer liquid for which it had been substituted. The consequences of this cruel pleasantry may be inferred; the heat, the movement, and the noise by which they were surrounded, together with the increased thirst caused by the insidious draughts that they were unconsciously imbibing, only induced the unfortunate Florentines to recur the more perseveringly to their refreshing libations; and at length the results became so apparent as to attract the notice of the King, who, already prepossessed like Sully himself against the Queen's foreign retinue, laughed heartily at a piece of treachery which he appeared to consider as the most amusing feature of the entertainment.

During the succeeding days several ballets were danced by the young nobles of the Court; and a tournament, open to all comers, and at which the Queen presented the prizes to the victors, was held at the Pont-au-Change.

At the close of Lent, the Duchesse de Bar, the King's sister, and her father-in-law, the Duc de Lorraine, arrived in France to welcome the new sovereign; who, together with her consort, met them at Monceaux, which estate, lately the property of *la belle Gabrielle*. Henry had, after her arrival in the capital, presented to his wife. Here the Court festivals were renewed; and had the heart and mind of Marie been at ease, her life must have seemed rather like a brilliant dream than a sober reality. Such, however, was far from being the case; for already the seeds of domestic discord which had been sown before her marriage were beginning to germinate. Madame de Verneuil was absent from the Court, and it was evident to every individual of whom it was composed, that the King rather tolerated than shared in the gaieties by which he was surrounded.

Bassompierre relates that during this sojourn at Monceaux, while Henry was standing apart with himself, M. de Sully, and the Chancellor, he suddenly informed them that the favourite had confided to him a proposal of marriage which she had received from a prince, on condition that she should be enabled to bring with her a dowry of a hundred thousand crowns; and inquired if they would advise him to sacrifice so large a sum for such a purpose. "Sire", replied M. de Bellièvre, "I am of opinion that you would do well to give the young lady the hundred thousand crowns in order that she may secure the match". And when Sully, with his usual prudence, remarked that it was more easy to talk of such an amount than to procure it, the Chancellor continued, heedless of the interruption: "Nay more, Sire; I am equally of

Marie de Medicis

opinion that you had better give two or even three hundred thousand, if less will not suffice. Such is my advice”.

It is needless to say that it was not followed.

The only amusement in which Henri IV indulged freely and earnestly was play; and he was so reckless a gamester, that at no period has the Court of France been so thoroughly demoralized by that frightful vice as throughout his reign. Not only did his own example corrupt those immediately about him, but the rage for gaming gradually pervaded all classes. The nobility staked their estates where money failed; the citizens trafficked in cards and dice when they should have been employed in commerce or in science; the very valets gambled in the halls, and the pages in the ante-chambers. Play became the one great business of life throughout the capital; and enormous sums, which changed the entire destiny of families, were won and lost. One or two traits will suffice to prove this, and we will then dismiss the subject. In the year 1607, M. de Bassompierre relates in his Memoirs, that being unable from want of funds to purchase a new and befitting costume in which to appear at the christening of the Dauphin, he nevertheless gave an order to his tailor to prepare him a dress upon which the outlay was to be fourteen thousand crowns; his actual resources amounting at that moment only to seven hundred; and that he had no sooner done so, than he proceeded with this trifling sum to the hotel of the Duc d'Epéron, where he won five thousand; while before the completion of the costume, he had not only gained a sufficient amount to discharge the debt thus wantonly incurred, but, as he adds, with a self-gratulation worthy of a better cause, “also a diamond-hilted sword of the value of five thousand crowns, and five or six thousand more with which to amuse myself”.

In 1609, only one Year later, L'Etoile has left on record a still more astounding and degrading fact. “In this month” (March), he says, “several academies of play have been established, where citizens of all ages risk considerable sums, a circumstance which proves not only an abundance of means, but also the corruption of morals. The son of a merchant has been seen at one sitting to lose sixty thousand crowns, although he had only inherited twenty thousand from his father; and a man named Jonas has hired a house in the Faubourg St. Germain, in order to hold one of these academies for a fortnight during the fair, and for this house he has given fourteen hundred francs”.

D'Aubigny and several other chroniclers bear similar testimony; and while Bassompierre boasts of having won five hundred thousand pistoles in one year (each pistole being little inferior in value to our own sovereign), he nevertheless gives us plainly to understand that the King was a more reckless gamester than himself, a fact corroborated moreover by Sully, who tells us in his Memoirs, “The sums, at least the principal ones, that I employed on the personal expenses of Henry, were twenty-two thousand pistoles, for which he sent to me on the 18th of January 1609, and which he had lost at play; a hundred thousand livres to one party, and fifty-one thousand to another, likewise play debts, due to Edward Fernandès, a Portuguese. A thousand pistoles for future play; Henry at first took only five hundred, but he subsequently sent Beringhen for the remainder for a different purpose. I carried him a thousand more for play when I went with the Chancellor to Fontainebleau”.

Only a short time subsequent to the establishment of the Court at the Louvre, what neither the desire and authority of the King himself nor the arts of his mistress had been able to accomplish, was achieved through the agency of the Queen's favourite attendant, Leonora Galigai, who had accompanied her royal mistress and foster-sister from Italy at the period of her marriage. On the formation of the Queen's household, Henry had, among other appointments, honoured Madame de Richelieu with the post of Mistress of the Robes; but Marie de Medicis having decided on bestowing this charge upon Leonora, refused to permit the Countess to perform the duties of her office, and requested the King to transfer it to her Italian *protégée*. This, however, was a concession to which Henry would not consent; and while the Queen persisted in not permitting the services of Madame de Richelieu, her royal bridegroom as pertinaciously negatived the appointment of *parvenue* lady of honour. The high-born countess bore the affront thus offered to her with the complacent dignity befitting

Marie de Medicis

her proud station; but such was far from being the case with the ambitious and mortified Leonora, who had not been a week at the French Court ere she became aware that all the Italian followers of the Queen were peculiarly obnoxious both to the King and his minister; and who felt that should she fail to push her fortunes upon the instant, she might one day be compelled to leave France as poor and as powerless as she had entered it. Not contented, therefore, with urging her royal mistress to persevere in her resolution of rejecting the attendance of Madame de Richelieu, she began to speculate upon the most feasible measures to be adopted in order to secure her own succession to the coveted dignity; and after considerable reflection, she became convinced that this could only be accomplished through the assistance of the Marquise de Verneuil. Once assured of the fact, Leonora did not hesitate; but, instead of avoiding, as she had hitherto done, the advances of the favourite--who, aware of her unlimited power over the mind of the Queen, had on several occasions treated her with a courtesy by no means warranted by her position at the Court--she began to court the favour of the Marquise in as marked a manner as she had previously slighted it; and ere long the intrigue of the two favourites was brought to a successful issue. Each stood in need of the other, and a compact was accordingly entered into between them. Madame de Verneuil, whose pride was piqued by her exclusion from the royal circle, was desirous to gain at any price the countenance of Marie, and to be admitted to her private assemblies, where alone she could carry out her more extended plan of ambition; while the wily Italian, rendered only the more pertinacious by difficulty, and anxious moreover to secure a post which would at all times enable her to remain about the person of the Queen, thought no price too great, even the dishonour of her royal foster-sister, to obtain her object, and thus a mutual promise was made; the Marquise pledging herself that, in the event of the Queen recognizing her right to attend her receptions, and treating her with the courtesy and consideration due to the rank conferred upon her by the King, she would effect the appointment courted by Leonora; while the Signora Galigai, with equal confidence, promised in her turn that she would without delay cause Madame de Verneuil to receive a summons to the Queen's presence.

Nor did either of these ladies over-estimate the amount of her influence; for the monarch no sooner learnt that the reception of his mistress by the haughty and indignant Princess could be purchased by a mere slight to Madame la Grande Prévoste, than he consented to sanction the appointment of the Italian *suivante* of Marie to the post of honour; while Leonora soon succeeded by her tears and entreaties in wringing from her royal mistress a reluctant acquiescence to her request.

Thus then, as before stated, a hollow peace was patched up between the unequal rivals; and Madame de Verneuil at length found herself in possession of a folding-seat in the Queen's reception room; while her coadjutress triumphantly took her place among the noblest ladies of the land; but scarcely had this result been accomplished, when Henry, profiting by so unhoped-for an opportunity of gratifying the vanity of the favourite, assigned to her a suite of apartments in the Louvre immediately above those of the Queen, and little, if at all, inferior to them in magnificence.

This, however, was an affront which Marie de Medicis could not brook; and she accordingly, with her usual independence of spirit, expressed herself in no measured terms upon the subject, particularly to such of her ladies as were likely to repeat her comments to the Marquise. The latter retorted by assuming all the airs of royalty, and by assembling about her a little court, for which that of the Queen herself was frequently forsaken, especially by the monarch, who found the brilliant circle of the favourite, wherein he always met a warm and enthusiastic welcome, infinitely more to his taste than the formal etiquette and reproachful frowns by which his presence in that of his royal consort was usually signalized.

Nor could the annoyance of the proud Florentine Princess be subject of astonishment to any rightly-constituted mind. The position was a monstrous and an unnatural one. Both the wife and the mistress were about to become mothers; and the whole Court was degraded by so unblushing an exhibition of the profligacy of the monarch. Still, however, the French ladies of the household forebore to censure their sovereign; and even sought to persuade the outraged Queen that when once she had given a Dauphin to France the favourite would be compelled to

Marie de Medicis

leave the palace; but Marie's Italian followers were far less scrupulous, and expressed their indignation in no measured terms. The Queen, wounded in her most sacred feelings, became gradually colder to the Marquise, who, as though she had only awaited this relapse to sting her still more deeply than she had yet done, retorted the slights which she constantly received by declaring that "the Florentine", as she insolently designated her royal mistress, was not the legal or lawful wife of the King, whose written promise, still in her possession, he was, as she asserted, bound to fulfil should she bear him a son. This surpassing assurance no sooner reached the ears of Marie de Medicis than she once more forbade Madame de Verneuil her presence; but the Marquise, strong in her impunity, merely replied by an epigram, and consoled herself for her exclusion from the Queen's private circle by assuming more state and magnificence than before, and by collecting in her saloons the prettiest women and the most reckless gamblers that the capital could produce. Thus attracted, the infatuated monarch became her constant guest; and his neglected wife, in weak health, and with an agonised heart, saw herself abandoned for a wanton who had set a price upon her virtue, and who made a glory of her shame.

Poor Marie! whatever were her faults as a woman, they were bitterly expiated both as a wife and as a mother!

Vain were all the efforts of the King on the one hand and those of Leonora on the other to terminate this new misunderstanding; the Queen was coldly resolute, and the Marquise insolently indifferent; nor would a reconciliation, in all probability, ever again have taken place, had not the interests of the Mistress of the Robes once more required it, when her influence over the mind of her royal foster-sister sufficed to overcome every obstacle.

Among the numerous Florentines who composed the suite of Marie de Medicis was Concino Concini, a gentleman of her household, whose extreme personal beauty had captivated the heart of Leonora; while she saw, as she believed, in his far-reaching ambition and flexible character the very elements calculated, in conjunction with her own firmer nature and higher intellect, to lead her on to the most lofty fortunes. It is probable, however, that had La Galigai continued to attend the Queen in her original and obscure office of waiting-woman, Concini, who was of better blood than herself, and who could not, moreover, be supposed to find any attraction in the diminutive figure and sallow countenance of his countrywoman, would never have been induced to consent to such an alliance; but Leonora was now on the high road to wealth and honour, while his own position was scarcely defined; and thus ere long the consent of the Queen to their marriage was solicited by Concini himself.

Marie, who foresaw that by this arrangement she should keep both parties in her service, and who, in the desolation of a disappointed spirit, clung each day more closely to her foreign attendants, immediately accorded the required permission; but it was far otherwise with the King, who had no sooner been informed of the projected union than he sternly forbade it, to the great indignation of his consort, who was deeply mortified by this new interference with her personal household, and saddened by the spectacle of her favourite's unaffected wretchedness. In vain did the Queen expostulate, and, urged by Leonora and her suitor, even entreat of Henry to relent; all her efforts to this effect remained fruitless; and she was at length compelled to declare to the sorrowing woman that she had no alternative save to submit to the will of the King.

Such, however, was far from being the intention of the passionate Italian. Too unattractive to entertain any hope from her own pleadings with Henry himself, she once more turned in this new difficulty to Madame de Verneuil, who, in order to display how little she had been mortified or annoyed by the coldness of the Queen, and at the same time to prove to her that where the earnest entreaties of the latter had failed to produce any effect, her own expressed wish would suffice to ensure success, immediately bade Leonora dry her eyes and prepare her wedding-dress, as she would guarantee her prompt reception of the royal consent upon one condition, and that one so easy of accomplishment that she could not fail to fulfil it.

Marie de Medicis had been heard to declare that in the event of her becoming the mother of a Dauphin, she would, at the earliest possible period, dance a ballet in honour of the

King, which should exceed in magnificence every exhibition of the kind that had hitherto been attempted; and the condition so lightly treated by the favourite was no less than her own appearance in the royal ballet, should it indeed take place. Even La Galigai herself was startled by so astounding a proposition; but she soon discovered, from the resolute attitude assumed by the Marquise, that her powerful intercession with the King was not otherwise to be secured; and it was consequently with even less of hope than apprehension that the agitated Mistress of the Robes kissed the hand of Madame de Verneuil, and assured her that she would leave no effort untried to obtain the consent of her royal mistress to her wishes. But when she had withdrawn, and was traversing the gallery which communicated with the apartments of Marie, she began to entertain serious misgivings: the pretension of the Marquise was so monstrous, that, even conscious as she was of the extent of her own influence over her foster-sister, she almost dreaded to communicate the result of her interview, and nearly despaired of success; but with the resolute perseverance which formed so marked a feature in her character, she resolved to brave the utmost displeasure of the Queen rather than forego this last hope of a union with Concini. It was, nevertheless, drowned in tears, and with a trembling heart, that she presented herself before Marie as the voluntary bearer of this new and aggravated insult; while, incomprehensible as it must appear in this age, whatever may have been the arguments and entreaties of which she was clever enough to avail herself, it is at least certain that they were ultimately successful; and that she was authorized by the Queen to communicate to Madame de Verneuil her Majesty's willingness to accede to her request, provided that the Marquise pledged herself in return to perform her portion of the contract.

That her partiality for her early friend induced Marie de Medicis to make, in this instance, a most unbecoming concession, is certain; while it is no less matter of record that, probably to prevent any opportunity of retraction on the part of Madame de Verneuil, she lavished upon her from that day the most flattering marks of friendship, and publicly treated her with a distinction which was envied by many of the greatest ladies at Court, even although it excited the censure of all.

The comparative tranquillity which succeeded this new adjustment of the differences between the Queen and the Marquise continued until the month of September, on the 17th day of which Marie became the mother of a Dauphin (subsequently Louis XIII), at the palace of Fontainebleau, where, as had already been the case at the Louvre, the apartments of the favourite adjoined her own. Nothing could exceed the delight of Henry IV at the birth of his heir. He stood at the lower end of the Queen's apartment, surrounded by the Princes of the Blood, to each of whom the royal infant was successively presented; and this ceremony was no sooner terminated than, bending over him with passionate fondness, he audibly invoked a blessing upon his head; and then placing his sword in the tiny hand as yet unable to grasp it, "May you use it, my son", he exclaimed, "to the glory of God, and in defence of your crown and people". He next approached the bed of the Queen: "*M'amie*" he said tenderly, "rejoice! God has given us what we asked". Mézeray and Matthieu both assert that the birth of the Dauphin was preceded by an earthquake, which, with the usual superstition of the period, was afterwards declared to have been a forewarning of the ceaseless wars by which Europe was convulsed during his reign.

Rejoicings were general throughout the whole country, and were augmented by the fact that more than eighty years had elapsed since the birth of a successor to the crown who had been eligible to bear the title of Dauphin,—Francis II having come into the world before his father Henri II was on the throne, who had himself only attained to that title after the death of his elder brother Francis, who was born in 1517. Te Deums were chanted in all the churches; salvos of artillery were discharged at the Arsenal; fireworks, bonfires, and illuminations made a city of flame of Paris for several successive nights; while joyous acclamations rent the air, and the gratified citizens congratulated each other as they perambulated the streets as though each had experienced some personal benefit. The fact that Anne of Austria, the daughter of Philip III of Spain, was born only five days previous to the Dauphin, was another source of delight to the French people, who regarded the circumstance as an earnest of the future union of the two kingdoms, a prophecy which was afterwards fulfilled by the marriage of the two royal children.

We have already made more than one allusion to the belief in magic, sorcery, and astrology which at this period had obtained in France, and by which many, even of the most enlightened of her nobles and citizens, suffered themselves to be trammelled and deluded; and however much we of the present day may be inclined to pity or to despise so great a weakness, we shall do well to remember that human progress during the last sixty years has been more marked and certain than that which had taken place in the lapse of the three previous centuries. It is true that there were a few strong-minded individuals even at the period of which we treat who refused to submit their reason to the wild and illogical superstitions which were rife about them; but these formed a very small portion of the aggregate population, and from the peasant in his hovel to the monarch on his throne the plague-spot of credulity had spread and festered, until it presented a formidable feature in the history of the time. It is curious to remark that L'Etoile, the most commonplace and unimaginative of chroniclers, who might well have been expected in his realism to treat such phantasies as puerile and absurd, seems to justify to his own mind the extreme penalties of the scaffold and the stake as a fitting punishment for sorcerers and magicians: declaring them, as he records in his usual terse and matter-of-fact style, to be dictated by justice, and essential to the repression of an intercourse between men and evil spirits.

Gabrielle d'Estrées was the dupe, if, indeed, not the victim, of her firm faith in astrology. She had been assured that "a child would prevent her from attaining the rank to which she aspired"; and the predisposition of an excited nervous system probably assisted the verification of the prophecy. The old Cardinal de Bourbon, whom the Leaguers would fain have made their king, was seduced from his fidelity to the illustrious race from which he sprang by his weak reliance upon the predictions of soothsayers, who thus degraded him into the tool of the wily Due de Guise; while his nephew, Charles II, also a Cardinal, even more infatuated than himself, had been impelled to believe that the disease which was rapidly sapping his existence was the effect of the machinations of a Court lady by whom he had been bewitched! Traitors found excuse for their treason in the assertion that they had been deluded by false predictions or ensnared by magic; princes were governed in their political movements by astral calculations; a grave minister details with complacency, although without comment, various anecdotes of the operation of the occult sciences, and even makes them a study; while a European monarch, strong in the love of his people and his own bravery, suffers the predictions of soothsayers and prophets to cloud his mind and to shake his purposes, even while he declares his contempt for all such delusions.

That such was actually the case is proved by De Thou, who relates an extraordinary speech made by the King at the Louvre, in 1599, on the occasion of the promulgation of the Edict of Nantes, to the deputies of the Parliament of Paris, in the course of which he declared that, twenty-six years previously, when he was residing at the Court of Charles IX, he was about to cast the dice with Henri de Lorraine, Duc de Guise, his relative, amid a large circle of nobles, when at the instant in which they were prepared to commence their game drops of blood appeared upon the table, which were renewed without any apparent agency as fast as they were wiped away. Each party carefully ascertained that it could not proceed from any of the individuals present; and the phenomenon was so frequently repeated that Henry, as he averred, at once amazed and disturbed, declined to persevere in the pastime, considering the circumstance as an evil omen. Whatever may be the opinion of the reader as to the actual cause of this apparent prodigy, it is at least certain that it was verified by subsequent events, as well as the extraordinary and multiplied prophecy that the King himself would meet his death in a coach.

Under these circumstances, combined with the almost universal credulity of the age and nation which he governed, it is scarcely matter of surprise that Henri IV, on so momentous an occasion as the birth of his son, should have sought, even while he feigned to disregard the result, to learn the after-destiny of the royal infant; and accordingly, a few days subsequently, he commanded M. de la Rivière, who publicly professed the science of judicial astrology, to draw the horoscope of the Dauphin with all the accuracy of which the operation was susceptible. The command was answered by an assurance from La Rivière that the work was already in progress; but as another week passed by without any communication from the seer,

Marie de Medicis

Henry became impatient, and again summoned him to his presence in order to inquire the cause of the delay.

“Sire”, replied La Rivière, “I have abandoned the undertaking, as I am reluctant to sport with a science whose secrets I have partially forgotten, and which I have, moreover, frequently found defective”.

“I am not to be deceived by so idle a pretext”, said the King, who readily detected that the alleged excuse was a mere subterfuge; “you have no such scruples, but you have resolved not to reveal to me what you have ascertained, lest I should discover the fallacy of your pretended knowledge or be angered by your prediction. Whatever may be the cause of your hesitation, however, I am resolved that you shall speak; and I command you, upon pain of my displeasure, to do so truthfully”.

Still La Rivière excused himself, until perceiving that it would be dangerous to persevere in his pertinacity, he at length reluctantly replied: “Sire, your son will live to manhood, and will reign longer than yourself; but he will resemble you in no one particular. He will indulge his own opinions and caprices, and sometimes those of others. During his rule it will be safer to think than to speak. Ruin threatens your ancient institutions; all your measures will be overthrown. He will accomplish great deeds; will be fortunate in his undertakings; and will become the theme of all Christendom. He will have issue; and after his death more heavy troubles will ensue. This is all that you shall know from me, and even this is more than I had proposed to tell you”.

The King remained for a time silent and thoughtful, after which he said coldly: “You allude to the Huguenots, I see that well; but you only talk thus because you have their interests at heart”.

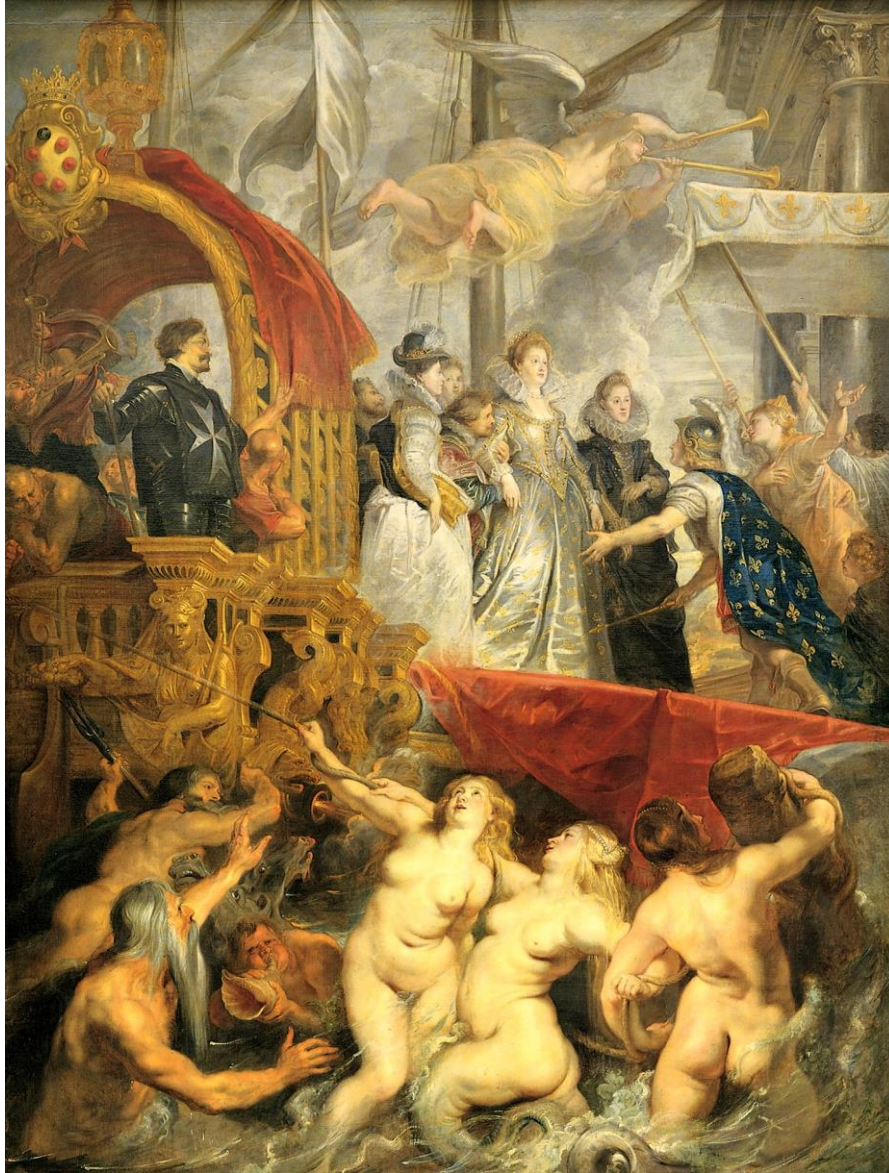
“Explain my meaning as you please”, was the abrupt retort; “but you shall learn nothing more from me”. And so saying, the uncompromising astrologer made a hurried salutation to the monarch and withdrew.

A fortnight after this extraordinary scene another event took place at the Louvre sufficiently interesting to Henry to wean his thoughts for a time even from the foreshadowed future of his successor. In an apartment immediately contiguous to that of the still convalescent Queen, Madame de Verneuil became in her turn the mother of a son, who was baptized with great ceremony, and received the names of Gaston Henri; and this birth, which should have covered the King with shame, and roused the nation to indignation, when the circumstances already detailed are considered, was but the pretext for new rejoicings.

On the 27th of October the Dauphin made his public entry into Paris. The infant Prince occupied a sumptuous cradle presented to him by the Grand Duchess of Florence; and beside him, in an open litter, sat Madame de Montglat, his *gouvernante*, and the royal nurse. The provost of the merchants and the metropolitan sheriffs met him at some distance from the gates, and harangued him at considerable length; and Madame de Montglat having replied in his name to the oration, the *cortège* proceeded to the house of Zamet. Two days subsequently he was conveyed in the same state to St. Germain-en-Laye, where, in order that the people might see him with greater facility, the nurse carried him in her arms. The enthusiasm of the crowd, by which his litter was constantly surrounded, knew no bounds; and the heart of that exulting mother, which was fated afterwards to be broken by his unnatural abandonment, beat high with gratitude to Heaven as her ear drank in the enthusiastic shouts of the multitude, and as she remembered that it was herself who had bestowed this well-appreciated blessing upon France.

CHAPTER III.

1602



The convalescence of the Queen was the signal for a succession of festivities, and the whole winter was spent in gaiety and dissipation; banquets, ballets, and hunting-parties succeeded each other with bewildering rapidity; and so magnificent were several of the Court festivals that even some of the gravest historians of the time did not disdain to record them. The most brilliant of the whole, however, and that which will best serve to exemplify the taste of the period, was the ballet to which allusion has already been made as given in honour of the

Marie de Medicis

King by his royal consort, and in which Marie de Medicis herself appeared. In order to heighten its effect she had selected fifteen of the most beautiful women of the Court, Madame de Verneuil being, according to the royal promise, one of the number; and the first part of the exhibition took place at the Louvre. The entertainment commenced with the entrance of Apollo and the nine Muses into the great hall of the palace, which was thronged with native and foreign princes, ambassadors, and ministers, in the midst of whom sat the King with the Papal Nuncio on his right hand. The god and his attendants sang the glory of the monarch, the pacificator of Europe; and each stanza terminated with the somewhat fulsome and ungraceful words:

Il faut que tout vous rende hommage,
Grand Roi, miracle de notre âge.

Thence the whole gay and gallant company proceeded to the Hôtel de Guise, where the eight maids of honour of the Queen performed the second act; and this was no sooner concluded than the brilliant revellers removed to the archiepiscopal palace, where the Queen appeared in person upon the scene, with her suite divided into four quadrilles. Marie herself represented Venus, and led by the hand César de Vendôme attired as Cupid; when the splendour of her jewels produced so startling an effect that murmurs of astonishment and admiration ran through the hall. Gratified at the sensation caused by the unexampled magnificence and grace of his royal consort, Henry smilingly inquired of the Nuncio "if he had ever before seen so fine a squadron?"

"*Bellissimo e pericolosissimo!*" was the reply of the gallant prelate.

Each of the ladies composing the party of the Queen represented a *virtue*, an arrangement which, when it is remembered that Madame de Verneuil was one of the chosen, rendered their attributes at least equivocal. This royal ballet was nevertheless considered worthy of a poetical immortality by Berthault, a popular bard of the day, who left little behind him worthy of preservation, but who enjoyed great vogue among the fashionables of the Court at that period. Its most important result was, however, the marriage of Concini and Leonora; to which, in consideration of the honour done to the favourite by the Queen, Henry withdrew his opposition; even authorizing his royal consort to bestow rich presents upon the bride, and to celebrate the nuptials with considerable ceremony.

All these royal diversions were suddenly and disagreeably terminated some months afterwards by an intrigue which once more threw the King and his courtiers into a state of agitation and discomfort.

As regards Marie de Medicis herself, she had long ceased to derive any gratification from the splendid festivities of which she was one of the brightest ornaments; her ill-judged indulgence, far from exciting the gratitude of Madame de Verneuil, having rendered the insolent favourite still more arrogant and overbearing. To such an extent, indeed, did the Marquise carry her presumption, that she affected to believe herself indebted for the forbearance of the Queen to the conviction of the latter that she had a superior claim upon the monarch to her own; and while she permitted herself to comment upon the words, actions, and tastes, and even upon the personal peculiarities of her royal mistress, she declared her conviction of the legality of the written promise obtained by her from the King; and announced her determination, now that she had become the mother of a son, to enforce its observance.

These monstrous pretensions, which were soon made known to the Queen, at once wounded and exasperated her feelings; and she anxiously awaited the moment when some new imprudence of the favourite should open the eyes of the monarch to her delinquency, as she had already become aware that mere argument on her own part would avail nothing.

Several writers, and among them even female ones, yielding to the prestige attached to the name of Henri IV, have sought the solution of all his domestic discomfort in the "Italian jealousy" of Marie de Medicis; but surely it is not difficult to excuse it under circumstances of such extraordinary trial. Marie was a wife, a mother, and a queen; and in each of these

Marie de Medicis

characters she was insulted and outraged. As a wife, she saw her rights invaded--as a mother, the legitimacy of her son questioned--and as a queen her dignity compromised. What very inferior causes have produced disastrous effects even in private life! The only subject of astonishment which can be rationally entertained is the comparative patience with which at this period of her career she submitted to the humiliations that were heaped upon her.

In vain did she complain to her royal consort of the insulting calumnies of Madame de Verneuil; he either affected to disbelieve that she had been guilty of such absurd assumption, or reproached Marie with a want of self-respect in listening to the idle tattle of eavesdroppers and sycophants; alleging that her foreign followers, spoiled by her indulgence, and encouraged by her credulity, were the scourge of his Court; and that she would do well to dismiss them before they accomplished her own unhappiness. A hint to this effect always sufficed to silence the Queen, to whom the society and support of Leonora and her husband were becoming each day more necessary; and thus she devoured her tears and stifled her wretchedness, trusting that the arrogance and presumption of the Marquise would ultimately serve her better than her own remonstrances.

Such was the position of affairs when the intrigue to which allusion has been already made promised to produce the desired result; and it can create no surprise that Marie should eagerly indulge the hope of delivering herself from an obnoxious and formidable rival, when the opportunity presented itself of accomplishing so desirable an end without betraying her own agency.

During the lifetime of *la belle Gabrielle*, her sister, Juliette Hippolyte d'Estrées, Marquise de Cérisey, who in 1597 became the wife of Georges de Brancas, Duc de Villars, had attracted the attention of the King, whose dissipated tastes were always flattered by novelty; although if we are to credit the statements of the Princesse de Conti, this lady, so far from rivalling the beauty of her younger sister, had no personal charms to recommend her beyond *her youth and her hair*. Being as unscrupulous as the Duchesse de Beaufort herself, Juliette exulted in the idea of captivating the King, and left no effort untried to secure her supposed conquest; but this caprice on the part of Henry was only momentary, and in his passion for Henriette d'Entragues, he soon forgot his passing fancy for Madame de Villars. The Duchess herself, however, was far from being equally oblivious; and listening to the dictates of her ambition and self-love, she became persuaded that she was indebted to the Marquise alone for the sudden coldness of the King; and accordingly she vowed an eternal hatred to the woman whom she considered in the light of a successful rival. Up to the present period, anxious as she was to avenge her wounded vanity, she had been unable to secure an opportunity of revenge; but having at this particular moment won the affection of the Prince de Joinville, who had been a former lover of Madame de Verneuil, and with whom, as she was well aware, he had maintained an active correspondence, she made his surrender of the letters of that lady the price of her own honour. For a time the Prince hesitated; he felt all the disloyalty of such a concession; but those were not times in which principles waged an equal war against passion; and the letters were ultimately placed in the possession of Madame de Villars.

The Duchess was fully cognizant of the fact that it was from an impulse of self-preservation alone that M. de Joinville had been induced to forego his suit to the favourite, and to absent himself from the Court, a consideration which should have aroused her delicacy as a woman; but she was by no means disposed to yield to so inconvenient a weakness; and she had consequently no sooner secured the coveted documents than she prepared to profit by her good fortune.

Henriette d'Entragues had really loved the Prince--if indeed so venal and vicious a woman can be supposed capable of loving anything save herself--and thus the letters which were transferred to Madame de Villars, many of them having been written immediately after the separation of the lovers, were filled with regrets at his absence, professions of unalterable affection, and disrespectful expressions concerning the King and Queen; the latter of whom was ridiculed and slandered without pity. It is easy to imagine the triumphant joy of the

Marie de Medicis

Duchess. She held her enemy at her mercy, and she had no inclination to be merciful. She read and re-read the precious letters; and finally, after deep reflection, her plans were matured.

The Princesse de Conti was her personal friend, and was, moreover, attached to the household of the Queen, to whom Madame de Villars, from circumstances which require no comment, had hitherto been comparatively a stranger. Marie de Medicis, who had experienced little sympathy from the great ladies of the Court, having thrown herself principally upon her Italian followers for society, had in consequence been cold and distant in her deportment to the French members of her circle; who, on their side, trammelled by the rigorous propriety of her conduct, were quite satisfied to be partially overlooked, in order that their own less scrupulous bearing might pass unnoticed by so rigid a censor; and thus, when, upon the earnest request of Madame de Villars to be introduced to the more intimate acquaintance of the Queen, the Princess succeeded in obtaining for her the privilege of the *petites entrées* (unaware of the powerful passport to favour which she possessed), she found it difficult to account for the eagerness with which the ordinarily unapproachable Marie greeted the appearance and courted the society of the astute Duchess; nor did she for an instant dream that by facilitating the intercourse between them, she was undermining the fortunes of a brother whom she loved.

It appears extraordinary that of all the ladies about the Queen, Madame de Villars should have selected the sister of the Prince de Joinville to enable her to effect her purpose; but let her have acted from whatever motive she might, it is certain that day by day her favour became more marked; and the circumstance which most excited the surprise of Madame de Conti, was the fact that her *protégée* was often closeted with the Queen when, for reasons sufficiently obvious, she herself and even Leonora Galigai were excluded. In encouraging the vengeance of her new friend, Marie was well aware that she was committing an imprudence from which the more far-seeing Florentine would have dissuaded her; and thus, with that impetuosity which was destined through life to be her scourge, she resolved only to consult her own feelings. The secret of this new discovery was consequently not divulged to her favourite; and as her cheek burned and her eye flashed, while lingering over the insults to which she had been subjected by the unscrupulous mistress of the monarch, she urged Madame de Villars to lose no time in communicating the contents of the obnoxious letters to her sovereign.

The undertaking was difficult as well as dangerous; and in the case of the Duchess it required more than usual tact and caution. She had not only to encounter the risk of arousing the anger of Henry by accusing the woman whom he loved, but also to combat his wounded vanity when he should see his somewhat mature passion made a subject of ridicule, and, at the same time, to conceal her own motive for the treachery of which she was guilty. This threefold trial, even daring as she was, the Duchess feared to hazard. In communicating the fatal letters to the Queen, she had calculated that the indignation and jealousy of the Italian Princess would instigate her to take instant possession of so formidable a weapon against her most dangerous enemy, and to work out her own vengeance; but Marie had learnt prudence from past experience, and she was anxious to conceal her own agency in the cabal until she could avow it with a certainty of triumph. Perceiving the reluctance of Madame de Villars to take the initiative, she hastened to explain to her the suspicion which would naturally be engendered in the mind of the King, should he imagine that the affair had been preconcerted to satisfy her private animosity; and moreover suggested that the Duchess should, in her interview with the monarch, carefully avoid even the mention of her name. Encouragement and entreaties followed this caution; while a few rich presents sufficed to convince her auditor--and ultimately, Madame de Villars (who had too long waited patiently for such an opportunity of revenge to shrink from her purpose when it was secured to her), having gained the favour and confidence of the Queen at the expense of her rival, resolved to terminate her task.

The pretext of urgent business easily procured for her a private interview with the King, for the name of D'Estrées still acted like a spell upon the mind and heart of Henry, and the Duchess was a consummate tactician. Notice was given to her of the day on which the sovereign would visit St. Denis; and as she presented herself in the lateral chapel where he had just concluded his devotions, Henry made a sign for his attendant nobles to withdraw, when

Marie de Medicis

the Duchess found herself in a position to explain her errand, and to assure him that she had only been induced to make the present disclosure from her affection for his person, and the gratitude which she owed to him for the many benefits that she had experienced from his condescension. Having briefly dwelt on the contents of the letters which she delivered into his keeping, she did not even seek an excuse for the means by which they had come into her own possession, but concluded by observing: "I could not reconcile it to my conscience, Sire, to conceal so great an outrage; I should have felt like a criminal myself, had I been capable of suffering in silence such treason against the greatest king, the best master, and the most gallant gentleman on earth".

Henry was not proof against this compliment. He believed himself to be all that the Duchess had asserted, but he liked to hear his own opinion confirmed by the lips of others; and, although smarting under the mortification of wounded vanity occasioned by the contents of the letters of his perfidious mistress, he smiled complacently upon Madame de Villars, thanking her for her zeal and attachment to his person, and assuring her that both were fully appreciated.

She had no sooner retired than, as the Queen had previously done, he repeatedly read over each letter in turn until his patience gave way under the task; when hastily summoning the Duc de Lude, he desired him to forthwith proceed to the apartments of the Marquise, and inform her in his name that "she was a perfidious woman, a monster, and the most wicked of her sex; and that he was resolved never to see her again."

At this period Madame de Verneuil had quitted the palace, and was residing in an hôtel in the city, which had been presented to her by the King: a fortunate circumstance for the envoy, who required time and consideration to enable him to execute his onerous mission in a manner that might not tend to his own subsequent discomfiture; but on the delivery of the royal message, which even the courtly De Lude could not divest of its offensive character, Madame de Verneuil (who was well aware that the King, however he might yield to his momentary anger, was even less able to dispense with her society than she herself was to lose the favour which alone preserved her from the ignominy her conduct had justly merited) did not for an instant lose her self-possession. "Tell his Majesty", she replied, as calmly as though a sense of innocence had given her strength, "that being perfectly assured that I have never been guilty of word or deed which could justly incur his anger, I cannot imagine what can have induced him to treat me with so little consideration. That someone has traduced me, I cannot doubt; but I shall be revenged by a discovery of the truth".

She then rose from her seat, and retired to her private room, much more alarmed and agitated than she was willing to betray. De Lude had, during the interview, suffered a few remarks to escape him from which she was enabled to guess whence the blow had come; and conscious of the enormity of her imprudence, she lost no time in confiding to most confidential friends the difficulty of her position, and entreated them to discover some method by which she might escape its consequences.

As had been previously arranged with the Queen, Madame de Villars, at her audience of the King, had carefully abstained from betraying the share which his consort had taken in the intrigue, and had assumed to herself the very equivocal honour of the whole proceeding; and it was, consequently, against the Duchess alone that the anger of the favourite was excited. Even the Prince de Joinville was forgiven, when with protestations of repentance he threw himself at the feet of the Marquise, and implored her pardon--he could scarcely fail to be understood by such a woman, when he pleaded the extremes to which passion and disappointment could urge an ardent nature--while the Duc de Bellegarde was no sooner informed by the Princesse de Conti that the fortune, and perhaps even the life, of her brother were involved in the affair, than he devoted himself to her cause.

We have already stated that the time was not one of unnecessary scruple, and the peril of the Marquise was imminent. The letters not only existed, but were in the hands of the King: no honest or simple remedy could be suggested for such a disaster; and thus, as it was imperative to clear Madame de Verneuil from blame in order to save the Prince, it was

ultimately determined to deny the authenticity of the documents, and to attribute the forgery to a secretary of the Duc de Guise, who was celebrated for his aptitude in imitating every species of handwriting. The attempt was hazardous; but the infatuation of Henry for the fascinating favourite was so well known, that the conspirators were assured of the eagerness with which he would welcome any explanation, however doubtful; and they accordingly instructed the Marquise boldly to disavow the authorship of the obnoxious packet. The advice was, unfortunately, somewhat tardy; as, in her first terror, Madame de Verneuil had declared her inability to deny that she had written the letters which had aroused the anger of the King; but she modified the admission, by declaring that her hand had betrayed her heart, and that she had never felt what, in a moment of pique and annoyance, she had permitted herself to express. These were, however, mere words; and she had no sooner become cognizant of the expedients suggested by her advisers than she resolved to gainsay them; and accordingly, without a moment's hesitation, she despatched a message to the monarch to entreat that he would allow her to justify herself.

For a few days Henry remained inexorable, but at length his passion triumphed over his pride; and instead of summoning the Marquise to his presence as a criminal he proceeded to her residence, listened blindly to her explanations, became, or feigned to become, convinced by her arguments, and ultimately confessing himself to have been sufficiently credulous to be the culprit rather than the judge, he made a peace with his exulting mistress, which was cemented by a donation of six thousand livres.

As is usual in such cases, all the blame was now visited upon her accusers. Madame de Villars was exiled from the Court--a sentence to her almost as terrible as that of death, wedded as she was to a court-life, and by this unexpected result, separated from the Prince de Joinville, whose pardon she had hoped to secure by her apparent zeal for the honour of the monarch. The Prince himself was directed to proceed forthwith to Hungary to serve against the Turks; and the unfortunate secretary, who had been an unconscious instrument in the hands of the able conspirators, and whom it was necessary to consider guilty of a crime absolutely profitless to himself whatever might be its result, was committed to a prison; there to moralize at his leisure upon the vices of the great.

No mortification could, however, equal that of the Queen; who, having felt assured of the ruin of her rival, had incautiously betrayed her exultation in a manner better suited to a jealous wife than to an indignant sovereign; and who, when she became apprised of the reconciliation of the King with his wily mistress, expressed herself with so much warmth upon his wilful blindness, that a fortnight elapsed before they met again.

Nothing could be more ill-judged upon the part of Marie than this violence, as by estranging the King from herself she gave ample opportunity to the Marquise to resume her empire over his mind. It nevertheless appears certain that although he resented the sarcasms of the Queen, he was less the dupe of Madame de Verneuil than those about him imagined; he was fascinated, but not convinced; and it is probable that had Marie de Medicis at this moment sufficiently controlled her feelings to remain neuter, she might, for a time at least, have retained her truant husband under the spell of her own attractions. Such, however, was not the case; and between his suspicion of being deceived by his mistress, and his irritation at being openly taunted by his wife, the King, who shrank with morbid terror from domestic discomfort, instead of finding repose in the privacy of his own hearth, even while he was anxious to shake off the trammels by which he had been so long fettered, and to abandon a *liaison* which had ceased to inspire him with confidence, only sought to escape by transferring his somewhat exhausted affections to a new object. The struggle was, however, a formidable one; for although the Marquise had forfeited his good opinion, she had not lost her powers of fascination; and she so well knew how to use them, that, despite his better reason, the sensual monarch still remained her slave.

Thus his life became at this period one of perpetual worry and annoyance. Marie, irritated by what she justly considered as a culpable weakness and want of dignity on the part of her royal consort, persisted in exhibiting her resentment, and in loading the favourite with

every mark of contempt and obloquy; while Madame de Verneuil, in her turn, renewed her assertions of the illegality of the Queen's marriage, and the consequent illegitimacy of the Dauphin. The effect of such a feud may be readily imagined: the Court soon became divided into two distinct factions; and those among the great ladies and nobles who frequented the circle of the Marquise were forbidden the entrance of the Queen's apartments. One intrigue succeeded another; and while Marie, with jealous vindictiveness, endeavoured to mar the fortunes of those who attached themselves to the party of Madame de Verneuil, the Marquise left no effort untried to injure the partisans of the Queen. This last rupture was an irrevocable one.

In vain did Sully endeavour to restore peace. He could control the finances, and regulate the defences of a great nation; but he was as powerless as the King himself when he sought to fuse such jarring elements as these in the social crucible; and while he was still striving against hope to weaken, even if he could not wholly destroy, an animosity which endangered the dignity of the crown, and the respect due to one of the most powerful monarchs of Christendom, that monarch himself, wearied of a strife which he had not the moral courage either to terminate or to sustain, sought consolation for his trials in the smiles of Mademoiselle de Sourdis, whose favour he purchased by giving her in marriage to the Comte d'Estanges. This caprice, engendered rather by *ennui* than affection, was, however, soon terminated, as the new favourite could not, either personally or mentally, sustain a comparison with Madame de Verneuil; and great coldness still existed between the royal couple when the Court removed to Blois.

During the sojourn of their Majesties in that city, a misunderstanding infinitely more serious than any by which it had been preceded took place between them; and at length became so threatening, that although the night was far advanced, the King despatched D'Armagnac, his first valet-de-chambre, to desire the immediate presence of M. de Sully at the castle. Singularly enough, the Duke in his Memoirs affects a morbid reluctance even to allude to this outbreak, and professes his determination, in accordance with his promise to that effect made to both parties, not to reveal the subject of dispute; while at the same time he admits that, after a long interview with Henry, he spent the remainder of the night in passing from one chamber to the other, endeavouring to restore harmony between the royal pair, during which attempt many of the attendants of the Court were enabled at intervals to hear all parties mention the names of the Grand Duke and Duchess of Florence, the Duchess of Mantua, Virgilio Ursino, Don Juan de Medicis, the Duc de Bellegarde, Joannini, Concini, Leonora, Trainel, Vinti, Caterina Selvaggio, Gondy, and more frequently still, of Madame de Verneuil; a circumstance which was quite sufficient to dispel all mystery, as it at once became evident to those who mentally combined these significant names, that the royal quarrel was a recriminatory one, and that while the Queen was indulging in invectives against the Marquise, and her champion M. le Grand, the King retorted by reproaching her with the insolence of her Italian favourites, and her own weak submission to their thrall.

Capefigue, in his history, has shown less desire than Sully to envelop this royal quarrel in mystery; and plainly asserts, although without quoting his authority for such a declaration, that after mutual reproaches had passed between Henry and his wife, the Queen became so enraged that she sprang out of bed, and throwing herself upon the monarch, severely scratched him in the face; a violence which he immediately repaid with interest, and which induced him to summon the minister to the palace, whose first care was to prevail upon the King to retire to another apartment.

Marie, exasperated by the persevering infidelity of her husband, considered herself, with some reason, as the aggrieved party: she had given a Dauphin to France; her fair fame was untainted; and she persisted in enforcing her right to retain and protect her Tuscan attendants. Henry, on his part, was equally unyielding; and it was, as we have already shown, several hours before the bewildered minister of finance could succeed in restoring even a semblance of peace. To every argument which he advanced the Queen replied by enumerating the libertine adventures of her husband (with the whole of which she proved herself to be unhappily only too familiar), and by declaring that she would one day take ample vengeance

Marie de Medicis

on his mistresses; strong in the conviction that to whatever acts of violence she might be induced by the insults heaped upon her, no rightly thinking person would be found to condemn so just a revenge.

This declaration, let Sully modify it as he might, could but aggravate the anger of the King; and accordingly, he replied by a threat of banishing his wife to one of his distant palaces, and even of sending her back to Florence, with the whole of her foreign attendants.

From this project, if he really ever seriously entertained it, Henry was, however, at once dissuaded by his minister; who, less blinded by passion than himself, instantly recognised its enormity when proportioned to the offence which it was intended to punish; and consequently he did not hesitate to represent the odium which so unjust a measure must call down upon the head of the King. The Queen, whose irritation had reached its climax, was less easily persuaded; or the astute Concini, who was ever daring where his personal fortunes might be benefited, sacrificed his royal mistress to his own interests; for we find it recorded that some time subsequently, when Madame de Verneuil was residing at her hôtel in Paris, the Florentine favourite privately informed the monarch that Marie had engaged some persons on whom she could rely, to insult the Marquise; upon which Henry, after expressing his thanks for the communication, caused the favourite to leave the city under a strong escort.

Had the King been less unscrupulously inconstant, there is, however, no doubt that Marie de Medicis, from the strict propriety of her conduct to the last, and under every provocation, would ultimately have become an attached and devoted wife. Her ambition was satisfied, and her heart interested, in her maternal duties; but the open and unblushing licentiousness with which Henry pursued his numerous and frequently ignoble intrigues, irritated her naturally excitable temper, and consequently tended to throw her more completely into the power of the ambitious Italians by whom she was surrounded; among whom the most influential was Madame de Concini, a woman of firm mind, engaging manners, and strong national prejudices, who, in following the fortunes of her illustrious foster-sister, had deceived herself into the belief that they would be almost without a cloud; and it is therefore probable that a disappointment in this expectation, which, moreover, involved her own personal interests, rendered her bitter in her judgment of the *débonnaire* and reckless monarch who showed himself so indifferent to the attractions of her idolized mistress.

The subsequent ingratitude of Marie, indeed, only tends to increase the admiration of a dispassionate critic for the ill-requited Leonora; to whom it would appear, after a close analysis of her character, that ample justice has never yet been done; for ambitious as she was, it is certain that this unfortunate woman ever sought the welfare of the Queen, to whom she owed her advancement in life, even when the more short-sighted selfishness of her husband would have induced him to sacrifice all other considerations to his own insatiable thirst for power.

Unfortunately, however, the very excess of her affection rendered her a dangerous adviser to the indignant and neglected Princess, from whose private circle Henry at this period almost wholly absented himself.

Nor were these domestic anxieties the only ones against which the French King had to contend at this particular crisis; for while the Court circle had been absorbed in banquets and festivals, the seeds of civil war, sown by a few of the still discontented nobles, began to germinate; and Henry constantly received intelligence of seditious movements in the provinces. On the banks of the Loire and the Garonne the symptoms of disaffection had already ceased to be problematical; while at La Rochelle and Limoges the inhabitants had assaulted the government officers who sought to levy an obnoxious tax.

Little doubt existed in the minds of the monarch and his ministers that these hostile demonstrations were encouraged, if not suggested, by the secret agents of Philip III of Spain, and the Duke of Savoy, who had been busily engaged some time previously in dissuading the Swiss and Grisons from renewing the alliance which they had formed with Henri III, and

which became void at his death. This attempt was, however, frustrated by an offer made to them by Sillery of a million in gold, as payment of the debt still due to them from the French government for their past services; which enormous sum reached them through the hands of the Duc de Biron, to whom, as well as to the memory of his father, the old Maréchal, many of the Switzers were strongly and personally attached.

Day by day, also, the King had still more serious cause of apprehension, having ascertained almost beyond a doubt that the Duc de Bouillon, the head of the Huguenot party, who were incensed against Henry for having deserted their faith, was secretly engaged in a treaty with Spain, Savoy, and England, a circumstance rendered doubly dangerous from the fact that the Protestants still held several fortified places in Guienne, Languedoc, and other provinces, which would necessarily, should the negotiation prove successful, be delivered into his hands. There can be no doubt, moreover, that the monarch keenly felt the ingratitude of this noble, whom he had himself raised to the independent sovereignty of the duchy whence he derived his title; but his mortification was increased upon ascertaining that the Maréchal de Biron, who had been one of his most familiar friends, and in whose good-faith and loyalty he had ever placed implicit trust, was also numbered among his enemies, and endeavouring to secure his own personal advancement by betraying his master.

No two men could probably have been selected throughout the whole nation more fitted to endanger the stability of the royal authority. Both were marshals of France, and alike celebrated for their talent as military leaders, as well as for their insatiable ambition. Of the two, perhaps, however, the Duc de Bouillon was likely to prove the most formidable enemy to the sovereign; from the fact of his being by far the more able and the more subtle politician, and, moreover, gifted with a caution and judgment which were entirely wanting in the impetuous and reckless Biron.

Bouillon, who possessed great influence in the counsels of the Huguenots, was supported by the Duc de la Trémouille, his co-religionist, another leader of the reformed party; and secretly also by the Duc d'Epéron, whose fortunes having greatly deteriorated since the death of Henri III, considered himself harshly treated, and was ready to join every cabal which was formed against that King's successor, although he always avoided any open demonstration of hostility which might tend to compromise his personal safety.

A third individual pointed out to the King as one of his most active enemies was Charles de Valois, Comte d'Auvergne, the step-brother of Madame de Verneuil; to whom not only in consideration of his royal blood, but also as the relative of the Marquise, Henry had ever shown a favour which he little merited. Such an adversary the monarch could, however, afford to despise, for he well knew the Count to be more dangerous as a friend than as an enemy; his cowardly dread of danger constantly impelling him, at the merest prospect of peril, to betray others in order to save himself; while his cunning, his gratuitous and unmanly cruelty, and the unblushing perfidy which recalled with only too much vividness the character of his father, Charles IX, rendered him at once unsafe and unpleasant as an associate. Despite all these drawbacks, Biron with his usual recklessness had nevertheless accepted him as a partner in his meditated revolt, D'Auvergne having declared that he would run all risks in order to revenge the dishonour brought upon his family by the King; but in reality the Comte only sought to benefit himself in a struggle where he had little to lose, and might, as he believed, become a gainer.

The madness of the Duc de Biron in betraying the interests of a sovereign who had constantly treated him with honour and distinction, can only find its solution in his overweening vanity, as he was already wealthy, powerful, and popular; and had, moreover, acquired the reputation of being one of the first soldiers in France. He had been appointed admiral, and subsequently marshal; and had even been entrusted with the command of the King's armies at the siege of Amiens, where he bore the title of marshal-general, although several Princes of the Blood and the Connétable himself were present. He was decorated with all the Royal Orders; was a duke and peer of the realm, and Governor of Bordeaux; and, in fine, every attainable dignity had been lavished upon him; while he yielded precedence only to

royalty, and to the Duc de Montmorency, to whose office it was vain to aspire during his lifetime.

Such was the Maréchal de Biron, when, in the vainglorious hope of one day becoming the sovereign of certain of the French provinces, he voluntarily trampled under foot every obligation of loyalty and gratitude, and leagued himself with the enemies of his royal master, to wrest from him the sceptre which he so firmly wielded. The first intelligence of the Duke's defection which reached the monarch--to whom, however, his conduct had long appeared problematical--was obtained through the treachery of the Maréchal's most trusted agent; a man whom Biron had constantly employed in all his intrigues, and from whom he had no secrets. This individual, who from certain circumstances saw reason to believe that the plans of the Duke must ultimately fail from their very immensity, and who feared for his own safety in the event of his patron's disgrace, resolved to save himself by communicating the whole conspiracy to the King; for which purpose he solicited an audience, declaring that he had important matters to reveal, which involved not only the throne of the sovereign, but even his life; and he so confidently insisted upon this fact, that an interview was at length accorded to him at Fontainebleau; where, in the presence of Henry and the Duc de Sully, he confessed that conceiving himself to have been ill-used by the Court, he had from mortified vanity adopted the interests of M. de Biron, and even participated in the conspiracy of which he was now anxious to anticipate the effects, and from which he had instantly retired when he discovered that it involved the lives of his Majesty and the Dauphin.

He then solemnly asserted that when the Maréchal de Biron proceeded to Flanders to receive the oath of peace from the Archduke Albert, the Spaniards, who at once detected the extent of his vanity and ambition, had flattered his weakness and encouraged his hopes; and that they had ultimately despatched to him an individual named Picoté, who for some crime had been exiled from Orleans, and who was authorized to give him the assurance that it only depended upon the Duke himself to secure a brilliant position through their agency, should he see fit to become their ally. The Maréchal, his associate went on to say, listened eagerly to the proposition, and expressed his willingness to treat with Spain whenever it might be deemed expedient to confide to him the real meaning of the message; a reply which satisfied the Spaniards that with proper caution they should find it no difficult undertaking to attach him entirely to their interests, or, failing in this attempt, to rid themselves of a dangerous adversary by rendering him the victim of his own treason.

Elated by the brilliant prospect which thus opened upon him, Biron gradually became less energetic in the service of his legitimate master; and after the peace of Vervins, finding his influence necessarily diminished, he began to murmur, affecting to believe that the services which he had rendered to the sovereign had not been duly recognized; and it was at this period, according to his betrayer, that their acquaintance had commenced, an acquaintance which so rapidly ripened into friendship that ere long he became the depository of his patron's most cherished secrets.

After many and anxious consultations, principally caused by the uncertainty of the Duke as to the nature of the honours which were to be conferred upon him, it had been at length resolved between the two conspirators that they should despatch a priest to the Duke of Savoy, a monk of Cîteaux to Milan, and Picoté himself to Spain, to treat with the several Princes in the name of the Maréchal; and what was even more essential to the monarch to ascertain, was the fact that a short time subsequently, and before he visited Paris, the Duke of Savoy had entered into a secret negotiation with Biron, and even led him to believe that he would bestow upon him the hand of one of his daughters, by which marriage the Maréchal would have become the cousin of the Emperor of Germany, and the nephew of the King of Spain, an alliance which, to so ambitious a spirit, opened up an opportunity of self-aggrandizement never to be realized in his own country and under his own sovereign.

In return for this concession, Biron had pledged himself to his wily ally that he would provide so much occupation for Henry in the interior of his kingdom, that he should have no leisure to attempt the invasion of the marquisate of Saluzzo, a pledge which more than any

other gratified M. de Savoie, who lived in constant dread of being driven from his territories. During the war the Maréchal nevertheless took several of the Duke's fortresses in Brescia; but a perfect understanding had been established between them which rendered this circumstance comparatively unimportant; and on the refusal of Henry to permit the appointment of a governor of his own selection for the citadel of Bourg, Biron became so incensed by what he designated as the ingratitude of his sovereign--though he was fully aware that by countenancing such an arrangement the King must necessarily leave the fortress entirely in his power--that he no longer restrained himself, but declared that the death of the French sovereign was essential to the accomplishment of his projects; and meanwhile he gave the Duke of Savoy, whom he thenceforward regarded as his firmest friend, constant information of the state and movements of the hostile army.

A short time afterwards it was definitely arranged between the conspirators that the Duke of Savoy should give his third daughter in marriage to the Maréchal, with a dowry of five hundred thousand golden crowns; that the Spanish monarch should cede to him all his claims of sovereignty upon the duchy of Burgundy; and that the Condé de Fuentes and the Duke of Savoy should march their combined forces into France, thus disabling Henry from pursuing his design of reconquering the long-coveted duchy.

This treasonable design, owing to circumstances upon which the impetuous Biron had failed to calculate, proved, however, abortive; and he had no sooner convinced himself of the fact, and comprehended the perilous position in which he had been placed by his imprudence, than he hastened to Lyons, where the King was then sojourning; and having obtained an audience, he confessed with a seeming frankness irresistible to so generous and unsuspecting a nature as that of Henry, that he had been sufficiently misled by his ambition secretly to demand from the Duke of Savoy the hand of his younger daughter; and that, moreover, in the excess of his mortification at the refusal of his Majesty to appoint a governor of his own selection at Bourg, he had even been induced to plot against the state, for both which crimes he humbly solicited the royal pardon.

Full well did Henry and his minister remember this occurrence; nor could the King forget that although he had urged the Maréchal to reveal to him the whole extent of the intrigue, he had dexterously evaded his most searching inquiries, and constantly recurred to his contrition. Henry owed much to Biron, whom he had long loved; and with a magnanimity worthy of his noble nature, after a few expostulations and reproaches, he not only pardoned him for what he believed to have been a mere temporary abandonment of his duties, but even assured him of his future favour, and bade him return in all security to his post.

Unhappily, however, the demon of ambition by which the Duke was possessed proved too powerful for the generous clemency of the King, and he resumed his treasonable practices; but a misunderstanding having ensued between himself and the false friend by whom he was now betrayed, all the private documents which had been exchanged between himself and the foreign princes through whose aid he trusted to obtain the honours of sovereignty, were communicated on this occasion to the monarch whose dignity and whose confidence he had alike outraged.

A free pardon was accorded to the traitor through whose means Henry was made acquainted with the extent of the intrigue, on condition that he should reside within the precincts of the Court and lend his assistance to convict the Duke of his crime, terms to which the perfidious confidant readily consented; while with a tact worthy of his falsehood, he soon succeeded in reinstating himself in the good graces of the Duke, by professing to be earnestly engaged in France in furthering his interests, and by giving him reason to believe that he was still devoted to his cause.

To this deception, and to his own obstinacy, Biron owed his fate.

The alarming facts which had thus been revealed to them were communicated by Henry and his minister to certain members of the privy council, by whom a report was drawn up and placed in the hands of the Chancellor; and, this preliminary arrangement completed, it was

determined to recall the Maréchal to Court either to justify himself, or to undergo the penalty of his treason. In order to effect this object, however, it was necessary to exercise the greatest caution, as Biron was then in Burgundy; and his alarm having already been excited by the evasion of his most confidential agent, they felt that he might, should his suspicions be increased, place himself at the head of the troops under his command, by whom he was idolized, and thus become doubly dangerous. It was, consequently, only by a subterfuge that there was any prospect of inducing him to approach the capital; and the King, by the advice of Sully, and not without a latent hope that he might be enabled to clear himself of blame, openly asserted that he put no faith in the disclosures which had been made to him, and that he would advise the Maréchal to be careful of those about him, whose envy or enmity led them to put a misconstruction upon his motives as well as upon his actions. The Baron de Luz, the confidential friend of Biron, for whose ear these declarations were especially designed, did not fail to communicate them on the instant to the accused party; while La Fin, by whom he had been betrayed, likewise wrote to assure him that in revealing the conspiracy to the King and the ministers he had been cautious not to utter a word by which he could be personally implicated. It is certain, however, that the Duke placed little reliance either upon the assertions of Henry, or the assurances of his treacherous agent; as on the receipt of a letter from the sovereign, announcing his own instant departure for Poitou, where he invited Biron to join him, in order that he might afford him his advice upon certain affairs of moment, the latter wrote to excuse himself, alleging, as a pretext for his disobedience to the royal command, the rumour of a reported aggression of the Spaniards, and the necessity of his presence at a meeting of the States of Burgundy which had been convoked for the 22nd of May, where it would be essential that he should watch over the interests of his Majesty.

The King did not further insist at that moment; but having ascertained on his return from Poitou that fresh movements had been made in Burgundy, in Saintonge, in Périgord, and in Guienne, which threatened to prove inimical to his authority, and that couriers were constantly passing from one of these provinces to the other, he sent to desire the presence of the Sieur Descures, an intimate friend and follower of the Maréchal, whom he commanded to proceed with all speed to Burgundy, and to inform his lord that if he did not forthwith obey the royal summons, the sovereign would go in person to bring him thence. This threat was sufficiently appalling; and the rather as Sully, by his authority as grand-master of artillery, had taken the precaution, on pretext of recasting the cannon and improving the quality of the powder in the principal cities of Burgundy, to cripple Biron's resources, and to render it impossible for him to attempt any rational resistance to the royal will. The Maréchal soon perceived that he had been duped, but, nevertheless, he would not yield; and Descures left him, firm in his determination not to trust himself within the precincts of the Court.

The King, who, from his old attachment to Biron, had hitherto hoped that he had been calumniated, and that, in lieu of crimes, he had only been guilty of follies, offended by so resolute an opposition to his will, began, like his ministers, to apprehend that he must in truth thenceforward number the Duke among his enemies; and he consequently suffered himself, shortly after the return of his last messenger, to be persuaded to despatch the President Jeannin as the bearer of a third summons to the Maréchal, and to represent to him how greatly he was increasing the displeasure of the sovereign by his disobedience, as well as strengthening the suspicions which were already entertained against him. Finally, the president was instructed to assure the haughty and imperious rebel that the King had not forgotten the good service which he had rendered to the nation; and that he ascribed the accusations which had reached him rather to the exaggerations of those who in making such reports sought to increase their own favour at Court than to any breach of trust on the part of the Maréchal himself.

Somewhat reassured by these declarations, and unconscious of the extent of La Fin's treachery, Biron allowed himself to be persuaded by the eloquence of Jeannin, and reluctantly left Dijon for Fontainebleau, where he arrived on the 13th of June. As he was about to dismount, La Fin approached to welcome him; and while holding his stirrup whispered in his ear: "Courage, my master; speak out boldly, for they know nothing". The Duke silently nodded his reply, and at once proceeded to the royal chamber, where Henry received him with a gay

countenance and open arms, declaring that he had done well to accept his invitation, or he should assuredly have gone to fetch him in person as he had threatened. Biron excused himself, but with a coldness extremely displeasing to the King, who, however, forebore to exhibit any symptom of annoyance; and after a short conversation in which no further allusion was made to the position of the Maréchal, Henry, as he had often previously done, proposed to show him the progress of the new buildings upon which he was then actively engaged; and, leading the way to the gardens, he did in fact for a time point out to him every object of interest. This done, he suddenly turned the discourse upon the numerous reasons for displeasure which the recent acts of Biron had given him (being careful, nevertheless, not to betray the extent of his knowledge), and earnestly urged him to confess the real amount of the imprudence of which he had been guilty, pledging his royal word, that should he do so with frankness and sincerity, the avowal would ensure his pardon.

But this the infatuated Duke had no intention of conceding. The whispered assurance of La Fin still vibrated on his ear, and he also calculated largely on his intimacy with D'Auvergne, which secured to him the influence of Madame de Verneuil. He consequently replied, with an arrogance as unbecoming as it was misplaced, that he had not come to Court to justify himself, but in order to ascertain who were his accusers; and, moreover, added that, having committed no crime, he did not require any pardon; nor could either Henry himself or the Duc de Sully, with whom he had subsequently a lengthened interview, succeed in inducing him to make the slightest confession.

The noonday repast was no sooner over than the King sent to summon the Maréchal to his closet, where he once more exerted every effort to soften the obduracy of the man to whose valour he was well aware that he had been greatly indebted for his crown, and whom he was consequently anxious to save from dishonour and ignominy; but, unfortunately for his own interests, Biron retained as vivid a recollection of the fact as Henry himself; and he so highly estimated the value of his services, that he resolved to maintain the haughty position which he had assumed, and to persist in a denial that was fated to cost him his life. Instead, therefore, of throwing himself upon the clemency of the King by an undisguised avowal of his treason, he merely replied to the appeal by again demanding to know who were his accusers; upon which Henry rose from his seat, and exclaiming: "Come, we will play a match at tennis", hastily left the room, followed by the culprit.

The King having selected the Comte de Soissons as his second against the Duc d'Epéron and the Maréchal, this ill-assorted party continued for some time apparently absorbed in the game; and so thoroughly did it recall past scenes and times to the mind of the monarch, that he resolved, before he abandoned his once faithful subject to his fate, to make one last endeavour to overcome his obstinacy. He accordingly authorized M. de Soissons to exert whatever influence he possessed with the rash man who was so blindly working out his own ruin, and to represent to him the madness of persisting in a line of conduct which could not fail to provoke the wrath of his royal master.

"Remember, Monsieur", said the Prince, who was as anxious as the monarch himself that the scandal of a public trial, and the certainty of an ignominious death, should be spared to so brave a soldier—"remember that a sovereign's anger is the messenger of destruction".

Biron, however, persisted in declaring that he had no reason to fear the displeasure of Henry, and had consequently no confession to make; and with this fatal answer the Count was fain to content himself.

The King rose early on the following morning, full of anxiety and apprehension. He could not look back upon the many gallant acts of the unfortunate Maréchal without feeling a bitter pang at the idea that an old and formerly zealous servant was about to become a victim to expediency, for the spirit of revolt, which he had hitherto endeavoured to suppress by clemency, had now risen hydra-headed, threatening to dispute his right of reprisal, and to involve the nation once more in civil war. He painfully felt, that under circumstances like these, lenity would become, not only a weakness, but a crime, and possessing, as he did, the

Marie de Medicis

most indubitable proofs of Biron's guilt, he saw himself compelled to forget the friend in the sovereign, and to deliver up the attainted noble to the justice of his betrayed country.

A privy council was consequently assembled, at which Henry declared his determination to arrest the Duke, and to put him upon his trial, if, after mature deliberation, it was decided that he deserved death, as otherwise he was resolved not to injure his reputation by any accusations which might tarnish his renown or embitter his existence. To this last indication of relenting he received in reply an assurance that no further deliberation was requisite, as the treason of the Maréchal was so fully proved, and the facts so amply authenticated, that he would be condemned to the axe by every tribunal in the world.

On finding that his councillors were unanimous in this opinion, the King summoned MM. de Vitry and de Praslin, and gave them orders to arrest both the Duc de Biron and the Comte d'Auvergne, desiring them at the same time to act with the greatest caution, and carefully to avoid all noise and disorder.

When their Majesties had supped they retired to the private apartments, where, among other courtiers, they were joined by the two conspirators, both of whom were peculiarly obnoxious to the Queen--D'Auvergne from his general character, as well as his relationship to Madame de Verneuil, and Biron from his intimacy with the brother of the favourite, who had renewed her pretended claim to the hand of Henry, a subject which always tortured the heart of Marie, involving, as it did, the legitimacy of her son, and her own honour. It was not, therefore, without a great exertion of self-command that she replied to the ceremonious compliments of the Duke by courtesies equally lip-deep, and, at the express desire of the King, was induced to accept him as her companion at the card-table. During the progress of the game, a Burgundian nobleman named Mergé approached the Maréchal and murmured in a low voice, as he affected to examine his cards, that he was about to be arrested, but Biron being at that moment deeply absorbed in his occupation, did not hear or heed the warning, and he continued to play on in the greatest security until D'Auvergne, to whom Mergé had communicated the ill-success of his own attempt, in his turn drew near the royal table, and whispered as he bowed profoundly to the Queen, by which means he brought his lips to a level with the Duke's ear: "We are not safe here".

Biron did not for an instant lose his presence of mind; but without the movement of a muscle again gathered up his cards, and pursued his game, which was only terminated at midnight by an intimation from the King that it was time for her Majesty to retire. Henry then withdrew in his turn; but before he left the room he turned towards the Maréchal and said with marked emphasis: "Adieu, *Baron de Biron*, you know what I have told you".

As the Duke, considerably startled by this extraordinary address, was about to leave the antechamber, Vitry seized his right arm with one hand, and with the other laid a firm grasp upon his sword, exclaiming: "Monsieur, the King has confided the care of your person to me. Deliver up your sword". A few of the gentlemen of the Duke's household who were awaiting him made a show of resistance, but they were instantly seized by the guard; upon which the Maréchal demanded an interview with the monarch.

"His Majesty has retired", replied Vitry. "Give me your sword".

"Ha! my sword", said Biron with a deep sigh of indignant mortification, "that sword which has rendered him so much good service"; and without further comment or expostulation he placed the weapon in the hands of the captain of the guard, and followed him to the chamber in which he was to pass the night.

The Comte d'Auvergne had meanwhile also been arrested at the gate of the palace by M. de Praslin, and conducted to another apartment.

The criminals were no sooner secured than the King despatched a messenger to Sully to inform him of the fact, and to desire his immediate attendance at the palace; and on his arrival, after narrating to him the mode of their capture, Henry desired him to mount his horse, and to repair without delay to the Bastille, in order to prepare apartments for them in

that fortress. "I will forward them in boats to the water-gate of the Arsenal", he pursued; "let them land there, but be careful that they are seen by no one; and convey them thence to their lodgings as quietly as possible across your own courts and gardens. So soon as you have arranged everything for their landing, hasten to the Parliament and to the Hôtel-de-Ville; there explain all that has passed, and say that on my arrival in the capital I will communicate my reasons for what I have done, of which the justice will be at once apparent".

This arrangement was made upon the instant, and on the morrow the prisoners were embarked in separate boats upon the Seine, under a strong escort of the King's bodyguard; and on their arrival at the Bastille they were delivered into the express keeping of the Duc de Sully; while upon his subsequent entrance into Paris on the afternoon of the same day, Henry was received with acclamation by the citizens, who were aware of the fruitless efforts made by the monarch to induce the Maréchal to return to his allegiance, and whose joy was of the most enthusiastic description at the escape of their beloved sovereign from a foul conspiracy. The Maréchal de Biron, like all men who have attained to a high station, and whose ambition prompts them to conciliate the goodwill of those by whom they are approached, possessed many friends; but the accusation of *lèse-majesté* under which he laboured was one of so formidable a nature that they remained totally passive; and it was only his near relatives who ventured to peril their own favour by making an appeal in his behalf. Their supplications, earnest and humble though they were, failed, however, to shake the resolution of Henry, whose pride had, in this instance, been doubly wounded alike as a monarch and as a man. He felt that not only had the King of France to deal with a rebel, but that the confiding friend, who had been ready upon the slightest appearance of regret or repentance once more to forgive, had been treated with distrust and recompensed by falsehood.

While those closely connected with him were endeavouring, by every means in their power, to appease the just indignation of the sovereign, and to intercede in his behalf, Biron himself, as though his past services must necessarily suffice to secure his impunity, was indulging, even within the formidable walls of the Bastille, in the grossest and most ill-judged vituperations against the King; and boasting of his own exploits, rather like a maniac than a brave and gallant soldier who had led armies into the field, and there done his duty unflinchingly. He partook sparingly of the food which was presented to him; and instead of taking rest, spent the greater portion of the night in pacing to and fro the narrow apartment. It was evident that he had firm faith either in the royal pardon, or in the means of escape being provided for him by his friends; but as day by day went by, and he received no intelligence from without, while he remarked that every individual who entered his chamber was fully armed, and that the knives upon his table were not pointed, in order that he should be unable to convert them into defensive weapons, he became somewhat less violent; and he no sooner ascertained that Henry had refused to comply with the petition of his family than he said, with a bitter laugh: "Ha! I see that they wish me to take the road to the scaffold". Thenceforward he ceased to demand justice on his accusers, became less imperious, and even admitted that he had no rational hope save in the mercy of the monarch.

On the 27th of July, the preliminary arrangements having been completed, the Maréchal was conducted to the Palais de Justice by the Sieur de Montigny, the Governor of Paris, in a covered barge escorted by twelve or fifteen armed men. Previously, however, to his being put upon his trial, he was privately interrogated by the commissioners chosen for that purpose; but this last judicial effort to save him only tended to secure his ruin. When confronted with his judges, Biron appeared to have lost all consistency of character; the soldier was sunk in the sophist; he argued vaguely and inconsistently; and compromised his own cause by the very clumsiness of the efforts which he made to clear himself. Unaware of the revelations of La Fin, when he was confronted with him he declared him to be a man of honour, his relative, and his very good friend; but the depositions of the Burgundian noble were no sooner made known to him than he retracted his former assertion, branding him as a sorcerer, a traitor, an assassin, and the vilest of men, with other epithets too coarse for repetition. These terrible accusations, however, came too late to serve his cause; he had already committed himself by his previous panegyric; and, perceiving that such was the case, he hastened to support his testimony against his former accomplice by asserting that were Renazé alive and in France, he should be

able to prove the truth of what he advanced, and to justify himself. Unfortunately for the success of this assurance, Renazé in his turn made his appearance in court; having, by a strange chance, recently escaped from Savoy, where the Duke had held him a prisoner; and Biron had the mortification of finding that this, another of his ancient allies, had not been more faithful to him in his adversity than La Fin. These two witnesses, indeed, decided his fate; as the letters which were produced against him were proved to have been written before the previous pardon granted to him by Henry at Lyons, and they were consequently of no avail as regarded the present accusation.

The Parliament was presided over by Messire Pomponne de Bellièvre, Chancellor of France, beside whom the Maréchal was requested to take his place upon a low wooden stool. Matthieu asserts that, although neither duke nor peer had obeyed the summons of the Chambers, the number of Biron's judges nevertheless amounted to one hundred and twelve; and it is probable that this very fact gave him confidence, as during the two long hours occupied by his trial he never once lost his self-possession, but argued as closely and as sagaciously as though he had yielded to no previous intemperance of language. He urged the pardon previously accorded to him by the King; earnestly protested that he had never entered into any cabal against the throne or dignity of his sovereign; and denied that any man could be proved a traitor, whatever might be his wishes, so long as he made no effort to realize them. He admitted that he might have talked rashly, but appealed to his judges whether he had not proved himself equally reckless in the field; and required them to declare if so venial a fault had not, by that fact, already been sufficiently expiated. He then recapitulated the events of his career as a military leader; but he did so temperately and modestly, without a trace of the arrogant bombast for which he had throughout his life been celebrated. So great was the effect of this unexpected and manly dignity, that many members of the court were seen to shed tears; and had his fate been decided upon the instant, it is probable that his calm and touching eloquence might have saved his life; but so much time had already been exhausted that enough did not remain for collecting the votes, and the result of the trial was consequently deferred; the Maréchal meanwhile returning to the Bastille under the same escort which had conveyed him to the capital.

On the 29th, the Chambers having again assembled, they remained in deliberation from six o'clock in the morning until two hours after midday, when sentence of death was unanimously pronounced against the prisoner; and he was condemned to lose his head in the Place de Grève, "as attainted and convicted of having outraged the person of the King, and conspired against his kingdom; all his property to be confiscated, his peerage reunited to the Crown; and himself shorn of all his honours and dignities".

On the following day, the decision of the Parliament having been made public, immense crowds collected in the Place de Grève in order to witness the execution; scaffoldings were erected on every side for the accommodation of the spectators; and the tumult at length became so great that it reached the ears of the Maréchal in his prison-chamber. Rushing to the window, whence he could command a view of some portion of the open fields leading to the Rue St. Antoine, along which numerous groups were still making their eager way, he exclaimed, in violent emotion: "I have been judged, and I am a dead man". One of his guards hastened to assure him that the outcry was occasioned by a quarrel between two nobles, which was about to terminate in a duel; and the unhappy prisoner thus remained for a short time in uncertainty as to his ultimate fate. Yet still, as he sat in his dreary prison, he heard the continued murmur of the excited citizens, who, believing that he was to be put to death by torchlight, persisted in holding their weary watch until an hour before midnight.

The King had, however, determined to postpone the execution until the morrow; when, apparently yielding to the solicitations of the Duke's family, but, as many surmised, anxious to avoid a tumult which the great popularity of Biron with the troops, and the numerous friends and followers whom he possessed about the Court, led him to apprehend might prove the result of so public a disgrace to his surviving relatives, Henry consented to change the place of execution to the court of the Bastille, where the Maréchal accordingly was beheaded at five o'clock in the evening. The circumstances attending his decapitation are too painful for detail;

Marie de Medicis

suffice it that his last struggles for life displayed a cowardice which ill accorded with his previous gallantry, and that it was only by a feint that the executioner at length succeeded in performing his ghastly office; while so great had been the violence of the victim, that his head bounded three times upon the scaffold, and emitted more blood than the trunk from which it had been severed.

It was said that the father of the culprit, the former Maréchal, had on one occasion, during an exhibition of the violence in which Biron so continually indulged, bitterly exclaimed: "I would advise you, Baron, as soon as peace is signed, to go and plant cabbages on your estate, or you will one day bring your head to the scaffold". A fearful prophecy fearfully fulfilled.

The corpse was conveyed to the church of St. Paul, where it was interred without any ceremony, but surrounded by a dense mass of the populace, many of whom openly pitied his fate, and lamented over his fall.

La Fin and Renazé were pardoned; but Hubert, the secretary of the Maréchal, suffered "the question", both ordinary and extraordinary, and was condemned to perpetual imprisonment, having refused to make any confession. He was, however, a short time subsequently, restored to liberty; but the remembrance of all that he had undergone rankled in his heart, and he no sooner found himself once more free than he abandoned his country, and withdrew to Spain, where he passed the remainder of his life.

The Baron de Luz, who had revealed all he knew of the conspiracy on the promise of a free pardon, was not only forgiven for the share which he had taken in the plot, but had, moreover, all his appointments confirmed; and was made governor of the castle of Dijon and the town of Beaune. The governorship of Burgundy, vacant by the death of Biron, was given to the Dauphin; and the lieutenancy of the province was conferred upon the Duc de Bellegarde, by whom the young Prince was ultimately succeeded in the higher dignity.

A Breton nobleman, named Montbarot, was committed to the Bastille on suspicion of being involved in the cabal; but no proof of his participation having transpired, he was shortly afterwards liberated.

The Duc de Bouillon, who was conscious that he had not been altogether guiltless of participation in the crime for which the less cautious Biron had just suffered death, deeming it expedient to provide for his own safety, took refuge in his viscounty of Turenne, where, however, he did not long remain inactive; and reports of his continued disaffection having reached the ears of the King, he was, in his turn, summoned to the royal presence in order to justify himself; but the example of his decapitated friend was still too recent to encourage him to such a concession; and instead of presenting himself at Court he despatched thither a very eloquent letter, in which he informed the monarch that, being aware of the falsehood and artifice of his accusers, he entreated him to dispense with his appearance in the capital; and to approve instead, that, for the satisfaction of his Majesty, the French nation, and his own honour, he should present himself before the Chamber of Castres; that assembly forming an integral portion of the Parliament of Toulouse, which held jurisdiction over his own viscounty of Turenne. Having forwarded this missive to the sovereign, he hastened to Castres, where he appeared as he had suggested, and caused his presence to be registered. The determination of Henry to compel his attendance at Paris was, however, only strengthened by this act of defiance; and having ascertained that the King was about to despatch a messenger to compel his obedience, M. de Bouillon left Castres in haste for Orange, whence he proceeded, by way of Geneva, to Heidelberg, and placed himself under the protection of the Prince Palatine, after having declared his innocence to Elizabeth of England and the other Protestant sovereigns, and entreated their support and mediation.

Thus far, with the exception of Biron himself, all the members of this famous conspiracy had escaped with their lives, and some among them without loss, either of freedom or of property; one of their number, however, was fated to be less fortunate, and this one was the Baron de Fontenelles, a man of high family, who had for several years rendered himself peculiarly obnoxious to the King and his ministers, and whose atrocious barbarities caused

him to fall unpitied. This wretched man, after having been put to the torture, was, by the sentence pronounced against him by the council, broken alive upon the wheel, where he suffered the greatest agony during an hour and a half. His lieutenant was condemned to the gallows for having been the medium of his communication with the Spanish Government; although, even as he was ascending the fatal ladder, he continued to declare that he had always been ignorant of the contents of the packets which he was charged to deliver, and could neither read nor write.

With the life of Biron, the conspiracy had terminated; while his fate had not failed to produce universal consternation. His devotion to the early fortunes of the King had been at once so great and so efficient, his military renown was so universally acknowledged, and his favour with the monarch was so apparently beyond the reach of chance or change, that his unhappy end pointed a moral even to the proudest, and so paralysed the spirit of those who might otherwise have felt inclined to question the royal authority, that even the nearest and dearest of his friends uttered no murmur; while those individuals who had dreaded to find themselves compromised by his ruin, and who, to their equal surprise and satisfaction, discovered that, while he had unguardedly preserved all the papers which could tend to his own destruction, he had destroyed every vestige of their criminality, rejoiced at their escape, and flattered themselves that their participation in his treachery would for ever remain undiscovered; a circumstance which rendered them at once patient and silent.

That the necessity for taking the life of the Maréchal had been bitterly felt by the King himself, we have already shown; and it was further evinced when he declared to those who interceded for the doomed man, that had his personal interests alone been threatened by the treason of the criminal, he should have found it easy to pardon the wrong that had been done him; but that, when he looked into the future, and remembered that the safety of the kingdom which had been confided to him, and of the son who was to succeed him upon the throne, must both be compromised by sparing one who had already proved that his loyalty could not be purchased by mercy, he held himself bound to secure both against an evil for which there was no other safeguard than the infliction of the utmost penalty of the law.

Many argued that, having spared the lives of the Ducs d'Epéron, de Bouillon, and de Mayenne, all of whom had at different times been in arms against him, Henry might equally have shown mercy to Biron; but while they urged this argument, they omitted to remember that the political crime of these three nobles had not been aggravated, like that of the Maréchal, by private wrong; and that they had not, by an unyielding obstinacy, and an ungrateful pertinacity in rebellion, exhausted the forbearance of an indulgent monarch. Moreover, Biron, in grasping at sovereignty, had not hesitated to invite the intrusion of foreign and hostile troops into French territory, or to betray the exigencies and difficulties of the army under his own command to his dangerous allies; thus weakening for the moment, and imperilling for the future, the resources of a frank and trusting master; two formidable facts, which justified the severity alike of his King and of his judges.

The lesson was a salutary one for the French nobility, who had, from long impunity, learnt to regard their personal relations with foreign princes as matters beyond the authority of the sovereign, and which could involve neither their safety nor their honour; for it taught them that the highest head in the realm might fall under an accusation of treason; and that, powerful as each might be in his own province or his own government, he was still responsible to the monarch for the manner in which he used that power, and answerable to the laws of his country should he be rash enough to abuse it.

That Henry felt and understood that such must necessarily be the effect produced by the fate of the Maréchal there can be little doubt, as well as that he was still further induced to impress so wholesome a conviction upon the minds of his haughty aristocracy by the probability of a minority, during which the disorders incident to so many conflicting and imaginary claims could not fail to convulse the kingdom and to endanger the stability of the throne; while it is no less evident that, once having forced upon their reason a conviction of his own ability to compel obedience where his authority was resisted, and to assert his sovereign

privilege where he felt it to be essential to the preservation of the realm, he evinced no desire to extend his severity beyond its just limits. Thus, as we have seen, with the exception of the Baron de Fontenelles, who had drawn down upon himself the terrible expiation of a cruel death, rather by a long succession of crime than by his association in the conspiracy of Biron, all the other criminals already judged had escaped the due punishment of their treason; while the Comte d'Auvergne, after having been detained during a couple of months in the Bastille, was restored to liberty at the intercession of his sister, Madame de Verneuil, who pledged herself to the monarch that he was guilty only in so far as he had been faithful to the trust reposed in him by the Maréchal, and had forborne to betray his secret, while he had never actively participated in the conspiracy. She moreover assured Henry, who was only anxious to find an opportunity of pardoning the Count--an anxiety which the tears and supplications of the Marquise, as well as his own respect for the blood of the Valois inherited by D'Auvergne from his royal father, tended naturally to increase--that the prisoner was prepared, since the death of Biron had freed him from all further necessity for silence, to communicate to his Majesty every particular of which he was cognizant. The concession was accepted; the Count made the promised revelations; and his liberation was promptly followed by a renewal of the King's favour.

Towards the close of the year, intelligence having reached Henry that the Prince de Joinville, who was serving in the army of the Archduke, had, in his turn, suffered himself to be seduced from his allegiance by the Spaniards, he gave instant orders for his arrest; but the Prince no sooner found himself a prisoner than he declared his readiness to confess everything, provided he were permitted to do so to the King in person and in the presence of Sully. His terms were complied with; and, as both Henry and his minister had anticipated from the frivolous and inconsequent character of their new captive, it at once became apparent that no idea of treason had been blent with the follies of which he had been guilty, but that they had merely owed their origin to his idle love of notoriety. A correspondence with Spain had become, as we have shown, the fashion at the French Court; and Joinville had accordingly, in order to increase his importance, resolved to effect in his turn an understanding with that country. During his audience of the King he so thoroughly betrayed the utter puerility of his proceedings that the monarch at once resolved to treat him as a silly and headstrong youth, towards whom any extreme measure of severity would be alike unnecessary and undignified; and he had consequently no sooner heard Joinville's narration to an end than he desired the presence of his mother the Duchesse de Guise and his brother the Duke, and as they entered the royal closet, somewhat startled by so sudden a summons, he said, directing their attention to the delinquent: "There stands the prodigal son in person; he has filled his head with follies; but I shall treat him as a child and forgive him for your sakes, although only on condition that you reprimand him seriously; and that you, my nephew", addressing himself particularly to the Duke, "become his guarantee for the future. I place him in your charge, in order that you may teach him wisdom if it be possible".

In obedience to this command M. de Guise, who was well aware with how rash and intemperate a spirit he was called upon to contend, at once, with the royal sanction, reconducted Joinville to his prison, where during several months the young Prince exhausted himself in threats, murmurs, and every species of verbal extravagance, until wearied by the monotony of confinement he finally subsided into repentance, and was, upon his earnest promise of amendment, permitted to exchange his chamber in the Bastille for a less stringent captivity in Château de Dampierre. Such was the lenient punishment of the last of the conspirators; and it was assuredly a clever stroke of policy in the monarch thus to cast a shade of ridicule over the close of the cabal, which, having commenced with a tragedy, had by his contemptuous forbearance almost terminated in an epigram.

The Court, after having passed a portion of the summer at St. Germain, removed in the commencement of August to Fontainebleau, the advanced pregnancy of the Queen having rendered her anxious to return to that palace. But any gratification which she might have promised herself, in this her favourite place of residence, was cruelly blighted by the legitimation of the son of Madame de Verneuil, which was formally registered at this period. Nor was this the only vexation to which she was exposed, the notoriety of the King's intrigues

Marie de Medicis

becoming every day more trying alike to her temper and to her health; while the new concession which had been made to the vanity--or, as the Marquise herself deemed it, to the honour--of the favourite, induced the latter to commit the most indecent excesses, and to increase, if possible, the almost regal magnificence of her attire and her establishment, at the same time that her deportment towards the Queen was marked by an insolent disrespect which involved the whole Court in perpetual misunderstandings.

As it had already become only too evident that the unfortunate Marie de Medicis possessed but little influence over the affections of her husband, however he might be compelled to respect the perfect propriety and dignity of her character, the cabal of the favourite daily increased in importance; and the measure of the Queen's mortification overflowed, when, soon after the royal visit to Fontainebleau, Henry took leave of her in order to visit Calais, and she ascertained that he had on his way stopped at the Château de Verneuil, whither he had been accompanied by the Marquise. It was in vain that M. de Sully--to whom the King had given strict charge to endeavour by every method in his power to reconcile the Queen to his absence, and to provide for her amusement every diversion of which she was in a condition to partake--exerted himself to obey the command of the monarch; Marie was too deeply wounded to derive any consolation from such puerile sources, nor was it until the return of her royal consort, when his evident anxiety and increased tenderness once more led her to believe that she might finally wean him from his excesses and attach him to herself, that she once more became calm.

On the 11th of November the anticipated event took place, and the Queen gave birth to her eldest daughter in the same oval chamber in which the Dauphin first saw the light. The advent of Elisabeth de France was not, however, hailed with the same delight by Marie as had been that of her first-born; on the contrary, her disappointment was extreme on ascertaining the sex of the infant, from the fact of her having placed the most entire confidence in the assurances of a devotee named Soeur Ange, who had been recommended to her notice and protection by the Sovereign-Pontiff, and who had, before she herself became cognizant of the negotiations for her marriage, foretold that she would one day be Queen of France. This woman, who still remained in her service, had repeatedly assured her that she need be under no apprehension of bearing daughters, as she was predestined by Heaven to become the mother of three princes only; and after having, with her usual superstition, placed implicit faith in the flattering prophecy, Marie no sooner discovered its fallacy than she abandoned herself to the most violent grief, refusing to listen to the consolations of her attendants, and bewailing herself that she should have been so cruelly deceived, until the King, although he in some measure participated in her annoyance, succeeded in restoring her to composure by bidding her remember that had she not been of the same sex as the child of which she had just made him the father, she could not have herself realised the previous prediction of Soeur Ange; an argument which, coupled with the probability that the august infant beside her might in its turn ascend a European throne, was in all likelihood the most efficacious one which could have been adopted to reconcile her to its present comparative insignificance.

CHAPTER IV

1603

A few weeks after the birth of Madame Elisabeth the Court returned to Paris, where, in honour of the little Princess, several ballets were danced and a grand banquet was given to the sovereigns by the nobility; but the heart of the Queen was too full of chagrin to enable her to assist with even a semblance of gratification at the festivities in which those around her were absorbed. The new-born tenderness lately exhibited by her husband had gradually diminished; while the assumption of the favourite, who was once more in her turn about to become a mother, exceeded all decent limits. The daily and almost hourly disputes between the royal couple were renewed with greater bitterness than ever, and when, on the 21st of January, Madame de Verneuil, like herself, and again under the same roof, gave birth to a daughter, Marie de Medicis no longer attempted to suppress the violence of her indignation; nor was it until the King, alike chafed and bewildered by her upbraidings, declared that should she persist in rendering his existence one of perpetual turmoil and discomfort he would fulfil his former threat of compelling her to quit the kingdom, that he could induce her to desist from receiving him with complaints and reproaches. Henry was aware that he had discovered, by the assertion of this resolve, a certain method of silencing his unfortunate consort, who, had she been childless, would in all probability gladly have sacrificed her ambition to her sense of dignity; but Marie was a mother, and she felt that her own destiny must be blended with that of her offspring. Thus she had nothing left to her save to submit; and deeply as she suffered from the indignities which were heaped upon her as a wife, she shrank from a prospect so appalling as a separation from the innocent beings to whom she had given life.

Meanwhile the King, wearied alike of the exigencies of his mistress and the cold, unbending deportment of the Queen, again made approaches to Mademoiselle de Guise, upon whom he had already, a year or two previously, lavished all those attentions which bespoke alike his admiration and his designs; but he was not destined to be more successful with this lady than before, her intimacy with the Queen, to whose household she was attached, rendering her still more averse than formerly to encourage the licentious addresses of the monarch. The excitement of this new passion nevertheless sufficed for a time to wean him from his old favourite; and forgetting his age in his anxiety to win the favour of the beautiful and witty Marguerite, he appeared on the 19th of February in a rich suit of white satin in the court of the Tuileries, where he had invited the nobles of his Court to run at the ring, and acquitted himself so dexterously that he twice carried it off amid the acclamations of the spectators.

From this period until the end of the month the royal circle were engaged in one continual succession of festivities, wherein high play, banquets, ballets, balls (at the latter of which a species of dance denominated *Braules*, and corrupted by the English into *Brawls*, which became afterwards so popular at the Court of Elizabeth, was of constant occurrence, as well as the *Corranto*, a livelier but less graceful movement), and theatrical representations formed the principal features. An Italian company invited to France by the Queen, under the management of Isabella Andrëini, also appeared before the Court, but no record is left of the nature of their performance.

From this temporary oblivion of all political anxiety Henry was, however, suddenly aroused by a rumour which reached the Court of a revolt in the town of Metz, which proved to

be only too well founded. For some time previously great discontent had existed among the citizens, who considered themselves aggrieved by the tyranny of the two lieutenants of the Duc d'Epéron their governor; and to such a height had their opposition to this delegated authority at length risen that the Duke found himself compelled to proceed to the city, in order, if possible, to reconcile the conflicting parties. This intelligence had no sooner been communicated to the King than he resolved to profit by so favourable an opportunity of repossessing himself, not only of the town itself, but of the whole province of Messin, in order to disable the Duc d'Epéron (against whom his suspicions had already been aroused) from making hereafter a disloyal use of the power which his authority over so important a territory afforded to him of contravening the measures of the sovereign. The fortress was one of great importance to Henry, who was aware of the necessity of placing it in the safe keeping of an individual upon whom he could place the fullest and most perfect reliance; and the more so that M. d'Epéron had, during the reign of Henri III, rather assumed in Metz the state of a sovereign prince than fulfilled the functions of its governor, and that he would, as the King at once felt, if not opposed, resist any encroachment upon his self-constituted privileges. The revolt of the Messinese (for, as was soon ascertained, the disaffection was not confined to the city, but extended throughout the whole of the adjoining country) afforded an admirable opening for the royal intervention, and Henry instantly decided upon visiting the province in person, accompanied by his whole Court, before the two factions should have time to reconcile their differences and to deprecate his interference. At the close of February he accordingly commenced his journey, despite the inclemency of the weather and the unfavourable condition of the roads, which rendered travelling difficult and at times even dangerous for the Queen and her attendant ladies; and pretexting a visit to his sister the Duchesse de Bar, he advanced to Verdun, where he remained for a few days ere he finally made his entry into Metz.

So unexpected an apparition paralyzed all parties. M. d'Epéron having refused to consent to the removal of Sobole, who was, as he knew, devoted to his interests, had failed to appease the indignation of the Messinese, who were consequently eager to obtain justice from the King; while Sobole himself, after a momentary vision of fortifying the citadel and defying the royal authority, became convinced that his design was not feasible; and he accordingly obeyed without a murmur the sentence of banishment pronounced against him, gave up the fortress unconditionally, and left the province.

Sobole had no sooner resigned his trust than the King appointed M. de Montigny lieutenant-governor of the province of Messin, and his brother, M. d'Arquien, lieutenant-governor of the town and fortress; while the garrison was replaced by a portion of the bodyguard by which the monarch had been accompanied from the capital.

The vexation of the Duc d'Epéron was extreme, but he dared not expostulate, although he at once perceived that his power was annihilated. So long as his lieutenants had been creatures of his own, his dominion over the province had been absolute; but when they were thus replaced by officers of the King's selection, his influence became merely nominal; so great, moreover, had been the tact of Henry, that he had found means to compel the Duke himself to solicit the dismissal of Sobole and his brother, in order to assure his own tenure of office; and he was consequently placed in a position which rendered all semblance of discontent impossible, while the citizens, delighted to find themselves thus unexpectedly revenged upon their oppressors, and proud of the presence of the sovereigns within their walls, were profuse in their demonstrations of loyalty and attachment.

A slight indisposition having detained the King for a longer period than he had anticipated at Metz, the Duchesse de Bar, the Duc de Lorraine, and the Duc and Duchesse de Deux-Ponts, arrived on the 16th of March to welcome him to the province. Thereupon a series of entertainments was given to these distinguished guests which was long matter of tradition among the Messinese; and which resulted in the betrothal of Mademoiselle de Rohan and the young Duc de Deux-Ponts.

While still sojourning at Metz, information reached Henry of the serious illness of Elizabeth of England; a despatch having been forwarded to the monarch by the Comte de

Marie de Medicis

Beaumont, his ambassador at the Court of London, informing him of the apprehensions which were entertained that her Majesty could not survive so grave a malady. The effect of this intelligence was to induce the King to hasten his return to his capital, and he accordingly prepared for immediate departure; but he was finally prevailed upon to sojourn for a few days at Nancy, where Madame (his sister) had prepared a magnificent ballet, which was accordingly performed, greatly to the admiration of the two Courts. Henry, however, whose anxiety exceeded all bounds, caused courier after courier to be despatched for tidings of the illustrious invalid, and took little share in the festivities which were designed to do him honour. He was probably on the eve, as he declared in a letter to the Due de Sully, of losing an ally who was the enemy of his enemies, and a second self, while he was totally ignorant of the views and feelings of her successor.

His forebodings were verified, for ere the Court left Nancy, Elizabeth had breathed her last; which intelligence was immediately conveyed to him, together with the assurance that her council had secured the person of the Lady Arabella Stuart, the cousin of the King of Scotland, and that there was consequently nothing to fear as regarded the succession. The death of Elizabeth did not in fact in any respect affect the relative position of the two countries, neither Henri IV nor James I being desirous to terminate the good understanding which existed between them; and on the 30th of July a treaty of confederation was concluded between the two sovereigns by Sully, in which they were mutually pledged to protect the United Provinces of the Low Countries against their common enemy Philip of Spain.

But, notwithstanding the apparent certainty of a continuance of his amicable relations with England, whether it were that this fatal intelligence operated upon the bodily health of the King, or that his hasty journey homeward had overtaxed his strength, it is certain that on reaching Fontainebleau he had so violent an attack of fever as to be compelled to countermand the council which had been convened for the third day after his arrival. The Court physicians, bewildered by so sudden and severe an illness, declared the case to be a hopeless one; while Henry himself, believing that his end was approaching, caused a letter to be written to Sully to desire his immediate attendance. So fully, indeed, did he appear to anticipate a fatal termination of the attack, that while awaiting the arrival of the minister, he caused the portrait of the Dauphin to be brought to him; and after remaining for a few seconds with his eyes earnestly fixed upon it, he exclaimed, with a deep sigh: "Ha! poor child, what will you have to suffer if your father should be taken from you!"

Sully lost no time in obeying the melancholy summons of the King; and, on arriving at Fontainebleau, at once made his way to the royal chamber, where he indeed found Henry in his bed, but with no symptoms of immediate dissolution visible either in his countenance or manner. The Queen sat beside him with one of his hands clasped in hers; and as he remarked the entrance of the Duke, he extended the other, exclaiming: "Come and embrace me, my friend; I rejoice at your arrival. Within two hours after I had written to you I was in a great degree relieved from pain; and I have since gradually recovered from the attack. Here", he continued, turning towards the Queen, "is the most trustworthy and intelligent of all my servants, who would have assisted you better than any other in the preservation alike of my kingdom and of my children, had I been taken away. I am aware that his humour is somewhat austere, and at times perhaps too independent for a mind like yours; and that there would not have been many wanting who might, in consequence, have endeavoured to alienate from him the affections of yourself and of my children; but should it ever be so, do not yield too ready a credence to their words. I sent for him expressly that I might consult with both of you upon the best method to avert so great an evil; but, thanks be to God, I feel that such a precaution was in this instance unnecessary".

Sully, in describing this scene, withholds all comment upon the King's perfect confidence in the heart and intellect of his royal consort; but none can fail to feel that the moment must have been a proud one for Marie, in which she became conscious that the nobler features of her character had been thoroughly appreciated by her husband. The vanity of the woman could well afford to slumber while the value of the wife and of the Queen was thus openly and generously acknowledged.

Marie de Medicis

And truly did Marie de Medicis need a remembrance like this to support her throughout her unceasing trials; for scarcely had the King recovered sufficient strength to encounter the exertion than he determined to remove to Paris; and, having intimated his wish to the Queen, immediate preparations were made for their departure. They arrived in the capital totally unexpected at nine o'clock in the morning, and alighted at the Hôtel de Gondy, where Henry took a temporary leave of his wife, and hastened to the residence of Madame de Verneuil, with whom he remained until an hour after mid-day; thence he proceeded to the abode of M. le Grand, with whom he dined; nor was it until a late hour that he rejoined the Queen, who at once became aware that the temporary separation between the monarch and his favourite, occasioned by the journey to Metz, had failed to produce the effect which she had been sanguine enough to anticipate.

Nor did Marie deceive herself; for, during the sojourn of the Court at Paris, which lasted until the month of June, Henry abandoned himself with even less reserve than formerly to his passion for the Marquise; while the forsaken Queen--who hourly received information of the impertinent assumption of that lady, and who was assured that she had renewed with more arrogance, and more openly than ever, her pretended claim to the hand of the sovereign--unable to conceal her indignation, embittered the casual intercourse between herself and her royal consort with complaints and upbraidings which irritated and angered the King; and at length caused an estrangement between them greater than any which had hitherto existed. There can be little doubt that this period of Marie's life was a most unhappy one. Deprived even of the presence of her children, who, from considerations of health, had been removed to St. Germain-en-Laye, and who could not in consequence be the solace of every weary hour, she found her only consolation in the society of her immediate household, and the zealous devotion of Madame de Concini; to whose first-born child she became joint sponsor with M. de Soissons, greatly to the annoyance of the King, who watched with a jealous eye the ever-increasing influence of the Florentine favourite.

Previously to her marriage with the Duc de Bar, Madame, the King's sister, had affianced herself to M. de Soissons; but the circumstance no sooner became known to Henry than he expressed his extreme distaste at such an union, and directed the Due de Sully to expostulate with both parties, and to induce them, should it be possible, to abandon the project, and to give a written promise never to renew their engagement. In this difficult and delicate mission the minister ultimately succeeded; but since that period a coldness had existed between the two nobles which at length terminated in mutual dissension and avoidance. It was, consequently, with considerable surprise that while preparing for his embassy to England, where he was entrusted with the congratulations of his own sovereign to James I on his accession, M. de Sully found himself on one occasion addressed by the Prince in an accent of warmth and friendliness to which he had long been unaccustomed from his lips; and heard him cordially express his obligation for some service which, in his official capacity, the minister had lately rendered him, and declare that thenceforward he should never recur to the past, but rather trust that for the future they might be firm and fast friends. Sully answered in the same spirit; and thus a misunderstanding which had disturbed the whole Court, where each had partisans who violently defended his cause, and thus rendered the schism more serious than it might otherwise have been, was apparently terminated; but the Duke had no sooner returned to France than it was renewed more bitterly than ever, to the extreme annoyance of the King, who was reluctant to interfere; the high rank of M. de Soissons on the one hand, and the eminent services of Sully on the other, rendering him equally averse to dissatisfy either party.

In the month of August 1603 the Comte de Soissons, whose lavish expenditure made it important for him to increase his income by some new concession on the part of the monarch, held an earnest consultation with Madame de Verneuil, with whom he was on the closest terms of intimacy, as to the most feasible method of effecting his object, and it was at length determined that the Prince should solicit the privilege of exacting a duty of fifteen sous upon every bale of cloth, either imported or exported throughout the kingdom; while the Marquise pledged herself to exert her influence to induce the King to consent to the arrangement, for which service she was to receive one-fifth of the proceeds resulting from the tax. Extraordinary

Marie de Medicis

as such a demand must appear in the present day, it was, according to Sully, by no means an unusual one at that period; when, by his rigorous retrenchments, he had greatly reduced the revenues of the Court nobles, and put it out of the power of the monarch to bestow upon them, as he had formerly done, the most lavish sums from his own privy purse; thus inducing them to adopt every possible expedient in order to increase their diminished incomes. Sympathizing with the annoyance of his impoverished courtiers, and anxious to silence their murmurs, the good-natured and reckless sovereign seldom met their requests with a denial, and from this abuse a number of petty taxes, each perhaps insignificant in itself, but in the aggregate amounting to a heavy infliction upon the people, were levied on all sides, and under all pretences; and the evil at length became so serious that the prudent minister found it necessary to expostulate respectfully with his royal master upon the danger of such a system, and to entreat of him to discountenance any further imposts which had no tendency to increase the revenues of the state, but merely served to encourage the prodigality of the nobles.

It was precisely at this unpropitious moment that M. de Soissons proffered his demand, which was warmly seconded by Madame de Verneuil, who represented to the monarch the impossibility of his refusing a favour of this nature to a Prince of the Blood, when he had so frequently made concessions of the same nature to individuals of inferior rank; and the certainty that, were his request negatived, M. de Soissons would not fail to feel himself at once injured and aggrieved. Still, mindful of the promise which had been extorted from him by Sully, the King hesitated; but upon being more urgently pressed by the favourite, he at length demanded what would be the probable yearly produce of the tax, when he was assured by the Count that it could not exceed ten thousand crowns; upon which Henry, who was anxious not to irritate him by a refusal where the favour solicited was so comparatively insignificant, at once signified his compliance; and as the subject had been cleverly mooted by the two interested parties at Fontainebleau, while the minister of finance was absent in the capital, Madame de Verneuil, by dint of importunity, succeeded in inducing the monarch to sign an order for the immediate imposition of the duty in favour of M. de Soissons; but before he was prevailed upon to do this, he declared to the Prince that he should withdraw his consent to the arrangement, if it were proved that the produce of the tax exceeded the yearly sum of fifty thousand francs, or that it pressed too heavily upon the people and the commercial interests of the kingdom. This reservation was by no means palatable to M. de Soissons, who had, when questioned as to the amount likely to be derived from the transaction, answered rather from impulse than calculation; but as the said reservation was merely verbal, while the edict authorizing the levy of the impost was tangible and valid, the Prince, after warmly expressing his acknowledgments to the monarch, carried off the document without one misgiving of success.

Henry, however, when he began to reflect upon the nature of the concession which he had been prevailed upon to make, could not suppress a suspicion that it was more important than it had at first appeared; and, conscious that he had falsified his promise to the minister, he resolved to ascertain the extent of his imprudence. He accordingly, the same evening, despatched a letter to Sully, in which, without divulging what had taken place, he directed him to ascertain the probable proceeds of such a tax, and the effect which it was likely to produce upon those on whom it would be levied.

So unexpected an inquiry startled the finance minister, who instantly apprehended that a fresh attack had been made upon the indulgence of the monarch; and he forthwith anxiously commenced a calculation, based upon solid and well-authenticated documents, which resulted in the discovery that the annual amount of such an impost could not be less than three hundred thousand crowns; while it must necessarily so seriously affect the trade in flax and hemp, that it was likely to ruin the provinces of Brittany and Normandy, as well as a great part of Picardy.

Under these circumstances it was decided between Henry and his minister, that the latter should withhold his signature to the order which had been extorted from the King; without which, or a letter from the sovereign specially commanding the registration of the edict by the Parliament, the document was invalid. There can be no doubt that the most manly

and dignified course which the monarch could have adopted, would have been to inform M. de Soissons of the result of the verification which had been made; and to have declared that, in accordance with his expressed determination when conditionally conceding the edict, he had resolved, upon ascertaining the magnitude of the sum which must be levied by such a tax, not to permit its operation. This was not, however, the manner in which Henry met the difficulty. He felt that his position was an onerous one, and he gladly transferred his responsibility to M. de Sully; who accordingly, upon the application of the Prince for his signature, in order that the document might be laid before the Parliament and thus rendered available, declined to accede to the request; alleging that the affair was one of such extreme importance, that he dared not take upon himself to forward it without the concurrence of the council.

M. de Soissons urged and expostulated in vain; the minister was inflexible; and at length the Prince withdrew, but not before he had given vent to his indignation with a bitterness which convinced his listener that thenceforward all kindly feeling between them was at an end.

But if the Count thus suffered himself to be defeated by a first refusal, Madame de Verneuil was by no means inclined to follow his example. Baffled but not beaten, she resolved upon returning to the charge; and accordingly she drove to the residence of the minister, and met him at the door of his closet as he was about to proceed to the Louvre, in order to have an interview with the King.

There was an expression of haughty defiance in the eye of the favourite, and a heightened colour upon her cheek, which at once betrayed to Sully the purpose of her visit; while he on his side received her with a calm courtesy which was ill-calculated to inspire her with any hope of success; and she had scarcely seated herself before he gave her reason to perceive that he was as little inclined to temporize as herself. When they met he held in his hand a roll of paper, which, even after she had entered the apartment, he still continued to grasp with a pertinacity that did not fail to attract her attention.

“And what may be the precious document, Monsieur le Ministre”, she demanded flippantly, “of which you find it so impossible to relax your hold?”

“A precious document indeed, Madame”, was the abrupt reply, “and one in which you figure among many others”. So saying, he unrolled the scroll, and read aloud a list of edicts, solicited or granted, similar to that of the Comte de Soissons, one of which bore her own name.

“And what are you about to do with it?” she asked.

“To make it the subject of a remonstrance to his Majesty”.

“Truly”, exclaimed the Marquise, no longer able to control her rage, “the King will be well-advised should he listen to your caprices, and by so doing affront twenty individuals of the highest quality. Upon whom should he confer such favours as these, if not upon the Princes of the Blood, his cousins, his relatives, and his mistresses?”

“That might be very well”, replied the minister, totally unmoved by her insolence, “if the King could pay these sums out of his own privy purse; but that they should be levied upon the merchant, the artizan, and the labourer, is entirely out of the question. It is they who feed both him and us; and one master is enough, without their being compelled to support so many cousins, relatives, and mistresses”.

Madame de Verneuil could bear no more; but rising passionately from her chair, she left the room without even a parting salutation to the plain-spoken minister, who saw her depart with as much composure as he had seen her enter; and quietly rolling up the obnoxious document which had formed the subject of discussion between them, he in his turn got into his carriage, and proceeded to the Louvre.

Furious alike at her want of success and at the affront which had been put upon her, the Marquise drove from the Arsenal to the hotel of M. de Soissons; where, still smarting under the rebuff of the uncompromising Duke, she did not scruple sufficiently to garble his words to give them all the appearance of a premeditated and wilful insult to the Prince personally. She

Marie de Medicis

assured him that in reply to her remark that the relatives of the monarch possessed the greatest claim upon his liberality, M. de Sully had retorted by the observation that the King had too many kinsmen, and that it would be well for the nation could it be delivered from some of them.

This report so exasperated M. de Soissons, that on the following morning he demanded an audience of the sovereign, during which he bitterly inveighed against the arrogance and presumption of the minister, and claimed instant redress for this affront to his honour and his dignity as a Prince of the Blood; haughtily declaring that should the King refuse to do him justice, he would find means to avenge himself.

The unseemly violence of the Count, by offending the self-respect of the monarch, could not have failed, under any circumstances, to defeat its own object; but aware as he was that Sully had sought only the preservation of his master's interests, Henry was even less inclined than he might otherwise have been to yield to a dictation of this imperious nature. The very excess of his indignation consequently rendered him calm and self-possessed, and thus at once gave him a decided advantage over his excited interlocutor. Instead of retorting angrily, and involving himself in an undignified dispute, he replied to the intemperate language of the Count by calmly inquiring if he were to understand that M. de Sully had addressed the obnoxious remark which was the subject of complaint to the Prince himself, or if it had merely been reported to him by a third person. To this question M. de Soissons impatiently replied that the insult had not indeed been uttered to himself personally, but that the individual by whom it was communicated to him was above all suspicion; while he moreover considered that his assurance of its truth ought to suffice, as he was incapable of falsehood.

“Were it so, cousin”, said Henry coldly, “you would differ greatly from the other members of your family, especially your elder brother; but since you appear to place so perfect a reliance on the veracity of your informant, you have only to name him to me, and to explain precisely what he alleges to have passed, and I shall then understand what is necessary to be done, and will endeavour to satisfy you as far as I can reasonably do so”.

M. de Soissons was not, however, prepared to involve Madame de Verneuil in a quarrel which threatened the most serious results; and he consequently declared that he had plighted his word not to divulge the identity of his informant; a promise which he, moreover, considered to be utterly unnecessary, as he was ready to pledge himself to the entire truth of what he had advanced.

“So, cousin”, said the King with an ambiguous smile, “you screen yourself under the shadow of an oath from revealing to me what I desire to know; then I, in my turn, swear not to believe one syllable of your complaint beyond what M. de Sully may himself report to me; for I hold his veracity in as great estimation as you do that of the nameless partisan to whom you are indebted for the fine story you have inflicted upon me”.

It was in somewhat the same frame of mind in which the Marquise had quitted the finance minister that M. de Soissons, as the King rose and thus indicated the termination of the interview, passed from the royal closet; nor did he retire until he had indulged in such unrestrained threats of vengeance that Henry considered it expedient to despatch Zamet without delay to the Arsenal to warn Sully to be upon his guard against the impetuous Prince, and not to venture abroad without a sufficient suite; while at the same time the messenger was instructed to inquire if the obnoxious expression had indeed been used, and to whom.

On being apprised of the visit which had been paid by Madame de Verneuil to the Duke, the King instantly comprehended the whole intrigue, and at once declared that it was useless to search further; as he well knew that she possessed both malice and invention enough to distort the words of the minister to her own purposes; an admission which indicated for the moment a considerable decrease of infatuation on the part of her royal lover.

That this had, however, already become evident, was exemplified by the fact that upon some rumour of the kind being addressed to the Duchesse de Rohan, coupled with an inference that the infidelity of Madame de Verneuil had become known to the King, the young

Marie de Medicis

Duchess had gaily replied: "What could he anticipate? How was it possible for love to nestle between a mouth and chin which are always interfering with each other?"

It is scarcely doubtful that the present incautious proceeding of the Marquise tended to shake the confidence which Henry had hitherto felt in an affection so admirably simulated that it might have inspired trust in an individual of far inferior rank. He could not overlook the fact that Madame de Verneuil had presumed to declare herself hostile to his favourite minister, and had even made a tool of one of the Princes of the Blood; an affront to himself which he resented after his accustomed fashion, by withdrawing himself from her society, and assiduously appearing in the private circle of the Queen.

On this occasion, however, week succeeded week, and the monarch still continued to avoid the enraged favourite; and even occasionally alluded to her with a contempt which stung her haughty and presumptuous spirit beyond endurance. She saw her little Court melting away, her flatterers dispersing, and her friends becoming estranged; nor could she conceal from herself that if she failed shortly to discover some method of estranging Henry from the Queen, and once more asserting her own influence, all her greatness would be scattered to the winds. Her vanity was also as deeply involved as her ambition, for she had hitherto believed her power over the affections of the King to be so entire that he could not liberate himself from her thrall; yet now, in the zenith of her beauty, in the pride of her intellect, and in the very climax of her favour, she found herself suddenly abandoned, as if the effort had not cost a single struggle to her royal lover.

Marie de Medicis, meanwhile, was happy. She cared not to look back upon the past; she sought not to look forward into the future; to her the present was all in all, and she began to encourage bright dreams of domestic bliss, by which she had never before been visited since the first brief month of her marriage. So greatly indeed did her new-born happiness embellish the exulting Queen, that it was at this period that the profligate monarch declared to several of his confidential friends, that had she not been his wife, his greatest desire would have been to possess her as a mistress. The whole of her little Court felt the influence of her delight; she lavished on all sides the most costly gifts; she surrounded the King with amusements of every description, and day after day the heart of the irritated favourite was embittered by the reports which reached her of the unprecedented gaiety and splendour of the Queen's private circle.

As the dissension which had arisen between Sully and the Comte de Soissons rather increased in intensity than yielded to the royal expostulation, Henry resolved to give a public proof of his continued regard for the minister; and for this purpose he caused him to be informed that on his way to Normandy (whither he was about to proceed in order to investigate the truth of certain rumours which had reached him of a meditated insurrection in that province) he would pass by Rosny, and should claim his hospitality for one day with his whole Court. As the King was on the eve of his departure, Sully at once left the capital, and by travelling with great speed, he reached the château four days before his expected guests, for whose reception he made the most magnificent preparations of which so brief an interval would admit. As the approaches to the domain were not yet completed, and it was necessary to level the road by which their Majesties would arrive, the Duke, in order to accomplish this object, incautiously caused a canal by which it was traversed, and over which the bridge was still unbuilt, to be dammed up; and this arrangement made, he directed his whole attention to the internal decorations of the castle. Unfortunately, however, while his royal and noble guests were still seated at the elaborate and costly banquet which had been prepared for them, a terrific storm burst over the edifice, and information was brought to the host that the waters had become so swollen as to have overflowed their banks, while the pent-up canal which he had just driven back had inundated the court, and was pouring itself in a dense volume through the offices. The alarm instantly became general; the Queen, the Princesses, and the ladies of the Court sought refuge in the upper rooms of the castle, whither, as the danger momentarily increased, they were soon followed by Henry and his retinue; and meanwhile Sully gave instant orders that workmen should be despatched to clear the bed of the canal, and thus afford an escape for the invading element. This was happily accomplished without any loss of life, and the accident entailed no further evil consequence than the destruction of all the

fruits and confectionary by which the banquet was to have terminated. After this misadventure the Court proceeded to Caen, where at the close of a patient investigation the King withdrew the government of the city from M. de Crèvecoeur-Montmorency, who was accused of being engaged in a treasonable correspondence with the Duc de Bouillon, the Comte d'Auvergne, and the Duc de la Trémouille, his relative, and bestowed it upon M. de Bellefonds. Thence the royal party removed to Rouen, where Henry succeeded in re-establishing perfect order throughout the whole province of Lower Normandy.

On his return to Paris the King learnt that M. de Soissons, who had declined to accompany him in his journey, so deeply resented his visit to Rosny, the purpose of which he had comprehended upon the instant, that he had resolved in consequence to quit the kingdom. As the voluntary expatriation of the Princes of the Blood tended alike to weaken his resources and to undermine his authority, Henry at once directed MM. de Bellièvre and de Sillery to wait upon the Count, and to assure him that, so soon as he produced certain proof of the culpability of the Duc de Sully, he should receive ample satisfaction for the alleged affront, but that until such proof was furnished he should continue to protect the minister, and to consider him innocent of the offence imputed to him. The Chancellor was, moreover, instructed to inquire into the motive which had induced the Prince to declare his intention of leaving France.

To this message M. de Soissons coldly replied by observing that he had been insulted by the Duke, to whom he had given no cause of offence; but that as it nevertheless appeared by the statement to which he had just listened, that it was the pleasure of his Majesty to defend the accused rather than the accuser, he considered that he need not advance any further reason for absenting himself from the kingdom. After the departure of MM. de Bellièvre and de Sillery, however, the Prince requested the Duc de Montbazon and the Comte de St. Pol to wait upon the sovereign, in order to explain to him his reason for quitting the country; to assure him of the regret which he felt that recent circumstances had left him no other alternative; and to entreat his Majesty to pardon him if he ventured to take his leave through the medium of these his friends, rather than, by appearing in person, incur the risk of aggravating his displeasure.

Having seen the two nobles depart upon their mission, M. de Soissons mounted his horse and at once proceeded to Paris, to make the necessary preparations for the journey which he contemplated; but before he had taken any definite measures to that effect he was rejoined by his friends, who had been directed by the King to follow him with all speed, and to explain to him that he had altogether mistaken the message entrusted to the Chancellor, as the only protection which his Majesty had declared his intention of affording to M. de Sully was against his own threats of personal violence; while in the second place they were instructed to inform him that the King strictly enjoined him not to quit Paris, as a want of obedience upon this point would prove very prejudicial to his Majesty's interests; and finally, they were authorized to assure him that, in the event of his compliance with the royal wishes, he should receive ample satisfaction for the affront of which he complained.

In reply, M. de Soissons maintained that he had given no ground for the apprehensions expressed by the monarch for the safety of his minister, and that he had never entertained any design to injure the interests of the sovereign, while the knowledge that his withdrawal from the country might have such a tendency was a more powerful preventive to his departure than "though he had been fettered by a hundred chains"; and that all he required from his adversary was a public acknowledgment of the offence which he had committed against him.

This concession of the irate Prince was followed by a still greater one on the part of the minister, who, anxious to relieve the mind of his royal master from the annoyance which he felt at a quarrel in which every noble of the Court had taken part, and which threatened to become still more inveterate from day to day, addressed a letter to M. de Soissons, wherein, although he explicitly denied "having uttered the expression which was imputed to him", he overwhelmed the Prince with the most elaborate and hyperbolic assurances of respect and devotion, declaring "that he would rather die than so forget himself".

Marie de Medicis

This submissive letter was accepted as an apology, and a hollow peace between the disputants was thus effected, which restored for a time the tranquillity of the Court.

On the 2nd of February 1604 the Queen was invited to participate in a ceremony which, had she been less happy and hopeful than she chanced to be at that particular period, could not have failed to excite in her breast fresh feelings of irritation and annoyance. This was the reception of Alexandre-Monsieur, the second legitimated son of the monarch and Gabrielle d'Estrées, into the Order of the Knights of Malta. The King having decided that such should be the career of the young Prince, was anxious that he should at once assume the name and habit of the Order, and he accordingly wrote to the Grand Master to request that he would despatch the necessary patents, which were forwarded without delay, accompanied by the most profuse acknowledgments on the part of that dignitary. In order to increase the solemnity and magnificence of the inauguration, Henry summoned to the capital the Grand Commanders both of France and Champagne, instructing them to bring in their respective trains as many other commanders and knights as could be induced to accompany them; and he selected as the scene of the ceremony the Church of the Augustines, an arrangement which was, however, abandoned at the entreaty of the Commandeur de Villeneuve, the Ambassador of the Order, who deemed it more dignified that the inauguration should take place in that of the Temple, which was one of their principal establishments.

At the hour indicated the two sovereigns accordingly drove to the Temple in the same carriage, Alexandre-Monsieur being seated between them; and on alighting at the principal entrance of the edifice, the King delivered the little Prince into the hands of the Grand Prior who was there awaiting him, attended by twelve commanders and twelve knights, by whom he was conducted up the centre aisle. The church was magnificently decorated, and the altar, which blazed with gold and jewels, was already surrounded by the Cardinal de Gondy, the Papal Nuncio, and a score of bishops, all attired in their splendid sacerdotal vestments. In the centre of the choir a throne had been erected for their Majesties, covered with cloth of gold, and around the chairs of state were grouped the Princes, Princesses, and other grandees of the Court, including the ambassadors of Spain and Venice, the Connétable-Duc de Montmorency, the Chancellor, the seven presidents of the Parliament, and the knights of the Order of the Holy Ghost.

The *coup d'oeil* was one of extraordinary splendour. The whole of the sacred edifice was brilliantly illuminated by the innumerable tapers which lit up the several shrines, and which casting their clear light upon every surrounding object, brought into full relief the dazzling gems and gleaming weapons that glittered on all sides. The organ pealed out its deepest and most impressive harmony; and not a sound was heard throughout the vast building as the Grand Prior, with his train of knights and nobles, led the youthful neophyte to the place assigned to him. The ceremony commenced by the consecration of the sword, and the change of raiment, which typified that about to take place in the duties of the Prince by his entrance into an Order which enjoined alike godliness and virtue. The mantle was withdrawn from his shoulders, and his outer garment removed by the knights who stood immediately around him, after which he was presented successively with a vest of white satin elaborately embroidered in gold and silver, having the sleeves enriched with pearls, a waist-belt studded with jewels, a cap of black velvet ornamented with a small white plume and a band of large pearls, and a tunic of black taffeta. In this costume the Prince was conducted to the high altar by the Duc and Duchesse de Vendôme, followed by a commander to assist him during the ceremony, and they had no sooner taken their places than Arnaud de Sorbin, Bishop of Nevers, delivered a short oration eulogistic of the greatness and excellence of the brotherhood of which he was about to become a member. The same prelate then performed a solemn high mass, and when he had terminated the reading of the gospel, Alexandre-Monsieur knelt before him with a taper of white wax in his hand, to solicit admission into the Order. He had no sooner bent his knee than the King rose, descended the steps of the throne, and placed himself by his side, saying aloud that he put off for awhile his sovereign dignity that he might perform his duty as a parent, by pledging himself that when the Prince should have attained his sixteenth year, he should take the vows, and in all things conform himself to the rules of the institution. The procession then passed out of the church in the same order as it had entered, and the young

Marie de Medicis

Prince was immediately put into possession of the income arising from his commandery, which was estimated at forty thousand annual livres.

This ceremony was followed by a series of Court festivals, which were abruptly terminated by the arrival of a courier from Lorraine with the intelligence of the death of the Duchesse de Bar, an event which it was so well known would deeply affect the King, that the principal personages of the Court, and the members of his council, determined to go in a body to communicate it, in order that they might offer him the best consolation in their power. This, however, was a grief beyond their sympathy, the affection which Henry bore towards his sister having been unshaken throughout their lives; and the distressing intelligence was no sooner imparted to him than he burst into a passionate flood of tears, and desired that every one should withdraw, and leave him alone with God. He was no sooner obeyed than he caused the windows of his closet to be closed, and admittance refused to all comers; after which he threw himself upon his bed, and abandoned himself to all the bitterness of a sorrow alike unexpected and irremediable. Several days passed away in this ungovernable grief, and when its violence at length partially subsided, the King issued an order that the whole Court should assume the deepest mourning, and that no one should presume to approach him in any other garb. Not only, therefore, were all the great officers of the Crown, and all the Court functionaries, from M. le Grand to the pages and lacqueys in the ante-chambers, clad in the same sable livery, but even the foreign ambassadors, anxious alike to avoid giving offence to the monarch, and to escape the inconvenience of being excluded from his presence and thus rendered incapable of furthering the interests of their several sovereigns, adopted a similar habit. The mourning of the Queen and her household more than satisfied all the exigencies of the King; for Marie de Medicis not only sympathized deeply with the sufferings of her royal consort, but also felt that in Madame Catherine she had lost a sincere friend--that rarest of all luxuries to a crowned head!--and it was not consequently in her outward apparel alone that she gave testimony of her unfeigned regret, for in abandoning her usual garb, she also abandoned every species of amusement, and forbade all movement in her immediate circle beyond that which was necessitated by the service of her attendants.

There was, however, one exception to this general concession, and that one was consequently so conspicuous as to excite instant remark. The Papal Nuncio had exhibited no intention of conforming to the universal demonstration which had draped the throne and palaces of France in sables; and the monarch no sooner ascertained the fact than he caused it to be made known to the prelate that he had no desire to oblige him to assume a garb repugnant to his feelings, but that he requested to be spared his presence until the period of his own mourning was at an end. This announcement greatly embarrassed the Nuncio, who at once felt that by persisting in the course he had adopted he should be deprived of the frequent audiences that were essential to the interests of the Sovereign-Pontiff, and accordingly he resolved no longer to offer any opposition to the express wishes of the King; but after having written to Rome to explain that he had put on mourning simply to secure himself against the threatened exclusion, and thereby to be enabled to watch over the welfare of the Holy See, he ultimately followed the example of those around him, and demanded permission in his turn to offer his compliment of condolence to the monarch.

This he did, however, in a manner little calculated to reconcile Henry to the reluctance which he had exhibited in performing this duty; for after having declared his earnest sympathy with the grief of his Majesty, he went on to remark that those who knew who he was, and for whom he spoke, could not fail to be startled by such an assertion, although he on his part, could assure his Majesty of his sincerity, as while others were weeping over the body of Madame, who had died a Protestant and a heretic, his master and himself were mourning for her soul.

To this unexpected exordium the King replied, with considerable indignation, that he had more faith in the mercy of God than to believe that a Princess who had passed her life in the fulfilment of all her social duties was destined to be condemned from the nature of her creed, and that he himself entertained no doubt of her salvation. After which he diverted the

Marie de Medicis

conversation into another channel, with a tone and manner sufficiently indicative to the Nuncio that he must not presume to recur to so delicate a subject.

The body of Madame was, at the King's desire, conveyed to Vendôme, and deposited beside that of her mother, a dispensation to this effect having been, after many delays, accorded by the Pope; although too late for the Duchess to have been made aware that this the earnest wish of her heart had been conceded.

At this period a new cause of uneasiness aroused the sovereign from his private grief. To his extreme surprise he had received intelligence from the Sieur de Barrault that all the most secret deliberations of his council were forthwith communicated to the King of Spain, without a trace of the source whence this important information could be derived; and for a time the mystery defied all the investigations which were bestowed upon it by Henry and his ministers. At length, however, long impunity rendered the culprit daring, and it was ascertained that Philip III was in possession of copies of the several letters written by the French monarch to the King of England, the Prince of Orange, and other friendly powers, all inimical to Spain, a circumstance which at once rendered it apparent that this treachery must be the work of some official in whom the greatest confidence had hitherto been placed; and steps were forthwith taken to secure the identification of the traitor, which was effected through the agency of another equally unworthy subject of Henry himself. A certain native of Bordeaux, named Jean Leyré (otherwise Rafis), who had been one of the most violent partisans of the League, and who had been banished from France, had entered the Spanish service, and long enjoyed a pension from the sovereign of that country, in recompense of the zeal and ardour with which he rendered every evil office in his power to the kingdom whence he had been cast out.

Circumstances, however, tended to make Leyré less useful to Philip, who had, as we have shown, secured a much more efficient agent, and the ill-acquired pension had accordingly been diminished, while the traitor had no difficulty in perceiving that the favour which he had hitherto experienced from his new master was lessened in the same proportion, a conviction which determined him to make a vigorous effort to obtain the permission of his offended sovereign to return to France. In order to effect this object, Leyré attached himself to such of his countrymen as were, like himself, domiciliated in Spain, and finally he made the acquaintance of one Jean Blas, who in a moment of confidence revealed to him that a secretary of the Comte de Rochepot (the predecessor of M. de Barrault as ambassador at the Court of Madrid), who had subsequently returned to the service of the Duc de Villeroy, still maintained a secret correspondence with the Spanish secretaries of state, Don Juan Idiaque Franchesez, and Prada, to whom, in consideration of a pension of twelve hundred crowns of gold, he betrayed all the most important measures of the French cabinet.

This man, whose name was Nicholas L'Hôte, was the son of an old and trusted follower of the Duc de Villeroy, to whose family his own ancestors had been attached for several generations, while he himself was the godson of the Duke, who had obtained for him the honourable office of secretary to M. de Rochepot, when that nobleman accepted the embassy to Spain. On the return of the Count to France, L'Hôte, whose services were no longer necessary to him, was dismissed, and upon an application to his old patron, was unhesitatingly received into his bureau; where, believing that his loyalty and devotion to himself were beyond all suspicion, he was employed by M. de Villeroy in deciphering his despatches; an occupation which afforded the traitor ample means of continuing his nefarious correspondence with his Spanish confederates.

Leyré had no sooner obtained this important information, and moreover convinced himself of its probability by various circumstances connected with L'Hôte which he was careful to learn from other sources, than he proceeded to the residence of M. de Barrault, and solicited an interview on business connected with his government. The ambassador, who was still striving by every method in his power to discover the author of the active and harassing treason by which his official measures were perpetually trammelled, with a vague hope that the object of this request might prove to be connected with the mystery which so disagreeably occupied his thoughts, at once granted the required audience; when Leyré, having explained

his own position, and expressed the deepest contrition for his past disloyalty, together with his ardent desire to obliterate, by an essential service to his rightful sovereign, a fault which was now irreparable, proceeded to inform M. de Barrault that he was prepared to reveal a system of treachery which was even at that moment in operation to the prejudice of France; but added that, as in communicating this secret he should be compelled immediately to escape from Spain, he would not consent to do so until the ambassador pledged himself that he should be permitted to return to his own country with a free pardon, and a sufficient pension to secure him against want; and concluded by saying that should it be beyond the power of M. de Barrault to give such a pledge without the royal authority, and that should he consider it necessary to mention him by name, and to state the nature of the promised service to his government, he must entreat him to make this revelation solely to the monarch, and by no means to commit the affair to writing.

To these terms M. de Barrault readily agreed; but after the departure of Leyré, conceiving that the extreme mystery enjoined by that personage was merely intended to enhance the implied value of his revelation; and convinced, moreover, that the sovereign would immediately communicate such a circumstance to his ministers, he addressed himself, as he was in the habit of doing, to the Duc de Villeroy, from whom he shortly afterwards received the required promise of both pardon and pension.

These were, however, no sooner placed in the hands of the astute Leyré, than, perceiving that they bore the counter-signature of Villeroy, instead of that of Loménie, which would have been the case had they been forwarded through the personal medium of the King, he revealed the whole transaction to M. de Barrault; representing that the traitor being under the roof of the minister by whom they had been despatched, and entirely in his confidence, must already be apprized of his danger, as well as fully prepared to avert it by the destruction of his betrayer; and accordingly he declared that, in order to save his life, he must at once get into the saddle, and endeavour to distance the pursuit which could not fail to be made with a view to seize his person.

This reasoning was so valid that the ambassador not only consented to his immediate departure, but also caused him to be accompanied by his own secretary, M. Descartes, by whom he was to be introduced to the sovereign. The precaution proved salutary, as no later than the following morning the officers of the law were sent to the house of Leyré, and being unable to find him, forthwith mounted in their turn and took the road to France. Fortunately for the fugitives they had, however, already travelled a considerable distance; and although hotly pursued, they were enabled to reach Bayonne without impediment, whence they proceeded to Fontainebleau to report their arrival to the King.

Before they reached their destination, they encountered the Duc de Villeroy, who was on his way to his château of Juvisy, and to whom Descartes considered it expedient to declare their errand, without concealing the name of the culprit whom they were about to accuse. The Duke listened incredulously; and when the travellers offered, should it meet with his approbation, to return at once to Paris and arrest his secretary, in order that he might himself deliver him up to the monarch, he declined to profit by the proposal, desiring them to fulfil their mission as the service of the King required; and adding, that he should shortly join them at Fontainebleau, where he was to be met on the morrow by the accused party, when the necessary steps for ascertaining the truth of the statement might be at once taken; but that until he had obtained an audience of the monarch, and ascertained his pleasure, all coercive measures would be premature.

With this unsatisfactory reply Leyré and his companion were fain to content themselves; and having, as they were desired to do, delivered into the hands of the Duke the detailed despatch of M. de Barrault with which they had been entrusted, they saw him calmly resume his way to Juvisy, while they continued their route to Fontainebleau.

Early the next day M. de Villeroy in his turn reached the palace, and at once proceeded to the royal closet; where, at the command of the King, he began to read aloud the papers

Marie de Medicis

which had been thus obtained; but he had not proceeded beyond the name of the accused when Henry vehemently interrupted him by exclaiming:

“And where is this L'Hôte, your secretary? Have you caused him to be arrested?”

“I think, Sire”, was the reply, “that he is at my hotel; but he is still at liberty”

“How, Sir!”, said the King still more angrily; “you think that he is at your hôtel, and you have not had him seized? This is strange negligence! What have you been about since you were informed of this act of treason, to which you should at once have attended? See to it instantly, and secure the culprit”

The Duc de Villeroy quitted the royal presence in anxious haste, and made his way to the capital with all speed, feeling convinced that should he fail in arresting his delinquent secretary he could not escape the suspicion of the King. L'Hôte had, however, profited by the intervening time to explain his predicament to the Spanish ambassador, who instantly perceived that not a moment must be lost. Horses were accordingly provided, and the detected traitor, accompanied by the steward of the ambassador, made the best of his way to Meaux, whence they were to travel post to Luxembourg.

Orders had, meanwhile, been despatched to all the postmasters not to supply horses to any traveller answering the description of L'Hôte; but as he wore a Spanish costume similar to that of his companion he might still have passed undetected, had he not, while endeavouring to mount at Meaux, trembled so violently as to fall from his saddle; a circumstance which attracted the attention of the groom who held his stirrup, and who immediately inferred that he must be some criminal who was flying from justice. On re-entering the house he related the incident to his master; and upon comparing the height, and bulk, and features of the fugitive with the written detail furnished by the authorities, both parties became convinced that they had suffered the very individual whom they were commissioned to arrest to pursue his journey to the frontier through their own agency; and thus impressed, the terrified postmaster hastened to the Prévôt des Maréchaux, who lost no time in following upon his track. The fugitives had, however, changed horses before the anxious functionary and his attendants could arrive to interpose their authority; but despite the darkness of the night, which prevented them from obtaining even a glimpse of those whom they were endeavouring to overtake, they persevered with confidence, being aware that before the close of the second stage a ferry must be passed, which would necessarily detain the travellers.

The event proved the accuracy of their calculation, the lateness of the hour compelling L'Hôte and his companion to rouse the reluctant ferryman from his rest, a process which involved considerable delay; and they were consequently scarcely half way across the river when they heard the clatter of horses' hoofs upon the bank, and the voice of the Maréchal hoarsely shouting to their conductor instantly to return, or he should be hanged for his disobedience.

The fugitives at once felt that they were lost should they permit him to comply; and accordingly the Spaniard drew his sword, threatening to bury it in the heart of the affrighted ferryman should he retreat an inch; while L'Hôte, as craven as he was traitor, could only urge the boat forward by the rope, groaning at intervals: “I am a dead man! I am a dead man!”

On gaining the opposite shore neither of the two attempted to remount; but, abandoning their horses, they set off at their best speed on foot; while the postilion by whom they had been accompanied had great difficulty, during the return of the boat, in securing the three animals who were thus suddenly committed to his sole charge.

L'Hôte, terrified and bewildered by the voices of the Prévôt and his men, who had, in their turn, passed the ferry, and unable in the darkness to discern any path by which he might secure his escape, parted from his companion, and continued his course along the river bank; until, attracted by some tallows which he supposed to be an island in the middle of the stream, he threw himself into the water in order to reach it; but soon getting beyond his depth, and being unable to regain the shore, as well as alarmed by the rapid approach of his pursuers, he

Marie de Medicis

perished miserably; and was found on the following morning not twenty yards from the spot where he had abandoned the land.

The Spanish steward, who was captured on the morrow in a hayloft about two leagues from the river, was conducted to Paris with the corpse, which was consigned to the prison of the Châtelet, where it was publicly exposed during two days, and then drawn upon a hurdle to the place of execution, where it was torn asunder by horses; the quarters of the body being subsequently attached to four wheels which were placed in the principal roads leading to the capital.

The ignominy with which the body was treated was, as Sully asserts, in accordance with the earnest request of the Due de Villeroy, who could not disguise from himself the difficulty of his own position; nor was it until after several days' deliberation that Henry, remembering the extent of the confidence placed by the Duke in the traitor by whom his interests had been so seriously compromised, could sufficiently control his indignation to assure him that he in no wise suspected him of complicity, but should continue to regard him with the same trust and favour as heretofore. The people were, however, less amenable; nor did they scruple to accuse M. de Villeroy of participation in the crime of his follower. They could not forget that he had been an active member of the League; and they looked with jealousy upon every transaction in which he was involved; while, fortunately for the Duke, the King was ultimately prevailed upon to believe in the sincerity of his regret, and to remember that since he had attached himself to the royal cause he had rendered essential service to the country; nor did the murmurs of his enemies, who had begun to hope that the treason of his secretary must involve his own ruin, induce the monarch to exhibit towards him either distrust or severity. So lenient, indeed, did the King show himself, that after having being detained for a short time in prison, the Spaniard who had been taken with L'Hôte was set at liberty, as too insignificant for trial, and as the mere tool of his master.

While this affair had monopolized the attention of the King, Madame de Verneuil, enraged by a continual estrangement which threatened the most dangerous results to herself, and resolved at all hazards to recall the attention of the monarch, began to assert more openly and arrogantly than ever her claim upon his hand, and the right of her son to the succession; while at the same time her brother, the Comte d'Auvergne, pretexting a quarrel with M. de Soissons, quitted the Court, and proceeded to the Low Countries, where he had for some time past been actively engaged in organizing a conspiracy, in support of this extravagant and hopeless pretension.

The double personage enacted by the Marquise was one which necessitated the utmost tact and caution, for she was aware that it involved her liberty, if not her life; and consequently, in order to secure the sympathy of the people, while she was at the same time exciting the passions of those discontented nobles who being remnants of the League still retained an unconquerable jealousy of the power by which they had been prostrated, she affected the deepest and most bitter repentance for her past errors, and solicited the permission of the King to retire from France with her children, that she might expiate, by a future of retirement and piety, the faults of which she had been guilty. To this request Henry, without a moment's hesitation, replied by the assurance that she was at perfect liberty to withdraw from the country whenever she saw fit to do so; adding, however, that he would not permit the expatriation of her children, and that before her own departure she must deliver into his hands the written promise of marriage, which, although according to the decision of all the high ecclesiastics of the kingdom totally void and valueless, she had nevertheless been so ill-advised as to render a source of uneasiness and annoyance to the Queen.

This demand was, however, arrogantly rejected, the Marquise declaring that she would neither part with her children nor with a document that rendered her the legal wife of the King; a decision which so incensed Marie de Medicis that she vehemently reproached her royal consort for an act of weakness by which her whole married life had been embittered, and refused to listen to any compromise until the obnoxious paper should be restored.

Thus circumstanced, Henry at length resolved to exert all his authority, and despairing of success through the medium of a third person, he determined himself to visit the Marquise and to exact the restitution of the document. At this period, however, Madame de Verneuil was too deeply involved in the conspiracy of her brother to prove a willing agent in her own defeat, and she accordingly received the monarch with an unyielding insolence for which he was totally unprepared; violently declaring that the promise had been freely given, and that the birth of her son had rendered it valid. In vain did the King insist upon the absurdity of her pretensions; she only replied by sneering at the extraction of the Queen, and asserting her own equality with a petty Tuscan princess, whose gestures and language were, as she declared, the jest of the whole Court. The King, outraged by so gross an impertinence, imperatively commanded her silence upon all that regarded the dignity or pleasure of his royal consort, a display of firmness which more and more exasperated the favourite, who retorted by observing that since the monarch had seen fit to retract a solemn engagement, and thus to brand herself and her children with disgrace, it only remained for her to reiterate her demand for permission to leave the country, with her son and daughter, and her father and brother, both of whom were prepared to share her fortunes, gloomy as they might be, the fear of God not permitting her to recur to the past without the most profound repentance.

To this persistence Henry coldly answered that in his turn he reiterated his declaration that she was at liberty to retire to England whenever she thought proper to do so, and to place herself under the protection of her kinsman, the Earl of Lennox, but that he would not suffer any other member of her family to share her exile; nor should she herself be permitted to reside either in Spain or the Low Countries, where the treasonable practices of the Comte d'Auvergne and the party of the discontented nobles with whom she had recently allied herself, had already given him just cause for displeasure.

Madame de Verneuil, perfectly unabashed by this reproach, assured the King, with a smile of haughty defiance, that she could be as firm as himself where her own honour and that of her children was involved, and added that should he persist in demanding the restoration of the written promise by which he had triumphed over her virtue, he might seek it where it was to be obtained, as he should never receive it from her hands; while as regarded her estrangement from himself, it had ceased to be a subject of regret, as since he had become old he had also become distrustful and suspicious, and his affected favour only tended to render her an object of public jealousy and indignation.

Outraged by this last insult, the King rose angrily from his seat, and without vouchsafing another word to the imperious Marquise quitted the room. It was not, however, in the nature of Henri IV to find himself once more in the presence of his mistress unmoved, and although the indignity to which he had been subjected throughout the interview just described should have sufficed to inspire him only with disgust for the woman who had thus emancipated herself from every observance of respect towards his own person and decency towards the Queen, it is nevertheless certain that his very anger was mingled with admiration; and that not even his sense of what was due to him both as a monarch and as a man could overcome the attraction of Madame de Verneuil. Their temporary separation, during which he had failed to find any equivalent for her wit and vivacity, gave an added charm to every word she uttered; he yearned to see her once more brilliant and happy, devoting her intellect and her fascinations to his amusement; and even while complaining to Sully of her impertinent and uncompromising boldness, he could not forbear uttering a panegyric upon her better qualities, which convinced the minister that their misunderstanding was not destined to be of long duration, an opinion in which he was confirmed when the weak and vacillating Henry, at the close of this enthusiastic apostrophe, proceeded to institute a comparison between the Marquise and the Queen, in which the latter suffered on every point. The earnest wish to please of the favourite was contrasted with the coldness of Marie de Medicis, the wit of the one with the haughty superciliousness of the other; in short, the longer that the King discoursed upon the subject, the more perfect became the conviction of his listener that the late meeting, tempestuous as it was, had sufficed to restore to Madame de Verneuil at least a portion of her former power.

Marie de Medicis

“I have no society in my wife”, pursued the monarch; “she neither amuses nor interests me. She is harsh and unyielding, alike in manner and in speech, and makes no concession either to my humour or my tastes. When I would fain meet her with warmth she receives me coldly, and I am glad to escape from her apartments to seek for amusement elsewhere. My poor cousin De Guise is my only refuge; and although she occasionally tells me some home-truths, yet she does it with so much good humour that I cannot take offence, and only laugh at her sallies”.

It was sufficiently evident at that moment that even the “poor cousin” of the monarch, beautiful and accomplished though she was, faded into insignificance before the pampered and presuming favourite.

“Perhaps”, says Sully, with a calm sententiousness better suited to some question of finance, “the Queen had only herself to blame for not having released him from the snares of her rival, and detached him from every other affair of gallantry, as he appeared to me perfectly sincere when he urged me to induce her to conform to *his tastes* and to *the character of his mind*”.

M. de Sully, great as he was in his official capacity, evidently possessed little knowledge of a woman’s nature, and the workings of a woman’s pride. We have seen what were the “tastes” of Henri IV, and what was the “character of his mind”; and although it would undoubtedly have proved both pleasant and convenient to the harassed minister that Marie de Medicis should have devoured her grief and mortification, and have received the mistresses of the King as the intimates of her circle, it was a result little to be anticipated from a pure-hearted wife, who saw herself the victim of every intriguing beauty whose novelty or notoriety sufficed to attract the dissolute fancy of her consort. Even at the very moment in which M. de Sully records this inferential reproach upon the Queen, he admits that Henry was once more in the thrall of the Marquise, and, moreover, the obsequious friend of Mademoiselle de Guise; and yet he seeks to visit upon Marie the odium of a disunion which can only be, with any fairness, attributed to the King himself, who, even while professing to return to his allegiance as a husband, was openly indulging in a system of licentiousness calculated to degrade him in the eyes of a virtuous and exemplary woman.

That Marie de Medicis had many faults cannot be denied by her most zealous biographer, but that she was outraged both as a wife and as a mother is no less certain; and adopting, as we have a right to do, the conjectural style of M. de Sully,—perhaps, we say in our turn, had the Queen, from the period of her marriage, been treated with the deference and respect which were her due, the harsher features of her character might have become softened, and the faults which posterity has been compelled to couple with her name might never have been committed. Assuredly her period of probation was a bitter one, and it may be doubted whether the axe of our own eighth Henry were not after all more merciful in reality than the wire-drawn and daily-recurring torture to which his namesake of France subjected the haughty and high-spirited woman who was fated to find herself the victim of his vices.

The foreboding of M. de Sully was verified, for within a few days of the interview just recorded between the King and Madame de Verneuil, and during the continuance of his estrangement from his wife, it soon became known that the favourite had re-assumed her empire. In vain did the mortified minister protest against this new weakness, and assure his royal master that it could not fail to increase the anger and indignation of Marie de Medicis; Henry only replied by asserting that when Sully should have succeeded in inducing the Queen to change her humour and to exert herself to please him, instead of persisting in closeting herself with her foreign followers, and permitting them to criticise his conduct and to aggravate his defects, he would forthwith relinquish his *liaison* with the Marquise. Such an answer, however, did not check the zeal of his anxious adviser; who, fearful lest this last schism should prove more important than those by which it had been preceded, and undeterred even by the impatience with which the King listened to his representations, persisted in assailing him with arguments, remonstrances, and warnings, peculiarly unpalatable at all times, but especially so at the very moment in which he had effected a

reconciliation with the favourite that promised a renewal of the entertaining intercourse whence he derived so much gratification.

“You have now, Sire”, resolutely urged the undaunted counsellor, “an admirable opportunity of terminating in a manner worthy of your exalted rank the difficulty by which you are beset, and of ensuring your own future tranquillity. Assume the authority which appertains to you as a sovereign; compel the Queen to silence; above all, strictly forbid her any longer to indulge in public in those idle murmurs and lamentations by which your dignity suffers so severely in the eyes of your subjects; and visit with the most condign punishment every disrespectful word of which others may be guilty either towards yourself or her. This effort, Sire, will be insignificant beside others which you have made, and in which your personal tranquillity was not involved; be no less courageous in your own cause, and do not suffer your reputation to be tarnished by a weakness incomprehensible in so great and powerful a monarch. By exacting the consideration and obedience which are your due, you are guilty of no tyranny; for it is the indisputable privilege of every crowned head to enforce both. Let me then entreat of your Majesty at once to assert yourself, and thus put a period to the domestic differences by which the whole Court is convulsed”.

“Your advice may be good”, was the evasive reply of the King, “but you do not yet understand me, or you would be aware that I cannot bring myself to exercise severity against persons with whom I am in habits of familiar intercourse, and especially against a woman”.

“In that case, Sire”, said Sully, “you have but one alternative. Exile your mistress from the Court, and make the required concessions to the Queen”.

“I am prepared to do so”, said Henry hastily, “if, in return for this sacrifice on my part, she will pledge herself no longer to annoy me by her jealousy and violence, and to meet me in the same spirit; but I have little hope of such a result: she is perfectly unable to exercise the necessary self-command, and is perpetually mistaking the impulse of temper for that of reason. Her intolerance and rancour forbid all prospect of sincere harmony between us. She is perpetually threatening with her vengeance every woman upon whom I chance to turn my eyes; and even the children of Gabrielle, who were in being before her arrival in the kingdom, are as hateful to her as though she had been personally injured by their birth; nor have I the least reason to anticipate that she will ever overcome so irrational an antipathy. Nor can she be won by kindness and indulgence. Not only have I ever treated her with the respect and deference due to the Queen of a great nation, but even in moments of pecuniary pressure I have been careful, not merely to supply her wants, but also to satisfy her caprices; and that too when I was aware that the sums thus bestowed were to be squandered upon the Italian rabble whose incessant study it has been to poison her mind against both myself and her adopted country. Would to Heaven, Rosny, that I had followed your advice on her arrival, and compelled the mischievous cabal to recross the Alps; but it is now too late for such regrets; and if you can indeed succeed in inducing the Queen to become more amenable to my wishes, and more indulgent to my errors, *Ventre Saint-Gris!* you will effect a good work, in which I shall be ready to second you. But mark, you must do this apparently upon your own responsibility, and be careful not to let her learn that I have authorized such a measure, or you will only defeat your own purpose, and render her more impracticable than ever”.

Such was the unsatisfactory result of the effort made by the minister to reconcile the royal couple; while, in addition to all his other anxieties, he found himself placed in a position at once so difficult and so dangerous that he was at a loss how to proceed, until a circumstance fortunately occurred of which he hastened to avail himself. In exchanging the petty Court of Florence for that of France, Marie had speedily emancipated herself from the compulsory economy to which she had been accustomed from her childhood, and had become reckless in her expenditure to an excess which constantly disturbed the equanimity of the prudent minister of finance. The current expenses of her household amounted annually to the sum of three hundred and forty-five thousand livres, an enormous outlay for that period; while she was so lavish to her favourites that she was constantly applying for further supplies; and on one occasion, when these were withheld, had actually pawned the crown jewels, which it was

necessary to redeem by a disbursement from the public treasury. In addition to these resources, her income was also considerably increased by gratuities, bribes from contracting parties, and edicts created in her favour; the last of which were peculiarly obnoxious to Sully, from the fact of their harassing the people without any national benefit; and it was accordingly with great reluctance, and frequently not without expostulation, that he was induced to countersign these documents.

The circumstance to which we have alluded as affording to Sully an opening for the delicate negotiation with which he was entrusted by the King, was an offer made to Marie de Medicis of the sum of eighty thousand livres in the event of her causing an edict to be issued in favour of the officials of the salt-works of Languedoc, which she forthwith despatched to the minister by M. d'Argouges, with a request that he would use his influence to obtain it.

Having made himself acquainted with the nature and tendency of the edict, M. de Sully desired the messenger to inform her Majesty that he was of opinion that the sovereign might safely authorize its operation without any injury to the public interests; but added that he feared the moment was an unpropitious one as regarded the Queen herself, the King being still deeply offended by some of her recent proceedings; nor would he advise her to venture upon such an application until she had succeeded in disarming his anger; for which purpose he respectfully suggested that she should endeavour to conciliate her royal consort by some concession, which he would exert all his ability to enhance in the eyes of his master, and in every way endeavour to advance her interests as he had already done on several previous occasions.

Marie, eager to possess herself of the large sum thus proffered for her acceptance, consented to follow his advice; and decided upon addressing a letter to the King, expressive of her regret at the coldness which existed between them, and of her willingness to meet his wishes should he condescend to explain them.

This letter having been read and approved by the finance minister was forthwith forwarded from Fontainebleau, where Marie de Medicis was then residing, to the King at Paris; but it was not without a struggle that the Queen had compelled herself to such an act of self-abnegation, and her courier was no sooner despatched than she complained in bitter terms to M. de Sully of the humiliations to which she was subjected by the infatuation of the monarch for Madame de Verneuil; declaring that she could never submit to look with favour or indulgence upon a woman who had the presumption to institute comparisons between herself and her sovereign; who was rearing her children with all the pretensions of Princes of the Blood Royal, and encouraging them in demonstrations of disrespect towards her own person; and who was, moreover, fomenting sedition, by encouraging the discontented nobles to manifestations of disloyalty to their monarch; while the King, blinded by his passion, made no effort to rebuke, or even to restrain, her impertinence.

The minister listened calmly and respectfully to these outpourings of her indignation, but assured her in reply that it only depended upon herself to annihilate the influence of the favourite, by a system of consideration for the feelings of her royal consort of which she had not hitherto condescended to test the efficacy. He, moreover, implored her to make the trial; and represented so forcibly the benefit which must accrue to herself by a restoration of domestic peace, that she at length admitted the justice of his arguments, and pledged herself to accelerate, by every means in her power, a full and perfect reconciliation.

Gratified by this almost unhopd-for success, Sully shortly afterwards withdrew; and the reply of the King to the letter which she had addressed to him was delivered to Marie when she was surrounded only by her own private circle. It was at once courteous and conciliatory; and it is probable that, had it arrived before the departure of the Duke, it would have been acknowledged in the same spirit; but, unfortunately, the Queen had no sooner communicated its contents to her confidential friends than she was met by the assurance that the monarch had, on the receipt of her missive, carried it to the Marquise, where her credulity had excited great amusement, an assertion which was followed by other commentaries so distasteful to her pride, that, instead of persevering in the prudent course which she had been induced to adopt,

Marie de Medicis

she haughtily informed the royal courier by whom the letter had been brought that she should entrust him with no written reply, but should expect his Majesty on the following day according to his own appointment.

This marked and impolitic demonstration of disrespect excited anew the resentment of Henry, who openly expressed his indignation in the most unmeasured terms, and that so publicly, that within a few hours Marie was informed of every particular; and the breach which Sully had fondly flattered himself that he was about to heal became wider and more threatening than ever.

Meanwhile the commerce of the King and the favourite was far from affording to the former all the gratification which he had anticipated from its renewal. The coquetry--to designate it by no harsher term--of Madame de Verneuil irritated the jealousy of the monarch, who could not forget that she had taunted him with his advancing age, and who saw her unblushingly encourage the admiration and attention of such of the courtiers as she could induce to brave his displeasure; while her lavish expenditure and unceasing demands, alike upon his patience and his purse, involved him in perpetual difficulties with his finance minister, which her extravagant attempts to assume the airs and to usurp the privileges of quasi-royalty did not tend to diminish.

The French King was, in fact, at this period, the victim of his own vices; the sovereign of a great and powerful nation, without a home or a hearth, a wifeless husband, and a discontented lover; tenderly attached to all his children, and yet unable to confer a favour upon the offspring of one mother without incurring the resentment of the other; and while feeling himself degraded by the thrall in which he lived, totally devoid of the moral courage necessary for his escape from so disgraceful a bondage.

It is in moments such as these that virtue and honour assert their well-earned privileges without even the effort of enforcing them. Weary of his perpetual discomfort, harassed by the heartless conduct of his mistress, and pining for the mental repose which he so greatly needed, Henry once more turned towards his wife as his only probable and legitimate haven of rest; but hopeless of success through his own agency, he again addressed himself to Sully for assistance and support.

Suddenly summoned by the monarch, the minister presented himself at the Tuileries, where he found Henry in the orangery, in which he had taken refuge from a shower of rain, pale, agitated, and anxious. The subject of his reconciliation with the Queen was mooted on the instant, and he repeatedly called upon Sully for his advice as to the best and surest method of effecting it. Conscious that his counsels had hitherto been either disregarded or rendered abortive by the King himself, the Duke endeavoured to escape this new demand upon his patience, but Henry was peremptory.

“Since then you command me to speak, Sire”, he said at length, “I will be frank. In order to accomplish the object which you have in view, you can only pursue one course. Put the sea between yourself and four or five individuals by whom you are now beset, and cause as many others to pass the Alps”.

“Your first suggestion is practicable”, was the reply; “there is nothing to prevent me from banishing the malcontents who are conspiring in my very Court, but I am differently situated with regard to the Italians; for, in addition to the hatred which I should draw down upon myself from a nation proverbially vindictive, the Queen would never forgive an affront offered to her favourites. In order to free myself from these she must be induced herself to propose their return to their own country, and I know no one more likely than you, Rosny, to effect an object at once so desirable and so important. Make the attempt, therefore; and should you succeed, I pledge myself from that moment to abstain from every intrigue of gallantry. Reflect upon what I have suggested in my turn, and consider the means by which this may be accomplished with the least possible delay”.

Marie de Medicis

So saying, the King, after ascertaining that the weather had again cleared, abruptly quitted the orangery, leaving M. de Sully perfectly aghast at the new duty which had thus been suddenly thrust upon him.

As it was utterly impossible to propose such a measure to Marie de Medicis as that of dismissing her most favoured attendants until a perfect reconciliation had been effected between the royal couple, it was to that object that the prudent minister first turned his attention; and so successful did he ultimately prove, that after a brief correspondence the King and Queen had an interview, during which the whole of their recent misunderstanding was calmly discussed, and declared by both parties to have been occasioned by the ill-judged interference of those by whom they were severally surrounded; nor did they separate until they had mutually pledged themselves to consign the past to oblivion, and thenceforward to close their ears against all the gossiping of the Court.

The effect produced by this matrimonial truce (for it was unfortunately nothing more, and lasted only for the short space of three weeks) was of the most happy description. Nothing was seen or heard of save projects of amusement, which, not content with absorbing the present, extended also into the future. This calm, like those by which it had been preceded, was not, however, fated to realize the hopes of either party. Henry was too much addicted to pleasure to fulfil his part of the compact, while the Queen had, unhappily for her own peace, so long accustomed herself to listen to the comments and complaints of her favourites, that it was not long ere they found her as well disposed as she had previously been to lend a willing ear to their communications. In Madame de Verneuil they, of course, possessed a fruitful topic; and as Marie, despite all her good resolutions, could not restrain her curiosity with regard to the proceedings of this obnoxious personage, she ere long betrayed her knowledge of the new affronts to which she had been subjected by the Marquise.

The result of this unfortunate enlightenment was such as, from her impulsive character, might justly have been anticipated. She no sooner found herself in the society of the King than she once more assailed him with invectives and reproaches which he was of no temper to brook; and in this new dilemma Sully resolved, as a last and crowning effort to establish peace, to suggest to Marie that as her happiness had again been destroyed solely by the evil tongues about her, she should secure to herself the gratitude and affection of her royal consort by dismissing all her Italian household, and surrounding herself entirely by French friends and attendants.

The indignation of the Queen at this proposal was beyond the reach of all argument. She declared herself to be sufficiently unhappy separated from her family, and neglected by her husband, without driving from her presence, almost with ignominy, the few persons who still remained faithful to her interests, and who sincerely sympathized in her sufferings; and although the Duke ventured again and again to recur to the subject, and always with the same earnestness, Marie continued to reject his counsel as steadily as when it was first offered.

The new attachment felt or feigned by the King for Mademoiselle de la Bourdaisière had again awakened her jealousy; and she complained with equal reason that Henry, even while indulging in this new passion, made no attempt to restrain the arrogance and bitterness of the forsaken favourite. Nor was Madame de Verneuil less indignant than the Queen; for even while affecting an extreme devotion, and surrounding herself with ecclesiastics, who, not content with labouring to effect her salvation, were also feeding her vanity with the most fulsome panegyrics, she could ill brook to see herself so easily forgotten; and once more she indulged in such indecent liberties with the name of Marie de Medicis that the King, whose patience was the more easily exhausted from the fact that he believed himself to be at last independent of her fascinations, was again driven to resort to the assistance of M. de Sully, in order to compel the restoration of the written promise of marriage which he had been weak enough to place in her hands.

It was, indeed, impossible for the sovereign of a great nation longer to temporize with an insolence which at this period had exceeded all endurable limits; for not only did the Marquise assert, as she had previously done, the illegality of the King's union with his wife, but so

thoroughly had her affected devotion wrought upon the minds of the priests about her that several among them were induced to support her pretended claim, and even publicly to declare the bans of marriage between herself and the monarch. Among these, two Capuchins, Father Hilaire of Grenoble and Father Archange, her confessors, the last in France, and the first in Rome, attached themselves recklessly to her interests, while at the same time numerous letters and pamphlets were distributed in the capital, advocating her cause; and so dangerously active had the cabal become in the Eternal City that the Cardinal d'Ossat considered it expedient to address a letter to the French Government upon the subject, which implicated in this wild conspiracy both the King of Spain and the Duke of Savoy, who, through the agency of Father Hilaire, were represented as upholding the pretensions of Madame de Verneuil. These circumstances, and especially the notoriety of a fact which involved alike the dignity of her husband and her own honour, so greatly exasperated the temper of the Queen that she no longer attempted to control her irritation; and on one occasion when, as was constantly the case, the pretended claim of the Marquise became the subject of discord between the royal couple, Marie so thoroughly forgot the respect which she owed to the King that she raised her hand to strike him. Fortunately, however, for both parties, the Duc de Sully, who was present during the altercation, and who instantly detected her intention, sprang forward and seized her arm; but in his haste he was compelled to do this so roughly that she afterwards declared he had given her a blow, adding, however, that she was grateful to him for having thus preserved her from a worse evil.

So great, indeed, was her sense of the obligation thus conferred, that thenceforward Marie regarded the finance minister with more favour than she had hitherto done; and occasionally requested his advice during her misunderstandings with the King. She could not have chosen a safer counsellor, for although Sully does not, in any instance, attempt to disguise his dislike to the Tuscan princess, he was incapable of betraying so sacred a trust; and if, as generally occurs in such cases, his advice was frequently neglected, she never once had cause to question its propriety.

A short time subsequent to the scene we have just described the Queen sent to request the presence of the minister in her closet, where he found her conversing with Concini, and evidently much excited. On his entrance she informed him that she was weary of the infidelities of the monarch; that the jealousy which he constantly kept alive alike undermined her health and destroyed her happiness; and that she had determined to follow the advice of her faithful servant, there present, and to communicate to his Majesty certain advances which had been made to her by some of the Court nobles, who were less insensible to her attractions than the King himself.

This communication startled M. de Sully; and while he was endeavouring to frame a reply by which he might remain uncompromised, Concini with his usual presumption followed up the declaration of the Queen by asserting his own conviction that it was the wisest measure which she could adopt; as it would at once convince her royal consort that she desired to keep nothing secret from him in which he was personally interested.

This interruption afforded time for the Duke to collect his thoughts, and heedless of the interference of the Italian, he remarked in his turn that her Majesty must pardon him if he declined to offer any opinion on so delicate a question, as it was one entirely beyond his province; after which, resolutely changing the tone of the discourse, he continued to converse with the Queen upon indifferent topics until Concini had retired. Then, however, he voluntarily reverted to the subject which she had herself mooted, and implored her to abandon her design; assuring her that he had her interest too sincerely at heart to see her without anxiety about to place herself in a position at once false and dangerous, as such an assurance from her own lips could not fail to excite in the breast of the King the greatest and most legitimate suspicions; for every man of sense must at once feel that no individual, be his rank what it might, would have dared to declare his passion to a person of her exalted condition without having previously ascertained that its expression would be agreeable to her, and having been tacitly encouraged to do so; while, on the other hand, so far from discovering any merit in such an avowal, or regarding it as a proof of confidence, his Majesty would

immediately decide that the motive by which she had been actuated in making it must have been either the fear of discovery, or a desire to rid herself of persons of whom she had become weary, in order that she might be left at liberty to encourage new suitors; or finally, that she had been urged to this unheard-of measure by individuals who had obtained sufficient influence over her mind to induce her to sacrifice her peace and her honour to their own views.

Happily for herself, Marie de Medicis admitted the validity of these arguments, and abandoned her ill-advised intention; and she was the more readily induced to do this from the assurance which she received from M. de Sully that the restoration of the promise given to Madame de Verneuil by the King was about to be enforced, and that she would consequently be speedily relieved from the anxiety by which she had been so long tormented. Nor was the pledge an idle one, as immediate measures were adopted to effect this act of justice towards the Queen. The negotiation was renewed by two autograph letters from the King himself, addressed respectively to the Comte d'Entragues and the Marquise de Verneuil, which were long preserved in the library of Joly de Fleury, but are now supposed to be lost. Copies of both had been, however, fortunately taken by the Abbé de l'Ecluse, and as they are highly characteristic of the monarch, and cannot fail to prove interesting to the reader, we shall insert them at length.

To M. d'Entragues the King wrote as follows:

“M. d'Entragues, je vous envoie ce porteur pour me rapporter la promesse que je vous baillay a Malesherbes je vous prys ne faillir de me la renvoyer et si vous voulez me la rapporter vous mesme je vous diray les raisons qui m'y poussent qui sont domestiques et non d'estat par lesquelles vous direz que jay raison et reconnaitrez que vous avez été trompé, et que jay un naturel plutost trop bon que autrement, massurant que vous obeyrez à mon commandement, je finirai vous assurant que je suis votre bon mestre”.

The letter addressed to Madame de Verneuil bears the same date, and runs thus:

“Mademoiselle, lamour, lhonneur et les bienfaits que vous avez reçus de moi, eussent arrêté la plus legere ame du monde si elle n'eut point été accompagnée d'un mauvais naturel comme le vostre. Je ne vous picqueray davantage bien que je le peusse et dusse fair, vous le savez: je vous prie de me renvoyer la promesse que savez et ne me donnez point la peine de la revoir par autre voye: renvoyez moi aussi la bague que je vous rendis l'autre jour: voilà le sujet de cette lettre, de laquelle je veux avoir réponse à minuit”.

These specimens of royal eloquence were unavailing; evasive answers were returned by the King's messenger, and entreaties having proved ineffectual, threats were subsequently substituted, upon which the arrogant Marquise was ultimately induced to relinquish her claim to ascend the throne of France, on condition that she should, at the moment of delivering up the document, receive in exchange the sum of twenty thousand silver crowns and the promise of a marshal's *bâton* for her father the Comte d'Entragues, who had never been upon a field of battle. This condition, onerous as it appears, was accepted; and the father of the lady finally, but with evident reluctance, restored the pernicious document to the King in the presence of the Comte de Soissons and the Duc de Montpensier, MM. de Bellièvre, de Sillery, de Maisse, de Jeannin, de Gêvres, and de Villeroy, by whom it was verified, and who signed a declaration to this effect, although it was afterwards proved that D'Entragues had only delivered into the hands of Henry a well-executed copy of the paper, while he himself retained the original.

This ceremony over, the Marquise was commanded to leave the Court, and for a short time peace was perfectly restored. The King had already become weary of his new conquest, and the hand of Mademoiselle de la Bourdaisière was bestowed upon a needy and complaisant courtier; but still the absence of the brilliant favourite, despite all her insolence, left a void in the existence of Henry which no legitimate affection sufficed to fill, and it was consequently not long ere he became enamoured of Mademoiselle de Bueil, a young beauty who had recently appeared at Court in the suite of the Princesse de Condé. The extraordinary loveliness of the youthful orphan at once riveted the attention of the King, and her own inexperience made her, in so licentious a Court as that of Henri IV, an easy victim, so easy, indeed, that the libertine

Marie de Medicis

monarch did not even affect towards her the same consideration which he had shown to his former favourites, although her extraordinary personal perfections sufficed to render her society at this period indispensable to him.

It was not long ere the exiled favourite was apprised of this new infidelity, yet such was her reliance upon her own power over the passions of the King that she affected to treat it with contempt; but although she scorned to admit that she could feel any dread of being supplanted by a rival, after-events tended to prove that she was by no means so indifferent to the circumstance as she endeavoured to appear, and being as vindictive in her hate as she was unmeasured in her ambition, she could not forgive the double insult which had been offered to her pride. Forgetting the excesses of which she had been guilty, and the forbearance of the King, not only towards her faults, but even towards her vices, she determined on revenge, and unhappily she felt that the means were within her reach.

The Comte d'Auvergne, although he had been a second time pardoned by Henry, who was ever too ready to receive him into favour, and was wont to declare that although he was a *prodigal son* he could never make up his mind to see the offspring of his King and brother-in-law perish upon a scaffold, was devotedly attached to his sister, and of an intriguing spirit which delighted in every species of cabal and conspiracy; while François de Balzac d'Entragues, her father, overlooking the fact that he had himself become the husband of a woman whose reputation was lost before their marriage, talked loudly of the dishonour which the King had brought upon his family, and moreover resented, with great reason, an attempt made by Henry to seduce his younger daughter, Marie de Balzac.

For this lady, who subsequently became the mistress of Bassompierre, the King conceived so violent a passion that, although at that period in his fiftieth year, he did not hesitate to assume the disguise of a peasant in order to meet her in the forest of Verneuil. The appointment had, however, become known to M. d'Entragues, who, exasperated by this second affront, and indignant at the persevering licentiousness of the monarch, stationed himself with fifteen devoted adherents in different quarters of the wood in order to take his life. Happily for Henry, he was well mounted, and on being attacked, defended himself so resolutely that he escaped almost by a miracle.

The disappointment of M. d'Entragues at this failure was so great that he compelled his daughter to propose another meeting in a solitary spot which he indicated, and where he made every preparation to secure the assassination of the imprudent monarch; but although she despatched the letter containing the assignation, Marie de Balzac found means to apprise her royal lover of the reception which awaited him, and he consequently failed to keep the appointment. That the Comte d'Entragues, twice foiled in his meditated vengeance, should lend himself willingly to any conspiracy against the honour and life of his sovereign, is consequently scarcely surprising, when we remember how many nobles had in turn caballed against Henri IV with scarcely a pretext for their disloyalty; and meanwhile Madame de Verneuil, fully conscious of the hatred of Philip of Spain for the French King, had no sooner resolved upon revenge than she at once turned her attention towards that monarch, and by exciting his worst passions succeeded in securing his support. She found an able and zealous coadjutor in Don Balthazar de Zuñiga, the Spanish Ambassador at the Court of France; while her step-brother, the Comte d'Auvergne, was no less successful with the Duke of Savoy, who, like Philip III, was never more happy than when he discovered and profited by an opportunity of harassing the French sovereign.

This conspiracy, as absurd as it was criminal, was, moreover, supported by many of the discontented nobles who had never pardoned Henry for the suppression of the League; and, wild as such a project cannot fail to appear in these days, we have the authority of Amelot de la Houssaye for the fact that the Comte d'Auvergne had induced Philip by a secret treaty to promise his assistance in placing Henri de Bourbon, the son of Henri IV and Madame de Verneuil, on the throne of France, to the detriment of the legitimate offspring of Marie de Medicis.

Marie de Medicis

In the act by which Philip bound himself thus to recognise the pretended claim of the Marquise, he also gave a pledge to furnish her with five hundred thousand livres in money, and to despatch the Spanish troops which at that moment occupied Catalonia to support the disaffected French subjects who might be induced to join the cabal in Guienne and Languedoc.

Report also said that M. d'Auvergne, not satisfied with this attempt to undermine the throne of Henri IV, had formed a design against his life, but the rumour obtained no credit even from his enemies.

Whatever extenuation may be found for Madame de Verneuil in such an attempt as this; whatever indulgence may be conceded to a woman baffled in her ambition, misled by her confidence in a supposititious claim, and urged on by a blind and uncalculating affection for her children, it is difficult to find any excuse for the persevering ingratitude of her step-brother. As regards M. d'Entragues, we have already shown that he had more than sufficient cause for seeking revenge upon a monarch who sacrificed every important consideration to the passion of the moment; but the Comte d'Auvergne had experienced nothing save indulgence from Henry, and it was consequently in cold blood that he organized a conspiracy, which, had it succeeded, must have plunged the whole nation into civil war. He was, moreover, the more culpable that he had, in order to secure a pardon for his previous participation in the crime of Biron, assured the too-credulous monarch, that in the event of his restoration to favour, he would, if permitted to continue his intercourse with Philip of Spain as unrestrictedly as heretofore, profit by the facility thus afforded to him to reveal to his Majesty all the secrets of the Spanish Government.

There can be no doubt that such a proposal must have startled and even disgusted the frank nature of the French King; but it was nevertheless too tempting to be rejected; and he himself avowed to Sully, when the new conspiracy of D'Auvergne became known to him, that it was less by the prayers of the culprit's sister, and by his own consideration for the children whom she had borne to him, than in the hope that he might, through the medium of the Count, be enabled to counteract the measures of his most subtle and dangerous enemy, that he had been induced on that occasion to pardon his disloyalty.

By this unwise and ill-calculated concession the King had afforded an opportunity to the restless and disaffected noble of pursuing a correspondence with Philip as dangerous as it was convenient. Couriers were permitted to come and go unquestioned; and it was not long ere every measure of the French Cabinet was as intimately known at Madrid as it was in the Privy Council of Henry himself. This evil was, moreover, increased by the unconditional pardon which had enabled M. d'Auvergne, after his strange and degrading offer, to return to the Court; and he profited so eagerly by the opportunity which was thus afforded to him that he had little difficulty in convincing the false and vindictive Philip that the moment was at length come in which he might overthrow the power of the sovereign whom he hated.

M. de Loménie, however, who, unaware of the promise made by the Count to Henry, became uneasy at the constant communication which the former maintained with the Court of Spain, at length determined to satisfy himself as to its nature, and for this purpose he intercepted some letters, by which he instantly became convinced of the treason meditated against his royal master. Indignant at the discovery which supervened, he suffered his displeasure to reach the ears of the culprit, who forthwith quitted the capital, and hastened to secure himself from arrest in Auvergne, of which province he was the governor, and where he made instant preparations to leave the kingdom should such a step become necessary.

It was consequently in vain that the King, when informed of the circumstance, despatched the Sieur d'Escures to summon the Count to his presence in order that he might justify himself. D'Auvergne resolutely refused to quit his retreat until he had received a formal promise from the sovereign that he should be absolved from all blame of whatever description, and received by his Majesty with his accustomed favour, alleging as a pretext for making this demand, that he was on bad terms with all the Princes of the Blood, with the Grand Equerry, and even with his sister, Madame de Verneuil, and that he could not make head against such a host of enemies except he were supported by the King.

The expostulations of the royal messenger were fruitless, the Count being more fully alive to the danger of his position than M. d'Escures himself; and to every argument and denegation of the anxious envoy he consequently replied by saying that it was useless to urge him to compromise his safety while he felt certain that his ruin had been decided upon, a fact of which he was convinced from the circumstance of his having received no letter from any of the intimate friends of the King since he had withdrawn from the Court, while he was sufficiently acquainted with the bad disposition of Madame de Verneuil to be assured that in the event of her being enabled to effect a reconciliation with the monarch at his expense, she would not scruple to sacrifice his interests to her own.

The embassy of M. d'Escures thus signally failed, and instead of furthering the purpose for which it was intended, it produced a totally opposite effect, as, warned by this attempt to regain possession of his person, it induced M. d'Auvergne to adopt the most extraordinary precautions. He from that moment not only refused to enter any town or village where he might be surprised, but he also declined to hold any intercourse even with his most familiar friends save on a highway, or in some plain or forest where the means of escape were easy; and when hunting, a sport to which he was passionately attached, and which was at that period the only relaxation he could enjoy with safety, he caused videttes to be stationed upon the surrounding heights, who were instructed to apprise him by a concerted signal of the approach of strangers.

All his caution was, however, vain, his capture being an object of too much importance to the King, at the present conjuncture, to be readily relinquished, and accordingly it was at length effected by a stratagem. By the advice of the Duc de Sully, this enterprise was entrusted to M. Murat, who associated with himself M. de Nérestan and the Vicomte de Pont-Château, who, by his instructions, paid several visits to the Count at his château of Borderon near Clermont, without, however, inducing him to quit its walls.

These gentlemen, nevertheless, made themselves so agreeable to the self-exiled conspirator, and listened so patiently to his complaints, that their society became at last necessary to him, and so thoroughly did they succeed in gaining his confidence that they finally experienced little difficulty in persuading him to be present at a review of the light cavalry of the Duc de Vendôme, of which he was the colonel-general, and which was about to take place in a little plain between Clermont and Nonant. He accordingly proceeded to the spot with only two attendants, and he was no sooner seen approaching than M. de Nérestan and the Vicomte de Pont-Château advanced from the ranks, apparently to welcome him, but on reaching his side, the latter seized the bridle of his horse, while his companion arrested him in the name of the King. Resistance was of course impossible, and thus the Comte d'Auvergne, despite all his precautions, found himself a prisoner.

L'Etoile, with a *naïveté* well calculated to provoke a smile of pity, calls this a "brave" and subtle stratagem; on its subtlety we may be silent, but we leave alike its courage and its honesty to the judgment of our readers. Sully admits that not only the two captors, but even Murat himself, who had an ancient grudge against D'Auvergne, spared no pains or deceit to insinuate themselves into his confidence, while it is equally certain that it was to his perfect faith in their professions that he owed his capture.

Having secured their prisoner, M. Murat and his coadjutors caused him to deliver up his sword, and to exchange the powerful charger upon which he was mounted for a road-hack that had been prepared for him, upon which he proceeded under a strong guard to Briare, whence he was conducted in a carriage to Montargis, and, finally, conveyed in a boat to Paris. During this enforced journey his gaiety never deserted him, nor did he appear to entertain the slightest apprehension as to the result of his imprisonment; throughout the whole of the way he jested, drank, and laughed, as though his return to the capital had been voluntary; and when he was finally met at the gates of the city by M. de la Chevalerie, the lieutenant-governor of the Bastille, he was in such exuberant spirits that the astounded official deemed it expedient to remind him that they had not come together to dance a ballet, but for a totally different purpose.

Marie de Medicis

It was only when he found himself conducted to the very chamber which had been occupied by the Maréchal de Biron previous to his execution, that a shade of anguish passed over the features of the Count. He could not but remember that the traitor-Duke, who had rendered great and good service to his sovereign, had suffered for the same crime of which he was in his turn accused without any such plea for mercy, and it is therefore scarcely surprising that he should have been startled upon finding himself installed as the successor of the condemned marshal.

M. d'Auvergne was not, however, of a temperament long to yield to gloomy ideas, and consequently, while his unhappy wife was lost in tears, and endeavouring by every exertion in her power to save him from a fate which appeared inevitable, he availed himself to the utmost of the leniency of his jailors, and indulged in every luxury and amusement which he was enabled to command. Agonised by her apprehensions, the unhappy Countess at length resolved to throw herself at the feet of the King, where, with a humility which contrasted strangely with the unbending arrogance of her sister-in-law, Madame de Verneuil, she besought in the most touching terms that Henry would spare the life of her husband, and once more pardon his crime. Her earnest supplications evidently affected the King, while Marie de Medicis, who was present, wept with the heart-broken wife, and warmly seconded her petition, but the monarch, who probably feared the result of such an act of mercy, having raised her from her knees with a gentle kindness which made her tears flow afresh, led her to the side of the Queen, upon whose arm he placed his hand as he said firmly: "Deeply, Madame, do I pity you, and sympathize in your suffering, but were I to grant what you ask, I must necessarily admit my wife to be impure, my son a bastard, and my kingdom the prey of my enemies".

All, therefore, that the Countess could obtain was the royal permission to communicate with her husband, a concession of which she hastened to take advantage; when, in reply to her anxious inquiry as to what he desired of her, she received by her messenger the heartless reply that she might send him a good stock of cheese and mustard, and that she need not trouble herself about anything else.

The intercepted letters of the Comte d'Auvergne having also implicated his stepfather M. d'Entragues, and his sister Madame de Verneuil, both were subsequently arrested; the former by the Provost Defunctis in his castle of Marcoussis, and the latter at her residence in the Faubourg St. Germain; while her children were taken from her, and sent, under a proper escort, to the palace of St. Germain-en-Laye. So important did it, moreover, appear to the French ministers to ascertain the exact extent of the conspiracy, that the Provost was accompanied to Marcoussis by M. de Loménie, in order that a search might be instituted upon the premises; the result of which tended to prove, beyond all possibility of doubt, that the original engagement delivered by the father of the Marquise to the sovereign had, in fact, not been restored, but had been skilfully copied by some able pen; while the importance which was still attached to the real document by the family of Madame de Verneuil may be gathered from the fact that it was discovered by the Secretary of State in a glass bottle, carefully sealed and enclosed within a second, which was laid upon a heap of cotton and built up in a wall of one of the apartments. Nor was this the only object of importance found in the possession of M. d'Entragues; as, together with the promise of marriage which he had professed to restore to the King, M. de Loménie likewise discovered, secreted with equal care, sundry letters, the treaty between Philip of Spain and the conspirators, and the cypher which had been employed in their correspondence.

From these documents it was ascertained that the King of Spain had stipulated on oath that, on the condition of Madame de Verneuil confiding her son to his guardianship, he should be immediately recognized as Dauphin of France, and heir to the throne of that kingdom; while five fortresses in the territory of Portugal should be placed at his disposal, and subjected to his authority, as places of refuge should such a precaution become necessary. A similar provision was, moreover, made for the Marquise herself; and an income amounting to twenty thousand pounds English was also promised to the quasi-Prince for the support of his household.

Marie de Medicis

Nor was this domestic arrangement by any means the most important feature of the conspiracy, as appointments, both civil and military, involving considerable pecuniary advantages, were also promised to the Comte d'Auvergne and his stepfather; and a simultaneous invasion was arranged by the Duke of Savoy in Provence, the Condé de Fuentes in Burgundy, and Spinola in Champagne.

On the 11th of December M. d'Entragues was conveyed in a close carriage to the prison of the Conciergerie at Paris, accompanied by his son M. de Marcoussis on horseback, but without a single attendant; and he was in confinement for a considerable time before he was allowed either fire or light; while on the same day, Madame de Verneuil was placed under the charge of M. d'Arques, the Lieutenant of Police, who was informed that he must answer with his life for her safe-keeping, and who accordingly garrisoned her residence with a strong body of his guards and archers.

The Comte d'Entragues was no sooner incarcerated, than his wife, following the example of her daughter-in-law, obtained an audience of Henry, in order to implore the pardon of her husband; but it was remarked that, earnest as she was in his behalf, she never once, during the whole of the interview, made the slightest allusion either to the Comte d'Auvergne or Madame de Verneuil; doubtless feeling that in the one case the well-known respect of the King for the blood of the Valois, and in the other his passion for the Marquise, would plead more powerfully in their behalf than the most emphatic entreaties. Like that of the Comtesse d'Auvergne, her attempt, however, proved abortive, save that Henry accorded to her prayers a mitigation of the rigour with which her husband had hitherto been treated.

Meanwhile Madame de Verneuil, far from imitating the humility of her relatives, openly declared that, whatever might be the result to herself, she should never regret the measures which she had adopted to obtain justice for herself and her children; and when on one occasion she was urged to make the concessions by which alone she could hope for pardon, she answered haughtily: "I have no fear of death; on the contrary, I shall welcome it. If the King takes my life, it will at least be allowed that he sacrificed his own wife, for I was Queen before the Italian woman. I ask but three favours from his Majesty: pardon for my father, a rope for my brother, and justice for myself."

Her reason for this expression may be found in the fact that during three examinations which he underwent the Comte d'Auvergne finally acknowledged everything, and threw the whole blame upon the Marquise; feeling convinced that, under every circumstance, her life was safe; although he had previously (placing the most entire reliance on the good-faith and secrecy of M. de Chevillard, to whom he had, in conjunction with his sister, confided the original treaty with Spain, and never apprehending the discovery of the documents deposited at Marcoussis), declared his innocence in the most solemn manner; and he even concluded his address to the commissioners by saying: "Gentlemen, show me one line of writing by which I can be convicted of having entered into any treaty, either with the King of Spain or his ambassador, and I will immediately sign beneath it my own sentence of death, and condemn myself to be quartered alive".

Nor was the confidence placed by M. d'Auvergne in his friend misplaced; for when Chevillard was in his turn taken to the Bastille as his accomplice, he so carefully concealed the treaty in the skirt of his doublet that it escaped the search of the officials; and on seeing himself treated as a prisoner of state, he contrived by degrees to swallow it in his soup, in order that it should not afterwards fall into their hands in the event of his condemnation.

The indignation of the Marquise may consequently be imagined, when, after such a declaration as that which he had originally made, she ascertained that the Count had not only confessed his guilt, but that he had, moreover, revealed the most minute details of the plot; and in order to convince the King that he placed himself entirely at his mercy, had even given up to him the mutual promise made between himself and the Dues de Bouillon and de Biron on the occasion of the previous conspiracy. Her arrogance was also encouraged by the fact that Henry, anxious to find some pretext for pardoning her treachery, sent secretly to inform her that if she would confess her fault and ask his forgiveness, it should be granted in

consideration of the past, and from regard for their children; to which message the Marquise vouchsafed no further reply than that those who had committed no crime required no pardon; and in addition to this impertinence, on being informed that some of her friends, anxious to save her in spite of her own obstinacy, had asserted that she had solicited the clemency of the monarch, she bitterly reproached them for their interference, declaring that they were liars and traitors, and that she would die rather than submit to such a humiliation.

During the exile of the Marquise, the King, whose passion for Mademoiselle de Bueil had begun to decrease, and who discovered that mere personal beauty offered no equivalent for the wit and fascinations of his old favourite, resolved to provide for her, as he had previously done for Mademoiselle de la Bourdaisière, by bestowing her upon a husband; and he accordingly effected her marriage with Henri de Harlay, Comte de Chésy, a young noble whose poverty, as well as his want of Court influence, gave every security for his ready submission to all the exactions of his royal master.

The monarch, whom absence had thus only sufficed to render more devoted than ever to the Marquise, and who had resolved under all circumstances to pardon her, continued to employ every method in his power to induce her to avow her error, although in searching her papers numerous letters had been discovered which revealed an amount of infidelity on her part that should have awakened his pride, and induced him to abandon her to her fate; and at length, despairing that any minor influence would suffice to alter her resolution, and to lower her pride, he instructed M. de Sully to see her, and if possible to convince her of the injury which she was doing to her own cause by the obstinacy with which she rejected the suggestions of the King.

The minister had no alternative save obedience; and he consequently presented himself at the residence of Madame de Verneuil, whom he found as self-possessed and as self-confident as in the palmiest days of her prosperity. Instead of concessions she made conditions, and complained loudly and arrogantly of the proceedings of the sovereign; by whom she declared that she had been outraged in her honour, and from whom she sought redress rather than indulgence. This tirade was seasoned by professions of piety and repentance which were appreciated at their real value by her listener; who, having suffered her to exhaust herself by her own vehemence, instead of temporizing with her vanity as her friends had previously done, took up the subject in his turn, and told her that she would do well to remember that she was at that moment a prisoner under suspicion of treason, and that she might consider herself very fortunate if she were permitted to expiate her crime by self-exile to any country except Spain; bidding her remark, moreover, that this lenity could not now be exhibited towards her until she had undergone a criminal examination, and demanded the pardon of the King for her disobedience.

M. de Sully next proceeded to upbraid her with her unbecoming conduct towards the Queen; assuring her that every word or act of disrespect of which any were guilty towards the wife of the sovereign was an offence against his own person, and was likely to entail upon the culprit a very severe penalty. He then reproached her for her indecent expressions; and especially for her having more than once declared that had she not been treated with injustice, she should have been in the place occupied by "the fat banker's daughter"; and finally, he reprimanded her very severely for the impertinent and absurd affectation with which she had presumed to place herself upon a level with her royal mistress, and her children upon a par with the Dauphin of France; reminding her, moreover, that the perpetual disunion of their Majesties was to be solely attributed to her malignant and malicious insinuations, and advising her to lose no time in requesting permission to throw herself at the feet of the Queen, to entreat her pardon for the past and her indulgence for the future.

To this harangue, so different from the conciliatory and obsequious discourse of her partisans, Madame de Verneuil listened without any display of impatience, but with an ostentatious weariness which was intended to impress upon the minister the utter inutility of his interference; and when he paused to take breath, she assured him with a placid smile that she was obliged by his advice, but that she must have time to reflect before she could decide

upon such a measure. M. de Sully, however, was not to be deceived by this well-acted composure; he had not carefully studied the character of the Marquise without perceiving how ill she brooked control or remonstrance; and, accordingly, she had no sooner ceased speaking than he resumed the conversation by expatiating upon the enormity of her conduct in affecting the sudden devotion behind which she had seen fit to entrench herself, while she was daily indulging alike her jealousy and her hatred by endeavouring not only to ruin the domestic happiness of the monarch, but even the interests of his kingdom; and when his offended listener remarked, with chilling haughtiness, that he was in no position to impugn her sincerity, he only answered the intended rebuke by persisting that her assumed piety was a mere grimace, which could not impose upon any man of sense; a fact which he forthwith proved by detailing all her past career, and thus convincing her that no one incident of her licentious life had remained a mystery to him.

“Can you now tell me”, he asked, “that these adventures existed only in the jealous imagination of the King, as you have so often assured his Majesty himself? And will you persist in denying that you have deceived him in the most unblushing manner? Believe me, Madame, if you had indeed become penitent for your past errors, and had, from a sincere return to God, desired to withdraw from the Court, you would at once have obtained permission to do so with honour to yourself; but you have simply acted a part, and that so unskillfully as to have deceived no one”.

At this period of the interview Madame de Verneuil could not wholly suppress her emotion, but she controlled it sufficiently to reply only by a condescending bow, and the exclamation of, “Proceed, M. le Ministre!”

“I will do so, Madame”, said M. de Sully, “by a transition from remonstrance to inquiry. Have you any legitimate subject of complaint which you conceive to warrant your failure of respect towards their Majesties?”

“If this question was dictated to you by the King, Monsieur”, was the proud reply, “he was wrong to put it, as he, better than any other person, could himself have decided; and if it be your own suggestion you are no less so, since whatever may be its nature, it is beyond your power to apply the remedy”.

“Then, Madame, it only remains for me to be informed of what you desire from his Majesty”.

“That which I am aware will prove less acceptable to the King than to myself, M. le Ministre; but which I nevertheless persist in demanding, since I am authorized by your inquiry to repeat my request. I desire immediate permission to leave France with my parents, my brother, and my children, and to take up my permanent residence in some other country, where I shall have excited less jealousy and less malevolence than in this; and I include my brother in this voluntary expatriation because I now have reason to believe that he is suffering entirely for my sake”.

Sully was startled: he could not place faith in her sincerity, and he consequently induced her to repeat her request more than once; until she at length added a condition which convinced him that she was indeed perfectly serious in the desire that she expressed.

“Do not, however, imagine, Monsieur”, she said, with a significant smile, “that I have any intention of leaving the kingdom, and taking up my abode with strangers, with the slightest prospect of dying by hunger. I am by no means inclined to afford such a gratification to the Queen, who would doubtlessly rejoice to learn that this had been the close of my career. I must have an income of a hundred thousand francs, fully and satisfactorily secured to me in land, before I leave France; and this is a mere trifle compared with what I have a legal right to demand from the King”.

“I shall submit your proposition to his Majesty, Madame”, said the minister as he rose to take his leave; “and will shortly acquaint you with the result”.

Marie de Medicis

Greatly to the disappointment of M. de Sully, however, he found Henry decidedly averse to the departure of Madame de Verneuil; nor could all the arguments by which he endeavoured to convince the infatuated monarch that the self-exile of the Marquise was calculated to ensure his own future tranquillity, avail to overcome his distaste to the proposal. He was weary of his purely sensual intercourse with Madame de Moret, whose extreme facility had caused him from the first to attach but little value to her possession; while her total want of intellect and knowledge of the world continually caused him to remember with regret the dazzling although dangerous qualities of her predecessor. Marie de Medicis, moreover, who had originally looked with complacency upon his *liaison* with Mademoiselle de Bueil, rejoicing in any event which tended to estrange his affections from the Marquise, had, since her melodramatic marriage and her accession of rank, begun to entertain apprehensions that another formidable rival was about to embitter her future life; while the reproaches which she constantly addressed to the monarch, and to which he was compelled to submit, on the subject of a woman who had merely pleased his fancy without touching his heart, were another cause of irritation, and only tended to make him look back upon the past with an ardent longing to repair it. Thus he continued to employ all his most intimate associates in an attempt to urge the Marquise to make such concessions as would enable him to pardon her, with the earnestness of a repentant lover rather than the clemency of an indulgent sovereign; and when the stern minister so signally failed to convince her reason by his representations, the King endeavoured to arouse her vanity and self-interest by the flatteries and inferences of the more courtly Bassompierre, La Varenne, Sigogne, and others in whom he placed confidence; but all this ill-disguised anxiety only served to convince the wily favourite that she should prove victorious in the struggle, for since Henry could not bring himself to consent to her expatriation, there was no probability that he would ever be induced to take her life.

And the astute Marquise judged rightly: for she was not only safe herself, but the palladium of her family. The King was no longer young; he had become satiated with the tame and facile pleasures for which he was indebted to his sovereign rank; and although opposition and haughtiness in a wife angered and disgusted him, there was a piquancy and novelty in the defiance of a mistress by which he was alike amused and interested. He could calculate upon the extent to which the Queen would venture to indulge her displeasure; but he found himself quite unable to adjudge the limits of Madame de Verneuil's daring; and thus his passion was constantly stimulated by curiosity. In her hours of fascination she delighted his fancy, and in those of irritation she excited his astonishment. Like the ocean, she assumed a new aspect every hour; and to this "infinite variety" she was in all probability indebted for the duration of her empire over the sensual and selfish affections of her royal lover.

Conscious of her power, the Marquise continued inexorable; and finally, Henry found himself compelled to include her in the public accusation brought against the other conspirators, and to issue an order to the Parliament, as the supreme criminal tribunal of the kingdom, to commence without further delay the prosecution of the delinquents.

A new anxiety at this time divided the attention of the King with that which he felt for the vindication of the favourite. His permission had been asked by the Huguenots to hold a meeting at Châtellerauld, and this he had at once conceded; but circumstances having arisen which induced the Council to apprehend that the intrigues of the Duc de Bouillon, supported by MM. de la Trémouille, and du Plessis-Mornay, were about to involve the kingdom in new troubles, M. de Sully proceeded to Poitou under pretext of taking possession of his new government, and by his unexpected appearance on the scene of action counteracted the project of the conspirators; while a short time subsequently the Duc de la Trémouille fell into a rapid decline which terminated his existence at the early age of thirty-four years, and deprived the reform party of one of their most able and zealous leaders.

Meanwhile, amid all the dissensions, both political and domestic, by which Henri IV had latterly been harassed, his earnest desire to improve and embellish his good city of Paris and its adjacent palaces had continued unabated. Henri III, during whose reign the Pont Neuf had been commenced, had only lived long enough to see two of its arches constructed, and the piles destined to support the remainder raised above the river; this undertaking was now

Marie de Medicis

completed, and numerous workmen were also constantly employed on the galleries of the Louvre, and at the châteaux of St. Germain-en-Laye, Fontainebleau, and Monceaux; the latter of which, as we have already stated, the monarch had presented to the Queen on her arrival in Paris; while, emulating the royal example, the great nobles and capitalists of the city were building on all sides, and increasing alike the extent and splendour of the metropolis. It was at this period that Henry joined the Faubourg St. Germain to the city, and caused it to be paved; constructed the Place Royale; repaired the Hôtel de St. Louis for the purpose of converting it into a plague-hospital; and commenced building the Temple Square.

Other great works were also undertaken throughout the kingdom; the junction of the Garonne with the Aude, an attempt which presented considerable difficulty and which was only terminated during the reign of Louis XIV, was vigorously commenced; other rivers, hitherto comparatively useless, were rendered navigable; and the canal of Briare, with its two-and-thirty locks, although not more than half completed at the death of Henry, had already cost the enormous sum of three hundred thousand crowns. Numerous means of communication were established by highways which had not previously existed; bridges were built, and roads repaired; taxes which paralyzed the manufactures of the country were remitted; the fabrication of tapestried hangings wrought in worsted, silk, and gold, was earnestly encouraged; mulberry plantations were formed, and the foundation laid for the production of the costly silks and velvets for which Lyons has ever since been so famous. An imitation of the celebrated Venetian glass was also introduced with great success; and, above all, even in the midst of these expensive undertakings, a tax of four annual millions of francs, hitherto raised by the customs upon the different classes of citizens, was altogether abolished. Hope and energy were alike aroused by so vigorous a measure; and thus the people ceased to murmur, and were ready to acknowledge that the King had indeed begun to verify his celebrated declaration that "if he were spared, there should not exist a workman within his realm who was not enabled to cook a fowl upon the Sunday."

CHAPTER V

1605

The year 1605 commenced, as had been the case each year since the peace, with a succession of Court-festivals; tilts and tournaments, balls and masquerades, occupied the attention of the privileged; presents of value were exchanged by the sovereigns and princes; and during all this incessant dissipation the Parliament was diligently employed upon the trial of the conspirators.

On Saturday, the 29th of January, the Comte d'Auvergne was placed out the sellette (a very low wooden stool upon which accused persons were formerly seated during their trial), where L'Etoile asserts that he communicated much more than was required of him; while the Queen, anxious to secure the condemnation of Madame de Verneuil, and at the same time to intimidate the favourites by whom she might be succeeded, appeared in person as one of the accusing witnesses. Nor did Henry, who had already decided upon the pardon of the Marquise, attempt to dissuade her from this extraordinary measure; and it is even probable that as the design of the King was merely to humble the pride of the haughty Marquise, in order to render her more submissive to his authority, he was by no means disinclined to suffer Marie to give free vent to her indignation and contempt.

The Parliament had nominated as its commissaries Achille de Harlay, the first president, and MM. Etienne Dufour and Philibert Turin, councillors, to whose interrogatories, however, the Comte d'Auvergne at first refused to reply, alleging as his reason the pardon which had been accorded to him by Henry during the past year. In this emergency M. Louis Servin, the King's Advocate, was deputed to offer to his Majesty the remonstrance of the commissaries, and to represent that as the accused had already been convicted of conspiring, first with Maturin Carterie, and subsequently with the Duc de Biron, he was unworthy of pardon on this third occasion; while the most imperious necessity existed that an example should be made, in order to secure the safety of their Majesties and the Dauphin, which, moreover, as a natural consequence, involved the tranquillity and welfare of the state.

To this appeal the King replied that the abolition accorded to the accused on the two former occasions had been granted with a view of inducing him to return to his allegiance, but that since it had failed to produce the desired result it could form no pretext for his escape from the penalties of this new crime, and that should he persist in refusing to reply to the questions put to him by his judges his silence must be construed into an acknowledgment of treason; upon which M. d'Auvergne immediately endeavoured to redeem his error by revealing all the details of the past plots, as well as those of the one in which he was now implicated.

Madame de Verneuil, who had been summoned to appear at the same time, excused herself upon the plea of indisposition; and it was asserted that she had caused herself to be bled in order that the temporary delay in her examination thus secured might enable her, ere she appeared before the commissaries, to ascertain to what extent she had been implicated by the revelations of her step-brother. She no sooner learnt, however, that the Count had thrown all the odium of the conspiracy upon herself than she hastened to obey a second summons, and presented herself with her arm in a sling to undergo in her turn the necessary interrogatories. Her manner was firm, and her delivery at once haughty and energetic. She insisted upon the innocence of her father, declared that the whole cabal had been organized by D'Auvergne, and admitted that feeling herself wronged she had willingly entered into his

Marie de Medicis

views; but at the same time she coupled with this admission the assurance that having nothing with which to reproach herself she asked for no indulgence, and was quite prepared to abide by the consequences of her attempt to do justice alike to herself and to her children.

When the Comte d'Entragues was in his turn examined, he did not seek to deny his participation in the plot, but placed in the hands of his judges a written document, setting forth the services which he had rendered to the King since his accession, and which had merely been recompensed by the government of Orleans, a dignity of which he was moreover shortly afterwards deprived in order that it might be conferred upon another, although in his zeal for the monarch he had not only exhausted his own resources but had even raised considerable loans which still remained unliquidated. Yet, as he stated, he had uttered no complaint, although he was reduced to poverty and deprived of the means of suitably establishing his children, for he still had faith in the justice and generosity of his sovereign; and with this assurance he had retired to his paternal home, old, sick, and poor, to await as best he might the happy moment in which his claims should be remembered. And then it was, as he emphatically declared, that the last and crowning misfortune of a long life had overtaken him. Then it was that the King conceived that unfortunate attachment for his younger daughter, which deprived him of the greatest solace of his old age and exposed him to the raillery and contempt of his fellow-nobles, coupled with sarcastic congratulations upon the advantages which he was supposed to have derived from the dishonour of his child; an event which had clouded his remnant of existence with shame and despair. He had, as he asserted, several times requested of his Majesty that he might be permitted to withdraw entirely from the Court and finish his days in retirement and in the bosom of his family, but this favour had constantly been denied. As a last effort he had then represented the deplorable state of his health, and entreated that he might be permitted to travel in order to regain his strength, leaving his wife and children at Marcoussis; a favour which also was not only refused, but the refusal rendered doubly bitter by a prohibition either to see or correspond with his daughter, whose safety was at that moment endangered by the menaces of the Queen. He then entered briefly into the circumstances of the conspiracy, and concluded by declaring that no attempt upon the life either of the sovereign or the Dauphin had ever been contemplated by himself or by any of his accomplices.

Such was the defence of the dishonoured old man who had placed himself beyond the pale of sympathy by his own degrading marriage. Yet he was still a father; and who shall decide that the shame which in his own case had been silenced by the voice of passion, did not crush him with double violence when it involved the reputation of his child? Who shall say that he had not, in the throbbing recesses of his wrung heart, mourned with an undying remorse the fault of which he had himself been guilty, and felt that it was visited in vengeance upon the dearest object of his paternal love? Contemporary historians waste not a word upon the ruined noble, the disappointed partisan, and the disgraced father; yet the scene must have been a pitiable one in the midst of which he stood an attainted criminal, blighted in every affection and in every hope, the creditor of his King, and the victim of his paternal ambition.

The sentence of the Parliament was pronounced on the 2nd of February. The Comtes d'Auvergne and d'Entragues were condemned to death for the crime of *lèse-majesté*, and Madame de Verneuil to imprisonment in the convent of Beaumont, near Tours, until more ample information could be obtained of the exact extent of her participation; and meanwhile she was to be prohibited from holding any communication save with the sisterhood.

On the same day, the sentence having been instantly communicated to Madame d'Entragues, with the information that the King was about to repair to the chapel of the palace to attend mass, she hastened, accompanied by her daughter Marie de Balzac, to the Tuileries, where the two unfortunate women threw themselves on their knees before Henry as he entered the grand gallery, and with tears and sobs entreated mercy, the one for her husband, and the other for her father. The monarch burst into tears as he saw them at his feet. He could not forget that the mourners thus prostrate before him were the mother and the sister of the woman whom he still loved, and as he raised them from the ground he said soothingly: "You

Marie de Medicis

shall see that I am indulgent--I will convene a council this very day. Go, and pray to God to inspire me with right resolutions, while I proceed in my turn to mass with the same intention”.

The King kept his word. In the afternoon the Council again met, when he charged them upon their consciences to deliberate seriously before they condemned two of their fellow-creatures to an ignominious death; but they remained firm in their decision, declaring that by extending pardon to crimes of so serious a nature as those upon which judgment had just been passed, nothing but danger and disorder could ensue; and that after the execution of the Duc de Biron, individuals convicted of the same offence could not be suffered to escape with impunity without endangering by such misplaced clemency the safety of the kingdom, while a revocation of the sentence now pronounced would moreover tend to bring contempt upon the judicial authority.

Henry listened, but he would not yield; and before the close of the meeting, contrary to the advice of all his Council, he announced that he commuted the pain of death in both instances to perpetual imprisonment, and revoked the sentence that condemned the Marquise to the cloister, which he superseded by an order of exile to her own estate of Verneuil.

To express the disappointment and mortification of the Queen when this decision was announced to her would be impossible, as she instantly felt that any further attempt to destroy the influence of the favourite must prove ineffectual. She no longer exhibited any violence, but became a prey to the deepest melancholy, weeping where she had formerly reproached, and seeking her only consolation in prayer and in the society of her chosen friends. Upon Henry, however, the effect of his extraordinary and ill-judged leniency was far different. Although mercy, and even indulgence, had been extended towards the Marquise without eliciting one word either of entreaty or of acknowledgment, he felt convinced that so marked an exhibition of his favour must be recompensed by a return of affection on her part; and thus he continued to participate in the gaieties of the Court with a zest which was strangely contrasted by the gloom and sadness of his royal consort, and even derived amusement from the epigrams and satires which were circulated at his expense among the people.

On the 13th of the month M. de Rohan was married at Ablon to Marguerite de Béthune, the daughter of the Duc de Sully, whom Henry had previously determined to bestow upon the Comte de Laval, and not only did he confer the honour of his presence upon the well-dowered bride, but he also signed her marriage contract and presented to her ten thousand crowns for the purchase of her *trousseau*, with a similar sum to her bridegroom to defray the expenses of the wedding-feast. A singular ceremony followed upon the nuptial blessing, for M. de Rohan had no sooner led his newly-made wife from the altar than his ducal coronet was placed upon his brow, his ducal mantle flung upon his shoulders, and in this pompous costume he was, at the close of the banquet, escorted to Paris by the princes and nobles who had been the guests of M. de Sully.

Seldom had the King evinced more gaiety of heart than at this particular period, or appeared to derive greater amusement from the gossipry of the Court and the gallantries of the courtiers; and he no sooner ascertained that Mademoiselle d'Entragues had become the mistress of Bassompierre than he said laughingly to the Duc de Guise: “D'Entragues despises us all in her idolatry of Bassompierre. I have good grounds for what I state”.

“Well, Sire”, was the reply, “you can be at no loss to revenge the affront; while for myself I know of no means so fitting as those of knight-errantry, and I am consequently ready to break three lances with him this afternoon at any hour and place which your Majesty may be pleased to ordain”.

The preparations for this combat are so graphically described by Bassompierre himself, and so characteristic of the manners of the time, that we shall offer no apology for giving them in his own words.

“The King acceded to our wishes, as such encounters were by no means unusual, and told us that the tilting should take place in the great court of the Louvre, which he would cause to be covered with sand. M. de Guise selected as his seconds his brother the Prince de Joinville

Marie de Medicis

and M. de Thermes; while I chose M. de Saint-Luc and the Comte de Sault. We all six dressed and armed ourselves at the house of Saint-Luc, and as we had armour and liveries ready for every occasion, my party wore silver-mail, with plumes of red and white, as were our silk stockings; while M. de Guise and his troop, on account of the imprisonment of Madame de Verneuil, of whom he was secretly the lover, were dressed and armed in black and gold. In this equipage we arrived at the Louvre, myself and my friends being the first upon the ground”.

Henry, with his whole Court, both male and female, was present on the occasion, and the lists were placed immediately beneath the windows of the Queen's apartments; but the diversion was not fated to be of long duration, for at the first encounter the lance of M. de Guise entered the body of his antagonist and inflicted so formidable a wound that he was carried from the spot and laid upon the bed of the Duc de Vendôme, apparently in a dying state. After his hurt had been dressed, the Queen sent her sedan chair to convey him to his residence.

Although Bassompierre, in the preceding column, assures his readers that “such encounters were by no means unusual”, he goes on to state that directly he fell the King not only forbade the continuance of the tourney, but would never permit another to take place, and that this was the only one which had been held in France for the preceding century.

“No one can imagine”, says the wounded hero in continuation, “the multitude of visits that I received, especially from the ladies. All the Princesses came to see me, and the Queen on three occasions sent her maids of honour, who were brought to me by Mademoiselle de Guise, and stayed during the whole afternoon”.

These courtly diversions were abruptly terminated by the intelligence which reached Paris of the death, on the 3rd of March, of Pope Clement VIII. The piety of this distinguished Pontiff, and the eminent services which he had rendered to the French King, caused his loss to be deeply felt by Henry; but when, on the 1st day of April, Alessandro de Medicis, the cousin of the Queen, was unanimously elected as his successor under the title of Leo XI, nothing could exceed the joy which was manifested throughout the country. Paris was illuminated, bonfires were lighted on the surrounding heights, and salvos of artillery rang from the dark walls of the Bastille. This demonstration proved, however, to be premature, as the next courier who arrived in the French capital from Rome brought the fatal tidings of his death. On the day succeeding his elevation he had made his solemn entry into St. Peter's; on Easter Sunday the triple tiara was placed upon his brow, and the public procession to St. John de Lateran took place on the 17th; but on returning from this ceremony the new Pontiff complained of indisposition, and on the 27th he breathed his last; and was in his turn succeeded, on the Day of Pentecost (29th of May), by Paul V.

About this time the King, wearied of the perpetual coldness of Madame de Verneuil, which not even his excessive clemency had sufficed to overcome, made a last attempt to compel her gratitude by forwarding letters under the great seal, authorizing the Comte d'Entragues to retire to his estate of Marcoussis, and re-establishing both himself and his son-in-law in all their wealth and honours, save the posts which they had held under the crown, and their respective governments. D'Auvergne, however, was still a prisoner in the Bastille, where, after lashing himself into fury for a few months, he adopted the more prudent and manly alternative of study, and thus contrived to educe enjoyment even from his privations.

Yet still the haughty spirit of the Marquise scorned to yield. She was indeed living in her own house, the gift of the monarch against whom she exhibited this firm and calm defiance, and surrounded by luxuries, the whole of which she owed to his uncalculating generosity; but she could not, and would not, forget that she was, nevertheless, an exile from the Court, and a prisoner within the boundary of her estate, while the Queen, whom she had affected to despise, was triumphing in her disgrace. Nor was it until the month of September, when Henry, who was pining for her return, finally declared that no proof of culpability having been brought against her, she must be forthwith duly and fully acquitted of the crime with which she had been charged, that the icy barrier was at last broken down, and the haughty Marquise condescended to acknowledge herself indebted to her sovereign. The King did not satisfy

himself with this mere declaration, though he had caused it to be legally registered by the Parliament; but, fearful lest some further revelations might be made, by which she might become once more involved, he moreover strictly forbade his Attorney-general to take any new steps whatever relating to the conspiracy, or tending further to incriminate any of its presumed members.

The jealousy which existed between the two houses of Bourbon and Lorraine, and which Henry was anxious if possible to terminate, coupled perhaps with no small feeling of wounded vanity, determined him to bestow the hand of Louise Marguerite de Lorraine, Demoiselle de Guise (who, since she had been in the household of the Queen, had lent a less willing ear than formerly to his renewed gallantries), upon François, Prince de Conti; and accordingly the marriage was celebrated with great pomp in the month of July, in the presence of their Majesties and the whole Court. Madame de Conti herself asserts that the Queen first suggested this union, and did everything in her power to effect it; for which it is highly probable that Marie had a double motive, as the antecedents of Mademoiselle de Guise might well excuse her jealousy.

While besieging Paris, and before his public *liaison* with Gabrielle d'Estrées, Henry had sent to demand the portrait of Mademoiselle de Guise, giving her reason to believe that so soon as the war should be terminated he was desirous of making her his wife; a prospect which, as she very naively acknowledges, led her to despise the addresses of the Comte de Giury, who was her declared suitor, as well as those of the other nobles who sought her favour. One day, however, during a brief truce of six hours, the Duchesse de Guise and herself, accompanied by several other ladies, having ascended the rampart to converse with such of their friends as were in the besieging army, all the young gallants crowded to the foot of the walls to pay their respects to the fair being whose presence offered so graceful a contrast to the objects by which they were more immediately surrounded; and among the rest came Roger, Duc de Bellegarde, at that period the handsomest man in France.

It was the first occasion upon which Mademoiselle de Guise and the Duke had met; and we have the authority of the lady for stating that the attraction was mutual. M. de Bellegarde had long been the avowed lover of *la belle Gabrielle*; but, inconstant as the fair D'Estrées herself, he at once surrendered his previously-occupied heart to this new goddess. His prior attachment was not, however, the only reason which should have deterred Mademoiselle de Guise from thus suffering her fancy to overcome her better feelings, as M. de Bellegarde was accused of having been accessory to the assassination of her father; but neither of these considerations appears to have had any weight with the young Princess. According to her own version of the circumstance, Gabrielle conceived so violent a jealousy that the Duke was compelled to condescend to every imaginable subterfuge in order to conceal the truth; while the King, who soon became aware of the secret intelligence which subsisted between the lovers, ceased to feel any inclination to raise Mademoiselle de Guise to the throne of France; although, as we have seen, he was by no means insensible either to the charm of her wit or the attraction of her beauty.

In order to follow up his great design of pacification, Henry, after having re-established Philip of Nassau in his principality of Orange, also effected his marriage with Eléonore de Bourbon, by which union he secured another desirable ally.

During the development of the late conspiracy the monarch had been indebted for much of the information which he had received relative to the intrigues of the Comte d'Auvergne to the intelligence afforded by the ex-Queen Marguerite, who, having come into possession of many facts which could not otherwise have been known to the King, had assiduously imparted to him every circumstance that she conceived to be of importance; a service for which he had not failed to express his gratitude. That Marguerite had, however, been in no small degree actuated in this matter by feelings of self-interest, there can be no doubt, D'Auvergne having long enjoyed the proprietorship of the county from whence he derived his title, and which had been bestowed on him by Henri III, as well as several other estates which that monarch had inherited from his mother, Catherine de Medicis, the said territories having formed a portion

of her dowry on her union with Henri II. Marguerite's memories of her brother, as the reader will readily comprehend, were not sufficiently attaching to induce her to submit patiently to such a substitution, as she was aware that, by the marriage contract, the property in question was settled upon the female offspring of Catherine in default of male issue; and her lavish expenditure and errant adventures having exhausted her means, she resolved to exert every effort to establish her claim. She had already upon several occasions solicited permission to return to the French capital; and, although it had never been distinctly refused, it was so coldly conceded that her pride had hitherto prevented her from availing herself of an indulgence thus reluctantly accorded; but aware at the present moment that she could so materially serve the King as to ensure a more gracious reception than she might previously have anticipated, she resolved to seize the opportunity; and accordingly, greatly to the surprise, not only of the whole Court, but of the monarch himself, she arrived in Paris without having intimated her intention, lest the permission should be revoked.

For five-and-twenty years the last survivor of the illustrious house of Valois had existed in obscurity and poverty among the mountains and precipices of the inhospitable province of Auvergne, apparently forgetting for a time that world by which she had been so readily forgotten; but Marguerite began at length to yearn for a restoration of her privileges as a member of the great human family. She could not have chosen a more judicious moment in which to hazard so extreme a step; as in addition to the respect which, despite all her vices, she could still command as the descendant of a long line of sovereigns, she had latterly established many claims upon the gratitude of the King. It was impossible for him not to feel, and that deeply, the generous self-abnegation with which she had lent herself to the dissolution of their ill-omened marriage, when not only his own happiness, but that of the whole nation, required the sacrifice; nor could he fail to remember that while those upon whom he lavished alike his affection and his treasure, had constantly laboured to embitter his domestic life, and to undermine the dignity of his Queen, the repudiated wife had never once evinced the slightest disposition to withhold from her the deference and respect to which she was entitled.

Thus then, when her near approach to the capital was suddenly announced to him, Henry lost not a moment in hastening, with his royal consort and a brilliant retinue, to receive her before she could reach the gates; and gave orders that the palace of Madrid in the Bois de Boulogne should immediately be prepared in a befitting manner for her residence. Nor was Marie de Medicis less willing than himself to welcome the truant Princess, to whom she was aware that she owed many obligations; and the meeting was consequently a cordial one on both sides. After the usual ceremonies had been observed, Marguerite, abandoning the litter in which she had hitherto travelled, took her place in the state coach beside their Majesties, by whom she was conducted to her appointed abode; nor was it until repeated expressions of regard had been exchanged between the ex-Queen and her successor, that the royal party returned to the Tuileries.

After a sojourn of six weeks in the palace of Madrid, during which time Marguerite not only revealed to the monarch all the details of the Verneuil conspiracy, but also the particulars of another still more serious, as it involved the cession of Marseilles, Toulon, and other cities to the Spaniards, she became wearied of the forest villa, and established herself in the archiepiscopal Hôtel de Sens; an arrangement to which the King consented on condition that she should make him two promises, one of which was that she would be more careful of her health, "and not turn night into day, and day into night", as she was accustomed to do; and the other, that she would restrain her liberality, and endeavour to economize. To these requests the Princess cheerfully answered that she would make an effort to obey his Majesty upon the first point, although it would be a privation almost beyond endurance, from the habit in which she had so long indulged of enjoying the sunrise before she retired to rest; but with regard to the other she must decline to give a pledge which she was certain to falsify, no Valois having ever succeeded in such an attempt. It is probable that Henry, from a consciousness of his own peculiar prodigalities, did not feel himself authorized to insist upon a rigid observance of his expressed wish, as although Marguerite had so frankly refused to regulate her expenditure with more prudence, she was nevertheless permitted to remain in the asylum which she had

Marie de Medicis

chosen; and this she continued to do until the 5th of April 1606, when she was driven from it by a tragedy that rendered it hateful to her.

Slender as was her retinue, it unfortunately included a young favourite named Saint-Julien, who, from some private pique, had induced her to discharge from her service two attendants who had from their earliest youth been members of her household, the one as page, and the other as maid of honour; and who had ultimately married with her consent and approbation, but upon being thus cast off, had found themselves ruined, no noble house being willing to receive the dismissed attendants of the dishonoured Queen. Of this union a son had been born, possessed, however, of less patience and self-control than his unhappy parents, who, after having clung to Marguerite through good and evil fortune, now found themselves abandoned to all the miseries of poverty and neglect. This youth, called by L'Etoile Vermond, and by Bassompierre Charmond, made his way to Paris as best he might, and arrived in the capital after Marguerite had taken up her residence as already stated in the Faubourg St. Antoine. There can be no doubt that the utter destitution of his parents had made him desperate, for he could not rationally indulge the slightest hope of impunity; suffice it, that as the Princess was alighting from her coach on her return from attending mass at the abbey of the Celestines, between mid-day and one o'clock on the 5th of April, while her favourite stood beside the steps to assist her to descend, the unhappy Vermond shot him through the head, and then, turning his horse towards the gate of St. Denis, endeavoured to make his escape. He was, however, too ill-mounted to succeed in this attempt, the carriage of the ex-Queen having been followed by many of the nobles who were anxious to propitiate the favour of the King by so easy a display of respect to the dethroned Marguerite; and ere he reached the barrier the wretched young man found himself a prisoner.

The body of his victim had, meanwhile, been conveyed to an apartment on the ground floor of the hôtel, where on his arrival he was immediately confronted with it; but no sign of remorse or regret was visible as he gazed upon the corpse. "Turn it over", he said huskily, after he had gazed for awhile upon the glazed eyes and the parted lips. "Let me see if he be really dead". His request was complied with; and as he became convinced that life had indeed departed from the already stiffening form, he exclaimed joyfully: "It is well--I have not failed--my task is accomplished. Had it been otherwise I could yet have repaired the error".

When this scene was reported to Marguerite, who, absorbed in the most passionate grief, had retired to her apartment, she vowed that she would not touch food until she had vengeance on the murderer; and she kept her word, as she persisted in her resolution till, on the third day after he had committed the crime, the unhappy young man was decapitated in front of the house, and almost upon the very spot still reeking with the blood of his victim. But the nerves of the ex-Queen could endure no further tension; and on the morrow she removed to a new residence in the Faubourg St. Germain, where she was shortly afterwards visited by Bassompierre, who was charged with the condolences of the King on her late loss.

This fact alone tends more fully to develop the manners and morals (?) of the age than a thousand comments; and thus we have considered it our duty to place it upon record.

Meanwhile M. de Saint-Julien was far from having been the only favourite of the profligate Marguerite, who divided her time between devotional exercises and the indulgence of those guilty pleasures to which she was so unhappily addicted; but while the citizens were not slow to remark her excesses, she gained the love of the poor by a profuse alms-giving, and enjoyed a perfect impunity of action from the real or feigned ignorance of the King relative to the private arrangements of her household. She was, moreover, the avowed patroness of men of letters, by whom her table was constantly surrounded; and in whose society she took so much delight that she acquired, by this constant intercourse with the most learned individuals of the capital, a facility not only of expression, but also of composition, very remarkable in one of her sex at that period. Carefully avoiding all political intrigue, she made no distinction of persons beyond that due to their rank; and thus, while her intercourse with the Queen was marked by an affectionate respect peculiarly gratifying to its object, she was no less urbane and condescending to the Marquise de Verneuil; who had, as may have been anticipated, already

Marie de Medicis

regained all her former influence over the mind of the monarch, his passion even appearing to have derived new strength from their temporary estrangement.

The peculiar situation of the Queen, however, who was about once more to become a mother, and whose tranquillity of mind he feared to disturb at such a moment, rendered the monarch unusually anxious to conceal this fact; and it was consequently not until some weeks afterwards that Marie de Medicis was apprised of the new triumph of her rival.

The month of December accordingly passed away without the domestic discord which must have arisen had the Queen been less happily ignorant of her real position; but it was nevertheless fated to be an eventful one. The death of M. de la Rivière, the King's body-surgeon, a loss which was severely felt by Henry, was succeeded by the execution of M. de Merargues, whose conspiracy to deliver up Marseilles to the Spaniards was revealed to the monarch by Marguerite; and who, tried and convicted of *lèse-majesté*, was decapitated in the Place de Grève, his body quartered and exposed at the four gates of the capital, and his head carried to Marseilles, and stuck upon a pike over the principal entrance to the city; while, on the very day of his execution, as the King was returning from a hunt and riding slowly across the Pont Neuf, at about five in the afternoon, a man suddenly sprang up behind him and threw him backwards upon his horse, attempting at the same time to plunge a dagger which he held into the body of his Majesty. Fortunately, however, Henry was so closely muffled in a thick cloak that before the assassin could effect his purpose the attendants were enabled to seize him and liberate their royal master, who was perfectly uninjured. The consternation was nevertheless universal; nor was it lessened by the calmness with which, when interrogated, the assassin declared that his intention had been to take the life of the sovereign. It was soon discovered, however, by the incoherency of his language that he was a maniac; and although many of the nobles urged that he should be put to death as an example to others, the King resolutely resisted their advice, declaring that the man's family, who had long been aware of his infirmity, were more to blame than himself; and commanding that he should be placed in security, and thus rendered unable to repeat any act of violence. He was accordingly conveyed to prison, where he shortly afterwards died.

At this period, whether it were that the King hoped, by occupying her attention with subjects of more moment, to be enabled to pursue his *liaison* with Madame de Verneuil with less difficulty, or that his advancing age rendered him in reality anxious to initiate her into the mysteries of government, it is certain that he endeavoured to induce the Queen to take more interest than she had hitherto done in questions of national importance; and revealed to her many state secrets, not one of which, as he afterwards declared to Sully, did she ever communicate, even to her most confidential friends. But Marie de Medicis was far from evincing the delight which he had anticipated at his avowed wish that she should share with him in the hopes and disappointments of royalty; her ambition had not then been thoroughly awakened; she still felt as a wife and as a woman rather than as a Queen; and an insolence from Madame de Verneuil occupied her feelings more nearly than a threatened conspiracy. So great, indeed, was her distaste to the new character in which she was summoned to appear, that when the King occasionally addressed her with a gay smile as *Madame la Régente*, a cloud invariably gathered upon her brow. Upon one occasion, when the royal couple were walking in the park at Fontainebleau, attended by all the Court, and that the monarch, who led the Dauphin by the hand, vainly endeavoured to induce him to jump across a little stream which ran beside their path, Henry became so enraged by his cowardice and obstinacy that he raised him in his arms to dip him into the pigmy current, a punishment which was, however, averted by the entreaties of his mother; and the King reluctantly consented that he should suffer nothing more than the mortification of being compelled to exchange her care for that of his governess, Madame de Montglat. As the child was led away the King sighed audibly, but in a few seconds he resumed the conversation which had been thus unpleasantly interrupted, and once more he addressed the Queen as *Madame la Régente*.

"I entreat of you, Sire, not to call me by that name", said Marie; "it is full of associations which cannot fail to be painful to me".

Marie de Medicis

The King looked earnestly and even sadly upon her for a moment ere he replied, and then it was in a tone as grave as that in which she uttered her expostulation. "You are right", he said, "quite right not to wish to survive me, for the close of my life will be the commencement of your own troubles. You have occasionally shed tears when I have flogged your son, but one day you will weep still more bitterly either over him or yourself. My favourites have often excited your displeasure, but you will find yourself some time hence more ill-used by those who obtain an influence over the actions of Louis. Of one thing I can assure you, and that is, knowing your temper so well as I do, and foreseeing that which his will prove in after years--you, Madame, self-opinionated, not to say headstrong, and he obstinate--you will assuredly break more than one lance together".

Poor Marie! She was little aware at that moment how soon so mournful a prophecy was to become a still more mournful reality.

CHAPTER VI

1606

The description given by M. de Sully of his interview with their Majesties on the morning of the 1st of January 1606 is so characteristic of the time that we cannot conscientiously pass it over, although the feeling of the present day compels us to exclude many of its details. Early in the forenoon the Duke proceeded to the Louvre to pay his respects to the august couple, and to present the customary offerings; but on reaching the apartment of the King, he was informed by MM. d'Armagnac and l'Oserai, the two valets-de-chambre on duty, that his Majesty was in the chamber of the Queen, who had been seriously indisposed during the night. He consequently proceeded to the ante-room of his royal mistress, and as he found it vacant, advanced to the door of the chamber itself, against which he scratched gently, in order to attract the attention of Caterina Selvaggio or Mademoiselle de la Renouillère, her favourite attendants, and to ascertain the state of her health without awakening her. He had no sooner done so, however, than several voices loudly inquired who was there, and among them the Duke recognized those of Roquelaure, Frontenac, and Beringhen.

Having declared his identity, and been announced to the King, he was immediately summoned in a cheerful voice by Henry himself: "Come in, come in, Sully", cried the monarch; "you will think us very idle until you learn what has kept us in bed so late. My wife has been ill all night; but I will tell you all about it when there are not so many people present, and meanwhile let us see what you have brought for us as New Year's gifts, for I observe that your three secretaries are with you laden each with a velvet bag".

"It is true, Sire", answered the Duke. "I remembered that the last occasion upon which I had seen your Majesties together you were both in excellent spirits, and trusting to find it the case today, when we are all anticipating the birth of a second Prince, I have brought you some offerings which are sure to please you, as they cannot fail to gratify those to whom they are distributed in your name, a distribution which I trust may take place this evening in your presence and that of the Queen".

"Although she says nothing to you", laughed the King, "according to her custom of pretending to be asleep, she is as thoroughly awake as myself, but she is very angry with both of us. However, we will talk of that some other time. And now let us see your presents".

"They are not perhaps, Sire", said the Grand Master, "such as might be expected from the treasurer of a wealthy and powerful monarch; but such as they are, I feel convinced that they will afford more real gratification to those for whom they are intended, and excite more gratitude towards your own person, than all the costly gifts which you lavish upon individuals who, as I well know, only repay your profuse liberality by ingratitude and murmurs".

"I understand you", exclaimed the King; "it is useless to explain yourself further; rather show us what you have brought".

The Duke made a signal to his secretaries to approach the bed. "Here, Sire", he said, "in my despatch-bag, are three purses filled with gold tokens, with a device expressive of the love borne towards your Majesty by your people. One of these I offer to yourself, another to the Queen, and the third to Monseigneur le Dauphin, or rather I ought to say to *Mamanga* (Madame de Monglat), if her Majesty does not retain it, as she has always done on similar occasions. In the same bag are eight purses of silver tokens with the same device--two for yourself, two for the Queen, and four for La Renouillère, Caterina Selvaggio, and any other of the ladies who sleep in the chamber of her Majesty. The second bag contains twenty-five purses of tokens in silver, to be distributed among Monseigneur le Dauphin, Madame de Montglat, Madame de Drou, Mademoiselle de Piolant, the nurses and other attendants of

Monseigneur and his sister, and the waiting-maids of the Queen. In the third bag there are thirty sacks, each containing a hundred crowns in half-franc pieces, coined expressly for the purpose, and so large that they appear to be of twice the value. These are intended for all the attendants of subordinate rank attached to the household of her Majesty and the royal children, according to your orders. I have left, moreover, in my carriage below, in the charge of my people, two great bags, each containing a hundred crowns in twelve sous pieces, making the sum of twelve thousand sous, for division among the poor and sick upon the quays of the river near the Louvre, which are, as I am told, already crowded; and I have in consequence sent twelve citizens upon whom I can rely to distribute the money conscientiously according to the necessities of each applicant. All these poor people, and even the waiting-women of her Majesty, exhibit more delight on receiving these trifling coins, Sire, than you can well believe. They all say that it is not so much for the value of the gift, as because it proves that you remember and regard them; and, moreover, the attendants of the Queen prize them in consequence of their being free to appropriate them as they think fit, while they are compelled to employ their respective salaries according to the instructions which they receive, as they thus have a hundred crowns to expend in any finery for which they may take a fancy”.

“And do you bestow all this happiness upon them without being rewarded even by a kiss?” asked Henry gaily.

“Truly, Sire”, answered the Duke, “since the day when your Majesty commanded them to recognize their obligation in that manner, I have never found it necessary to remind them of your royal pleasure, for they come voluntarily to tender their acknowledgments according to order; while Madame de Drou, devout as she is, only laughs during the performance of the ceremony”.

“Come now, M. le Grand Maître”, persisted the King, “tell me the truth; which do you consider to be the handsomest, and consequently the most welcome among them?”

“On my word, Sire”, replied M. de Sully, “that is a question which I am unable to answer, for I have other things to think of besides love and beauty, and I firmly believe that they, each and all, pay as little attention to my handsome nose as I do to theirs. I kiss them as we do relics, when I am making my offering”.

Henry laughed heartily. “How say you, gentlemen”, he exclaimed, addressing the courtiers who thronged the chamber; “have we not here a prodigal treasurer, who makes such presents as these at the expense of his master, and all for a kiss?”

Of course the royal hilarity found a general and an immediate echo, which had no sooner subsided than the King exclaimed: “And now, gentlemen, to your breakfasts, and leave us to discuss affairs of greater importance”.

In a few minutes all had left the room save Sully himself and the two waiting-women of the Queen, and he had no sooner ascertained that such was the case than Henry said affectionately: “And now, sleeper, awake, and do not scold any longer, for I have, on my part, resolved not to think any more of what has passed, particularly at such a time as this. You fancy that Sully blames you whenever we have a difference, but you are quite wrong, as you would be aware could you only know how freely he gives me his opinion on my own faults, and although I am occasionally angry with him, I like him none the less; on the contrary, I believe that if he ceased to love me, he would be more indifferent to all that touches my welfare and honour, as well as the good of my people; for do you see, *ma mie*, the best-intentioned among us require at times to be supported by the wise advice of faithful and prudent friends, and he is constantly reminding me of the expediency of indulgence towards yourself, and of the necessity of keeping your mind at peace, in order that neither you nor the Prince whom you are about to give to France--for the Duke feels satisfied that it will be a Prince--may suffer from contradiction, or annoyance of any kind”.

“I thank M. le Grand Maître”, said the Queen at length, in a voice of great exhaustion; “but it is impossible for me to feel either calm or happy while you persist in preferring the society of persons who are obnoxious to me, to my own. My very dreams are embittered by this

Marie de Medicis

consciousness, and doubly so because I have reason to know that while I am their victim, they are false even to yourself and, moreover, detest you in their hearts. You may doubt this”, she added with greater energy, “but I appeal to the Duke himself, and he will tell you if this is not the case”.

M. de Sully, however, felt no inclination to offer his testimony to the truth of an assertion of this nature--the position involved too great a responsibility to be agreeable even to the experienced statesman himself; and he accordingly, with his accustomed prudence, generalized the subject by declaring that he experienced a heartfelt satisfaction in perceiving that their Majesties had at length yielded to a feeling of mutual confidence, which could not fail to put an end to all their domestic discomfort; adding that if he might presume to offer his advice, he would suggest that should any new subject of difference arise between them, they should immediately refer it to the arbitration of a third person, upon whose probity and attachment they could severally rely, and resolve to leave the whole affair totally in his hands, without aggravating the evil by any personal interference, or even considering themselves aggrieved by the remedy which he might suggest.

He then offered, should they place sufficient confidence in his own judgment and affection, to become himself the arbitrator whom he recommended; and he had no sooner done so than the King eagerly declared himself ready to comply with his advice, and to sign a pledge to that effect, but Marie de Medicis, who was as well aware as her royal consort that the first step adopted by Sully would be the exile of her Italian followers, was less willing to bind herself by such an engagement, and she therefore merely remarked that the proposition had come upon her so suddenly that she must have time to reflect before she thus placed herself entirely in the hands of a third party. She then, as if anxious to terminate the discussion, summoned her women, and the Duke, by no means reluctantly, withdrew.

At this period the King made a journey into Limousin, at the head of a body of troops, in order to overawe the malcontents in that province; and while at Orleans he withdrew the seals from Pomponne de Bellièvre, in order to bestow them upon Sillery, the former, however, retaining the empty title of Chief of the Privy Council. The pretext for this substitution was the failing health of the Chancellor, but it was generally attributed to the influence of Madame de Verneuil, in whose fortunes M. de Sillery had always exhibited as lively an interest as he had previously done in those of the Duchesse de Beaufort. Let it, however, have arisen from whatever cause it might, it is certain that the veteran statesman deeply felt the indignity which had been offered to him. Thus Bassompierre asserts that when he shortly afterwards visited M. de Bellièvre at Artenay, and that the indignant minister commented with considerable bitterness upon his recent deprivation, he vainly endeavoured to reconcile him to the affront by reminding him that he was still in office, and would preside at all the councils as chancellor, but Bellièvre immediately replied with emphasis: “My friend, a chancellor without seals is an apothecary without sugar”.

On the 10th of February the Queen gave birth to a second daughter in the palace of the Louvre, to her extreme mortification, the astrologers whom she had consulted having assured her that she was about to become the mother of a Prince. The citizens of Paris were, however, delighted, as no royal child had been born in the capital for a great length of time; while the princes and nobles, throughout the whole of the following month, vied with each other in their efforts to entertain their Majesties, and to cause them to forget their disappointment. It would appear, indeed, that Marie herself soon became reconciled to the sex of the infant Princess, as Bassompierre has left it upon record that even before she was sufficiently recovered to leave her room she used to send for him to play cards with her, an invitation which was always welcome to the handsome and dissipated courtier. She no sooner appeared in public, however, than other and more brilliant amusements were provided for her, consisting of jousts and banquets, Italian comedies and Court balls; but all these were exceeded in interest by a ballet that was performed on horseback in the great court of the Louvre, which had been thickly strewn with sand and surrounded by barriers, save at one opening opposite the seats prepared for their Majesties, through which the four nobles by whom the entertainment had been devised were to enter with their respective trains from the Hôtel de Bourbon.

The balconies and windows of the palace were crowded with splendidly dressed nobles and courtiers of both sexes, while a dense mass of people occupied every available spot of ground beyond the enclosure, where platforms had also been erected for the more respectable of the citizens and their families. The King and Queen were seated in the balcony of the centre window, which was draped with crimson velvet, having on their right and left several of the Princes of the Blood and ladies of the highest rank, while immediately behind them were placed the great officers of the Crown and the captains of the bodyguard. The hour selected for this novel and extraordinary exhibition was ten at night, and hundreds of lamps and double the number of torches were affixed to the *façade* of the palace, towards which every eye was upturned from the compact crowd below. The ballet was designed to represent the four primary Elements, and the appointed moment had no sooner arrived than a flourish of trumpets announced the approach of the Duc de Bellegarde, who with his party were to personate Water. The procession was opened by twenty-four pages habited in cloth of silver, each attended by two torch-bearers; these were followed by twelve Syrens playing on hautboys, who were in their turn succeeded by a pyramid whose summit was crowned by a gigantic figure of Neptune, surrounded by water-gods and marine divinities and insignia of every description. This stupendous machine paused for a moment beneath the window of their Majesties, and the aquatic deities having made their obeisance, it passed on, and gave place to twenty-four other pages, habited and attended like the former ones. These preceded the Duke himself at the head of twelve young and brilliant nobles, all clad in cloth of silver, with plumes of white feathers in their jewelled caps, and their horses richly caparisoned in white and silver. Having made the tour of the court, the whole party drew closely together in one angle of the enclosure, in order to make way for the second troop, but not before they had exhibited their equestrian skill, and elicited not only the approving comments of the courtly groups who contemplated them from above, but also the vociferous acclamations of the admiring thousands by whom they were hemmed in. The Duc de Bellegarde and his train had no sooner taken up their station than a second *fanfare* greeted the approach of the powers of Fire, who were ushered in by twenty-four pages dressed in scarlet, closely followed by four blacksmiths dragging an anvil, upon which, when they reached the centre of the court, they began to strike with great violence, and at every blow discharged such a shower of rockets into the air that many a fair dame crouched behind her neighbour for protection from the falling sparks; while the lamps and torches which lit up the palace walls were momentarily eclipsed. As the last rush of rockets burst, and fell back in a Danaëan shower, a train of salamanders, phoenix, and other anti-inflammable creatures appeared in their turn, and were followed by the Duc de Rohan, attired as Vulcan, with his twelve companions in the garb of Parthians, all similarly dressed, and armed with lances, swords, and shields, on which their arms were splendidly emblazoned. Renewed feats of dexterous horsemanship were exhibited by this brilliant band, after which, as their predecessors had previously done, they established themselves in an angle of the lists, and made way for the representatives of Air. First came the pages, forming an escort to the goddess Juno, with her attendant eagle and a multitude of other birds, all skilfully imitated and grouped; and when the feathered pageant had passed on, appeared the Comte de Sommerive and his noble band, all wearing the same costume and bearing the same arms. Lastly came Earth, in which the pages were succeeded by two enormous elephants, artistically constructed, and bearing upon their backs small towers filled with musicians, who, as they advanced, poured out a volume of sweet sound, to which several horses, draped with cloth of gold and led by Moors, moved in cadence like the grooms by whom they were conducted. Then followed more pages, and a band of trumpeters whose occasional flourishes overpowered the softer instruments of those who marched in front; and finally, twelve Moorish knights, led by the Duc de Nevers, all resplendent with gold and jewels, closed the procession, and fell back to the remaining extremity of the enclosure. A combat then commenced between the knights of Earth and those of Water, first single-handed, then in couples, and finally troop against troop, and so soon as this had terminated, the cavaliers of Air and Fire went through the same evolutions; when each having exhibited his dexterity in the *manège* and his skill in arms, the whole of the four bands joined in the *mêlée*, shivering their lances, their arrows, and their shields, and then each of the combatants seized a torch which had been prepared for him, and after having ridden round and round each other, making the wandering lights assume the

Marie de Medicis

appearance of meteors, the entire company formed once more into order and returned to the Hôtel de Bourbon like a long line of fire.

These were precisely the entertainments that Henri IV was eager to encourage, as they involved an expenditure which frequently crippled the means of those by whom they were exhibited for several years; and he was accustomed to declare that it was frequently to the poverty of his nobles that he was indebted for their fidelity, as they no sooner found themselves in a position to arm a few retainers and assume the offensive, than they forthwith began to organize a cabal.

The King having, in the month of March of this year, determined upon proceeding in person to quell the disturbances in the provinces, and to compel the Duc de Bouillon, who was known as the instigator of these disorders, to obedience, made preparations on an extensive scale for this purpose, and raised a powerful army in order to prove his resolution to terminate all similar attempts. In this project he was warmly encouraged by the Queen, who was to accompany him in his journey, the Duc de Sully having urged her with the most earnest arguments to suggest to his Majesty that although he was able personally, from his prowess and authority, to resist the insidious aggressions of M. de Bouillon, the case would be widely different were the infant Prince, by any sudden dispensation of Providence, to be called upon to supply his place. "The rebel Duke, Madame", said the prudent and upright minister, "would prove a formidable enemy to a woman and a child; and this should be looked to while your royal consort is still in the plenitude of health and strength".

Marie de Medicis at once felt the force of this reasoning; and although the caution might probably appear to her as somewhat premature, she nevertheless lost no time in entreating the King to make such an example of the restless and ambitious Bouillon as might deter others from following in his track.

"You are at once right and wrong, *ma mie*", replied Henry with his usual promptitude. "There can be no doubt that the temper and projects of this man tend to disturb the peace of the kingdom, and that were he to lose his head a great peril would be escaped; but we must not forget that he is a Prince of the Blood, and that he may be severely punished through his pride. I have resolved to take Sedan out of his hands, and to humble him upon the very threshold of his power; and this vengeance upon his rebellion will be ample, as he has taught himself to believe that I dare not attack him in his stronghold. Once subdued he will be undeceived, and I shall then be enabled to pardon him without having my clemency mistaken for fear, and I will take such measures as shall ensure his future submission".

On the 15th of the month, the Court of Parliament, on a summons from the sovereign, proceeded to the Louvre, where Henry explained to them his reasons for besieging the Maréchal de Bouillon in Sedan, and possessing himself of the town and citadel. "A failure", he concluded, "is impossible; and as an earnest of success the Queen will accompany me. Tomorrow we commence our journey; but do not conceive that I set forth against the Duke with any preconceived design of vengeance. My arms will be open to him should he acknowledge his error, for I have been his benefactor, and have made him what he is. But should he decline to offer his submission and to recognize my authority, I trust that God will favour my arms. Above all things, during my absence, I entreat of you to administer the strictest justice; and I leave in your hands the Dauphin, my son, whom I have caused to be removed from St. Germain to Paris, in order to place him under your protection; and I do so with the most entire confidence, as next to myself he should be to you the most sacred trust on earth".

On the morrow, accordingly; the King and Queen set forth, accompanied by a brilliant retinue, and closely followed by the Duc de Sully with fifty pieces of ordnance and twenty-five thousand men; a fact which was no sooner ascertained than the rebel Marshal despatched messengers to Torcy, the frontier village of France, who were authorized to pledge themselves that the Duke was willing to deliver up the citadel of Sedan for the space of ten years, if at the termination of that period his Majesty would consent to restore it, should he, in the interim, have become satisfied of his loyalty and devotion. He, however, annexed another condition to

Marie de Medicis

his surrender, which was that an act of oblivion should be passed, and that he should never thenceforward be subjected to any injury, either of property or person, for whatever acts of disobedience to the royal authority he might have previously been considered responsible, and should be left in untroubled possession of all his honours, estates, and offices under the Crown.

Having carefully perused this treaty, the King at once consented to the proposed terms, on the understanding that the Marshal should on the following morning present himself at Donchéry, where the Court were to halt that night, before their Majesties should have risen. This he accordingly did on the 21st, when upon his knees beside the royal couch he repeated and ratified the pledges of fidelity contained in his appeal for pardon, and had the honour of kissing hands with both sovereigns; the King assuring him as he did so that he valued the citadel of Sedan far less than the recovery of so valued a friend and subject.

Their Majesties then made a solemn entry into the city, attended by a train of princes and nobles, and were received with loud and long-continued shouts of "Long live the King! Long live the Queen and the Dauphin!" Salvos of artillery were fired from the ramparts of the town and the citadel, and the whole progress of the royal *cortège* through the streets resembled a triumphal procession. In the evening the entire city was illuminated; and the vociferous cheering of the excited people testified their delight at the bloodless and peaceful termination of an expedition from which they had anticipated for themselves only danger and distress.

The whole population was in a state of delirium; the royal equipages as they traversed the streets were followed by admiring crowds; the gay and gaudy nobles were watched by bright eyes, and welcomed by rosy lips; the civic authorities dreamt only of balls and banquets; and, in short, the rock-seated city, bristling as it was with cannon, and frowning with fortifications, appeared to have become suddenly transformed into the chosen abode of the Loves and Graces.

Having remained five days at Sedan, the King appointed a new governor and returned to Paris, whither he was accompanied by the whole of the royal party, which was moreover augmented by the presence of the Duc de Bouillon, who, according to Bassompierre, was as much at his ease, and as arrogant in his deportment, as though he had never incurred the risk of the headsman as a rebel and a traitor. The Court dined at La Roquette, and it was near dusk when they reached the Barrière St. Antoine, where they were met by the corporate bodies. Henry himself rode on horseback, preceded by eight hundred nobles in full dress, and followed by four Princes of the Blood, in whose train came other princes, dukes, and officers of the Court, among whom were the Maréchal de Bouillon and Prince Juan de Medicis. The Queen occupied her state coach, having beside her the Duchesses de Guise and de Nevers, and the Princesse de Conti. As the royal party halted at the barrier, the Civil Lieutenant, M. de Miron, provost of the merchants, delivered a congratulatory address to the King in the name of the city; but this loyal effusion was rendered inaudible by the booming of the cannon from the Bastille, and the crashing and whizzing of the rockets and other fireworks, which, by order of the Duc de Sully, were let off immediately that the monarch had passed the gates. So soon as the address was terminated, the gorgeous procession resumed its march, Sully riding on the left hand of the King, by whom this enthusiastic reception had been deeply felt; nor did his gratification suffer any decrease on observing as he passed on that every window upon his way was crowded with fair and animated faces. As he glanced towards the Bastille, the minister attracted his attention to the Comtesse d'Auvergne, who had latterly been permitted to visit her husband, and who was gazing wistfully from one of the narrow casements. As Henry recognized her, he withdrew his plumed cap, and bent his head with a courtesy and kindness which was remarked and commented upon by those around him; but his most gracious recognition was vouchsafed to the Comtesse de Moret, who was seated at a window in the Rue St. Antoine, surrounded by a bevy of beauties, who only served to render her own loveliness the more conspicuous.

Marie de Medicis

Thus, amid the deafening report of the artillery and the enthusiastic plaudits of the people, Henry and his Queen at length reached the Louvre, and terminated their bloodless campaign.

On the 30th of May the law courts, after three long and patient sittings, declared the ex-Queen Marguerite to be the lawful heir to the counties of Auvergne and Clermont, the barony of La Tour, and other estates which had appertained to the late Queen Catherine de Medicis; asserting that they had hitherto been unjustly possessed by Charles de Valois, who had also wrongfully derived his title of Comte d'Auvergne from one of them; and directed that the said territories should forthwith be transferred to the ex-Queen Marguerite, to whom they rightfully belonged. When this decision was pronounced, the Princess was assisting at the celebration of mass in the church of St. Saviour, whither M. Drieux, her chancellor, at once proceeded with the glad tidings, which he had no sooner imparted, than, overjoyed by the intelligence, she rose from her knees before the service was concluded, and leaving the church, hastened to the monastery of the Cordeliers, where she caused a Te Deum to be chanted in gratitude for her success.

A few days subsequently, while at the Louvre, the ex-Queen, in the presence of Marie de Medicis, made a donation of the recovered estates to the Dauphin, on condition that they should be annexed to the Crown, and never under any consideration, or upon any pretext, alienated. Marguerite, however, reserved to herself the income derivable from these possessions during her life; and she no sooner found her means adequate to the undertaking than she commenced the enlargement of the hotel which she had previously purchased in the Faubourg St. Germain, near the Pré aux Clercs, and the embellishment of the spacious gardens which swept down to the bank of the river opposite the Louvre.

Here it was, under the very shadow of the palace which should have been her home, that Marguerite held her little court; passing from her oratory to scenes of vice and voluptuousness which, happily, are unparalleled in these times; one day doing penance with bare feet and a robe of serge, and the next reposing upon velvet cushions and pillowed on down--now fasting like an anchorite, and now feasting like a bacchante; one hour dispensing charity so lavishly as to call down the blessings of hundreds on her head, and the next causing her lacqueys to chase with ignominious words and blows from beneath her roof the honest creditors who claimed their hard-earned gains. Extreme in everything, she gave a tithe of all that she possessed to the monks, although she did not shrink from confessing that her favourites cost her a still larger annual sum; and while she encouraged and appreciated the society of men of letters, and profited largely by their companionship, she condescended to the most frivolous follies, and abandoned herself to the most licentious pleasures.

The insipidity of Madame de Moret soon counteracted the spell of her beauty; and although on his return from Sedan the King had appeared to be more fascinated by her extraordinary loveliness than even at the first period of their acquaintance, it was not long ere he listened with a patience very unusual to him to the indignant remonstrances of the Queen on this new infidelity, and even assured her that her reproaches were misplaced. Marie, who perceived the prodigality with which the King lavished upon the frail fair one the most costly gifts, and who saw her, through the mock marriage which she had contracted, assume a place at Court which occasionally even brought her into contact with herself, could not so readily lay aside her suspicions; and although she had at first rejoiced to find that the fancy of the monarch could be diverted from Madame de Verneuil, she had never anticipated that the *liaison* would have endured so long. Henry, however, profited by this mistake; and while the Queen was still jealously watching the proceedings of Madame de Moret, he renewed with less secrecy his commerce with the witty and seductive Marquise, unconscious that she was at that period encouraging the addresses of the Duc de Guise. Nor did this partial desertion tend to wound the vanity of Madame de Moret, or to excite her ire against her rival; for once more the Prince de Joinville, who appeared to take a reckless pleasure in braving the anger of the monarch, had found favour in the eyes of one of his mistresses, and was established as the admitted lover of the facile Countess. Thus deceived on both sides, Henry had no annoyance to apprehend from either of the frail rivals; but such could not long remain the case with the

Marie de Medicis

Queen. There were too many eyes and ears about her ever open to discover and to retain the gossipy of the Court, and too many tongues ready to reveal all which might at the moment appear acceptable to her wounded feelings and insatiable desire to dwell upon the details of her unhappiness.

Princes should pause before they err, for they are a world's beacon. Every eye turns towards them for example and for support; and thus, where the one is evil, and the other wanting, the results of the failure may prove incalculable. The flaw in the diamond, the alloy in the gold, the stain in the purple, the blot upon the ermine--all these are detected upon the instant; the value of the jewel is decreased, the price of the metal is deteriorated, the glory of the hue is tarnished, the purity of the mantle is sullied; and where minor imperfections may pass unperceived, a mighty social lens is for ever bearing upon the great.

Angered and disappointed, the Queen, who had passed a short time in comparative tranquillity, once more found herself a prey to mortification and neglect; and so greatly did she resent the renewed intercourse between Henry and his favourite, that for upwards of a fortnight not a word was exchanged between the royal pair. At length, however, through the intervention of Sully, Sillery, and the other ministers, a sort of hollow peace was effected, and the Court removed to St. Germain, where the royal children constantly resided. Here they remained until the 9th of June, on which day, notwithstanding the unfavourable state of the weather, they set forth on their return to the capital. Their Majesties occupied a coach, in which, together with themselves, were the Princesse de Conti and the Dues de Vendôme and de Montpensier; other carriages followed with the ladies of the Queen's retinue; and a numerous train of nobles and attendants on horseback preceded the bodyguard. At that period no bridge existed at Neuilly, where the river was crossed in a ferry-boat which was waiting to receive the royal party, who, in consequence of the heavy rain, were driven on board; but unfortunately the beating of the water against the side of the frail bark, occasioned by the swollen state of the stream and the violence of the wind, so terrified the leaders of the royal coach, that it had no sooner left the land than they swerved so violently as to destroy the equilibrium of the boat, which instantly capsized, when the carriage was upset into the water, and immediately filled. The King, who was an excellent swimmer, was soon rescued by the attendants, a score of whom threw themselves from their horses into the river to afford assistance; but he no sooner reached the bank than he once more swam back to the rescue of the Queen and her companions. Marie, however, was already in safety, having been with considerable difficulty carried to land by the Baron de la Châtaigneraie, who was compelled to seize her by her hair, to prevent her from being carried down by the current, and who, having placed her under the care of her ladies, returned to the assistance of the Duc de Vendôme, whom he also succeeded in saving. The Princesse de Conti and M. de Montpensier, having been immersed on the landward side of the carriage, were rescued with comparative ease; but the peril had nevertheless been great, and the consternation general. Marie de Medicis, when brought on shore, was in a state of insensibility, and it was a considerable time before she recovered consciousness; nor had she yet opened her eyes when she gasped out an agitated inquiry for the King. Finally, however, all the party were enabled to take possession of one of the carriages of the suite, and to pursue their journey; but not before the Queen had desired that the person by whom she had been saved should be requested to attend her; upon which M. de la Châtaigneraie presented himself, with the water pouring from his embroidered mantle; and it was with no little surprise and gratification that their Majesties ascertained that not only the gallant La Châtaigneraie, but also several other members of the royal escort, had flung themselves into the river without waiting to throw off either their cloaks or swords. Marie made her acknowledgments to the gallant young noble with an earnest courtesy which would in itself have been a sufficient recompense for his exertions; but while speaking, she also detached from her dress a magnificent diamond cluster, valued at four thousand crowns, which she tendered to him with the intelligence that he was from that moment the captain of her bodyguard, and that she should thenceforward further his fortunes.

“And now, gentlemen”, said the King gaily, as the agitated and grateful young courtier knelt to kiss the hand which was extended towards him, “let us resume our journey. When we left St. Germain I was, as you all know, suffering agonies from toothache, which is now cured;

this bath has been the best remedy I have ever applied; and if any of us dined too heartily upon salt provisions, we have at least the satisfaction of feeling that we have been enabled to drink freely since”.

A few hours after his arrival in the capital, the King paid a visit to the Marquise de Verneuil, to whom he related the escape of himself and his companions; but even on so serious an occasion as this, and one which had threatened such tragical consequences to the Queen, the insolent favourite could not comment without indulging in the sarcastic and bitter pleasantry which she always affected in making any allusion to her royal mistress. After feeling or feigning great anxiety on the subject of Henry's own escape, she said with malicious gaiety: “Had I been there, when once I had seen you safe, I should have exclaimed with great composure, ‘The Queen drinks’.”

Unfortunately the King, taken by surprise, laughed heartily at this sally, a circumstance which was duly reported to Marie de Medicis, and which greatly increased her irritation. This new cause of offence was so grave that she could not forgive the levity of the King more readily than the heartless insolence of his mistress; and she carried her resentment to so extreme a pitch that she refused to receive him in her apartments. Such a determination was naturally productive of serious confusion in the palace, as it infringed upon all the accustomed etiquette of the Court, and created great perplexity among the officers of state; but remonstrances were vain. Marie, stung to the soul by the insult to which she had been subjected, and which her royal consort had not only suffered to pass unrebuked, but to which he had in some degree contributed, would not rescind her resolution; while the King was, in his turn, equally violent. In vain did the Duc de Villeroy, Sully, and others of the great nobles, endeavour to mediate between them: reason was lost in passion on both sides; and once more Henry declared his determination to exile the Queen to one of his palaces. From this extreme measure he was, however, dissuaded by his ministers; and at length, after the estrangement between the royal couple had lasted nearly three weeks, a partial reconciliation was effected; but Marie, although she was induced by the representations of her advisers to restrain her indignation, was from that hour alienated in heart from her husband, by whom she felt that her dignity had been compromised both as a Queen and as a wife.

Profiting, however, by this partial calm, several of the nobility proposed to add to the amusements of the Carnival, in commemoration of the recent escape of their Majesties, a ballet in which the Queen consented to appear; and the preparations were already far advanced when the King solicited her permission to include Madame de Moret among the performers, but Marie, who had previously condescended to associate herself in a similar exhibition with the Marquise de Verneuil, had been rendered less amenable by recent circumstances, and she peremptorily refused to appear in such intimate association with another of her husband's mistresses. The concession was not one upon which Henry could insist with any propriety, a fact of which the Queen was so well aware, that in order to terminate the affair as gracefully as possible she declined altogether either to assist in the entertainment or even to witness it, a decision which caused it to be abandoned altogether. This mortification was, however, compensated to the Countess by a donation from the King of eighty-five thousand five hundred francs.

At the commencement of July the King had accredited the Maréchal de Bassompierre as his ambassador-extraordinary to Lorraine, to be present at the marriage of the Duc de Bar, his brother-in-law, with the daughter of the Duke of Mantua, the Queen's niece; and had also furnished him with instructions to invite the Duchess of Mantua to become the godmother of the Dauphin, and the Duc de Lorraine to act as sponsor to the younger Princess. The marriage took place at Nancy, where M. de Bassompierre, as the representative of his sovereign, was magnificently and gratuitously entertained. Numerous balls were given, and a joust concluded the festivities; which were no sooner terminated than the courtly envoy communicated the royal invitation, which was received “with proper respect and honour”; and he then hastened his return to Paris in order to prepare the gorgeous dress already alluded to elsewhere as having been defrayed by his gains at play.

Marie de Medicis

Towards the close of the month, the two illustrious sponsors reached Villers-Cotterets, where they were met by the King and Queen, with the whole Court, and thence conducted to Paris. The Duchess arrived in a state coach of such extreme magnificence as to attract immediate notice, but with so slender a retinue as to provoke the sarcasms of the courtiers, who declared that they recognized her rank only by the carriage in which she rode; and *the Mantuan suite* accordingly became a favourite topic with the idle and the censorious. Great preparations were made at Notre-Dame for the ceremony, which was to take place on the 14th of September, and meanwhile nothing was thought of save pleasure and preparation. Bassompierre gives an amusing account of the distress of the tailors and embroiderers of the capital, who were unable to comply with the demands of their employers, and many of whom were kidnapped and carried off by persons of the highest rank in order to secure themselves against disappointment. All Paris was in turmoil; the great were busy in devising costumes which were to transcend all that had previously been seen at the French Court, and the operatives were equally occupied in executing the orders which they received.

In the midst of this excitement, however, the plague, which had long existed in the capital, declared itself more fatally; several officers of Queen Marguerite's household died under her roof, and the alarm became so great that the King removed his Court to Fontainebleau, where the baptismal ceremonies were performed with great magnificence on the day previously appointed.

These ceremonies were so curious and characteristic that we shall offer no apology to our readers for giving them in detail.

Each of the royal children had been privately baptized a few days after its birth, but the public christening had been hitherto deferred in order that it might be celebrated with becoming splendour. The desire of the King had always been that the Sovereign-Pontiff should act as sponsor to the Dauphin, the eldest son of France being, as he declared, the eldest son of the Church, and the successive deaths of Clement VIII and Leo XI had accordingly delayed the celebration of the ceremony. Paul V was, however, no sooner apprised of the wishes of the French monarch than he despatched a brief to the Cardinal de Joyeuse for registration in the Court of Parliament, by which that prelate was constituted Papal Legate and representative, and instructed in all things to support the holiness and dignity of the Apostolical See.

The turret-court at Fontainebleau was selected as the most appropriate spot for the construction of the temporary chapel, the great hall of the palace being totally inadequate to contain the thousands who had collected from every part of the country to witness the ceremony.

This immense area was completely enclosed by the costly gold-woven tapestry of which the manufacture had been, as we have stated, introduced and encouraged by the King, and had in its centre a square space, thirty feet in extent, surrounded by barriers, and similarly hung and carpeted with tapestry. In the front of this enclosure stood an altar magnificently ornamented with the symbols of the Order of the Holy Ghost, and a table gorgeously draped, both being surmounted by canopies. Behind the table stood a platform raised three steps from the floor, and in the midst of this was placed a column covered with cloth of silver, upon which rested the font, protected by a superb christening-cloth and a lofty canopy. On each side of the altar a gallery had been erected which was filled with musicians, and beneath that upon the right hand was a tapestried bench for the archbishops, bishops, and members of the Council, while immediately in front of the shrine were placed the seats of the Cardinal de Gondy, who was to perform the baptismal ceremonies, and the almoners and chaplains of his suite. The whole of the court was lined by the Swiss Guards, each holding a lighted torch, whose rays were reflected by the myriad jewels that adorned the persons of the courtly spectators. All the Princes of the Blood and great nobles wore their mantles clasped and embroidered with precious stones, their plumed caps looped with diamonds, and their sword-hilts encrusted with gems. That of the Duc d'Epemon was estimated at more than thirty thousand crowns, and several others were of almost equal value. The attire of the Princesses and ladies of the Court was, however, still more splendid, many of them standing with difficulty under the weight of

Marie de Medicis

the closely-jewelled brocade of which their dresses were composed, and wearing upon their heads masses of brilliants which might have ransomed a province. The Queen, whose dowry, as we have elsewhere shown, in a great measure consisted of costly ornaments, appeared on this occasion with a magnificence almost fabulous, her robe of cloth of gold and velvet being studded with no less than thirty-two thousand pearls and three thousand diamonds.

While their Majesties and their illustrious guests took possession of their respective seats, the prescribed ceremonial of preparation was in progress with the royal children, who had all been placed in state beds covered with ermined draperies under canopies of crimson velvet. Madame Elisabeth, the elder Princess, being surrounded by the ladies who were privileged to assist at her levée, the outer coverlet of her bed was withdrawn by the Comtesse de Sault and the Comtesse de Guissen; she was then lifted from it by Madame de Lavardin, undressed by Madame de Randan, and robed in her state costume by the Marquise de Montlor.

Madame Christine, the younger Princess, was meanwhile uncovered by the Duchesse de Guise and Mademoiselle de Mayenne, lifted in the arms of Mademoiselle de Vendôme, undressed by the Duchesse de Rohan, and robed by the Duchesse de Sully.

The Dauphin underwent the same ceremonies, but he was attended only by Princesses of the Blood. It was the Princesses de Conti and de Soissons who drew off the ermined quilt, the Princesse de Condé and the Duchesse de Montpensier by whom he was undressed, and Mademoiselle de Bourbon who adjusted his state robes.

When all the royal children were attired, the procession was formed. The Swiss Guards moved first, each carrying a lighted torch, and on arriving within the court they defiled, and, as before mentioned, lined the walls; the hundred gentlemen on duty in the palace followed, and these were succeeded by the ordinary members of the household and the gentlemen of the bedchamber all carrying tapers of white wax. After them came the drums, fifes, hautboys, and trumpets, together with nine heralds, behind whom walked the Grand Provost of the palace, the Knights of the Holy Ghost, and finally, the Children of France with their respective retinues. The first group consisted of the train of the younger Princess, in which the Baron de la Châtre bore the vase, M. de Montigny the basin, the Comte de la Rochepot the cushion, M. de Chemerault the taper, M. de Liancourt the christening-cap, and the Maréchal de Fervaques the salt-cellar. The Marquis de Bois-Dauphin carried the infant in his arms, and Madame de Chemerault bore her train. She was followed by a suite of twelve nobles, each bearing a flambeau in his hand; and after these came the Duc de Lorraine as godfather, with Don Juan de Medicis, son of the Grand Duke Ferdinand of Tuscany, as proxy for the Grand Duchess of Florence, the other sponsor, the ladies who had assisted at the Princess's levée closing the train.

This party had no sooner taken possession of the place assigned to them than the second group began to enter the enclosure. First came the Maréchal de Lavardin with the ewer, then the Duc de Sully with the cushion, next the Duc de Montbazon with the taper, then the Duc d'Epéron with the christening-cap, and finally, the Duc d'Aiguillon with the salt-cellar. The Prince de Joinville carried the Princess, whose ermine train was borne by Mademoiselle de Rohan. There was no godfather, and the Duchesse d'Angoulême walked alone as the proxy of the Archduchess Elisabeth of Flanders, immediately behind *Madame*, followed by Mademoiselle de Montmorency as her train-bearer, and the ladies who had assisted at the levée.

Finally appeared the third and last division of the procession, headed by the Prince de Vaudemont, carrying the taper; and then followed in succession the Chevalier de Vendôme with the christening-cap, the Duc de Vendôme with the salt-cellar, the Duc de Montpensier with the ewer, the Comte de Soissons with the basin, and the Prince de Conti with the cushion; the Sieur Gilles de Souvry carried the Dauphin, whose right hand was held by the Prince de Conti, while the train of his velvet mantle, edged with ermine, was borne by the Duc de Guise, behind whom followed twenty great nobles holding lighted flambeaux. These were succeeded by the Cardinal-Legate de Joyeuse, who represented Paul V as sponsor, and the Duchess of

Marie de Medicis

Mantua, the godmother, the Princesses of the Blood who had assisted at the levée closing the procession.

The Dauphin having been placed upon the table, the Cardinal approached him and demanded: "Sir, what do you ask?"

"The sacramental ceremonies of baptism", replied the little Prince, according to the instructions which he had received from the Almoner of Boulogne.

"Have you already been baptized?" again inquired the prelate.

"Yes, thank God", said the Dauphin firmly. To all the other interrogations of the Cardinal he simply answered, "*Ab renuncio*"

After the unction, when questioned on his belief according to the ordinary form, the little Prince responded audibly, "*Credo*"; and finally, he recited without error or hesitation the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, and the Creed.

The Princesses were then successively placed upon the table, when the elder was named Elisabeth, after her illustrious godmother the Archduchess of Flanders, and the younger Christine.

The baptismal ceremonies were followed by a grand banquet served upon four different tables. The attendants at that of the King were the Princes de Condé, de Conti, and de Montpensier; while the Queen was waited on by the Ducs de Vendôme, de Guise, and de Vaudemont; the Legate by the Comte de Candale and the Marquis de Rosny; and the Duchess of Mantua by the Baron de Bassompierre and the Comte de Sault.

On the following day the morning was occupied by the courtiers in tilting at the ring, the prizes being distributed by the Queen and the Duchess of Mantua; and at dusk the whole of the royal party proceeded to the wide plain which lies to the east of Fontainebleau, in the centre of which the Duc de Sully had caused a castellated building to be erected, which was filled with rockets and other artificial fireworks, and which was besieged, stormed, and taken by an army of satyrs and savages. This spectacle greatly delighted the Court, while not the least interesting feature of the exhibition was presented by the immense concourse of people (estimated at upwards of twelve thousand) who had collected to witness the magnificent pyrotechnic display, and who rent the air with their acclamations of loyalty.

All further rejoicings were, however, rendered unseasonable by the rapid increase of the plague, which having declared itself with great virulence at Fontainebleau, induced the hasty departure of the Court; and the illustrious guests having taken leave of the King and Queen laden with rich presents, their Majesties, with a limited retinue, repaired for a time to Montargis.

These baptismal festivities had not, meanwhile, been without alloy to the dissipated monarch. Despite the fascination of the wily Marquise, and the charms of the Comtesse de Moret, Henry was by no means insensible to the attractions of the many beautiful women who followed in the suite of the Queen at the august ceremony just described; and, among others, he especially honoured with his notice the Duchesses de Montpensier and de Nevers.

In neither case, however, was he destined to be successful, both these ladies possessing too much self-respect to accord any attention to his illicit gallantries; and this failure, especially with the latter, of whom he had become seriously enamoured, only tended to re-engage him with Madame de Verneuil. Throughout all the period occupied by the christening festivities, Madame de Nevers had been the object of his special pursuit; but so carefully did she avoid all occasions of private conversation, that the King, unaccustomed to so decided a resistance, became irritated to a degree which induced her to escape from the Court as soon as she found it practicable; and accordingly, on the very day after the festivities, she left Fontainebleau without any previous intimation of such a design, resisting all the efforts made by the sovereign to detain her. Nor did she yield to his subsequent endeavours for her recall, but on the appointment of her husband during the following year to the embassy at Rome, she

Marie de Medicis

accompanied him thither; and several months elapsed ere she reappeared in France, where her duty having compelled her to pay her respects to the Queen on her return, Henry was so little master of himself as to display his mortification by inquiring who she was, and on her name being announced, to exclaim loud enough for her to hear his reply: "Ha! Madame la Duchesse de Nevers! She is terribly altered".

The shaft fell harmless. The lady evinced the most perfect composure under the royal criticism, and having fulfilled her duties as a subject towards her sovereigns, she once more withdrew from the Court, and terminated her life as she had commenced it, without scandal or reproach.

CHAPTER VII

1607

Despite the presence of the pestilence the gaieties of the past winter had surpassed, alike in the Court and in the capital, all that had hitherto been witnessed in France. The profusion of the nobles, whom no foreign war compelled to disburse their revenues in arming their retainers, and in preparing themselves to maintain their dignity and rank in the eyes of a hostile nation, was unchecked and excessive; while, as we have already shown, the monarch felt no inclination to control an outlay by which they thus voluntarily crippled their resources.

The year 1607 commenced, with the exception of the fatal scourge which still existed in and about Paris, in the greatest abundance, and the most perfect peace. The Court celebrated the New Year at St. Germain-en-Laye, and on the following day proceeded to Fontainebleau, where during the *carême-prenant* a ballet was danced, and several magnificent entertainments were given to their Majesties by the great nobles of the household. These festivities were, however, unfortunately interrupted by an event which created universal consternation and anxiety. The most glaring evil of the reign of Henri IV had long been the prevalence of duelling, which he had in the first instance neglected to discountenance; and which had, in consequence, reached an extreme that threatened the most serious results, not only to the principal personages of the kingdom, but even to those whose comparative insignificance in society should have shielded them from all participation in so iniquitous and senseless a practice. L'Etoile computes the number of individuals who lost their lives in these illicit encounters at several thousands; nor did the tardy edicts issued by the King produce a cessation of the custom. On the 4th of February, the Prince de Condé, conceiving himself aggrieved by some expression used by the Duc de Nevers, sent him a challenge, to which the Duke instantly responded; and he was already on the ground watching the approach of his antagonist, when a company of the King's bodyguard arrived, who, in the name of his Majesty, forbade the conflict, and escorted the two quasi-combatants to the royal presence, where, "more in sorrow than in anger", Henry reprimanded both Princes; reminding them of their disobedience to his expressed commands, of the fatal example which their want of self-government would afford to their inferiors, and of the loss which the death of either party would have inflicted upon himself. He then more particularly addressed M. de Nevers, and reproached him severely for having evinced so little respect for the Blood Royal of France as to accept, under any circumstances, a challenge from a relative of his sovereign, who should have been sacred in his eyes.

Whether the arguments of the King convinced the two nobles, or their loyalty sufficed to render them conscious of their error, is unimportant. Henry had the satisfaction of removing the misunderstanding between them, and from the royal closet they proceeded to the apartments of the Queen, in order to allay an anxiety which, from her friendship and affection for Madame de Nevers who was then absent on one of her estates, had been painfully great.

The expressed displeasure of the King at these encounters did not, however, as we have already stated, suffice to prevent their frequent occurrence; and on the 22nd of the same month another hostile meeting took place between the Duc de Soubise and M. de Boccal, which had nearly proved fatal to the former; but it having been explained to the monarch that the antagonist of M. de Soubise had long withstood the provocation of the Duke, declaring that he dare not raise his hand against one so nearly connected with the throne, and that he had not yielded until the impetuous and intemperate violence of his antagonist had left him no other resource, Henry, with his usual clemency, forgave the crime.

Marie de Medicis

In addition to these occurrences, which were moreover succeeded by others of the same description during the month, the anger of the King was excited by a discovery which he made of the infidelity of Madame de Moret. Indulgent to his own profligacy to a degree which rendered him insensible to his self-abasement, Henry was peculiarly alive to the degradation of sharing with a rival the affections, or perhaps it were more fitting to say the favours, of his mistresses. He readily forgot the fact that he had himself been the first to initiate them into the rudiments of vice--to induce them to abnegate their self-respect, and to brave the opinion of the world and their own reproaches--while he could not brook that they should reduce him to a level with one of his own subjects, and that they should so far emancipate themselves as to feel a preference for younger and more attractive men when they had been honoured by his notice. The dissolute monarch did not pause to reflect that with women the national proverb, *il n'y a que le premier pas qui coûte*, is but too often realized, and that he was, in fact, the architect of his own mortification.

Madame de Moret had long been attached to the Prince de Joinville; who, young, reckless, and impetuous, returned her passion, and scarcely made any effort to conceal his rivalry with the monarch. Courtiers have, moreover, sharp eyes, and it was not long ere the King was apprised of the intrigue. Bassompierre relates that he hastened to warn the imprudent lovers of their danger, but that believing him to have some personal motive for his interference, they disregarded the caution; and the fact of their mutual passion at length became so well authenticated, that Henry, whose pride rather than his heart was wounded by the levity of the Countess, reproached her in the most insulting terms with her misconduct. Madame de Moret did not attempt to deny her attachment to the Prince, but excused herself by reminding the monarch that, honoured as she was by his preference, she could not forget that she was merely his mistress, and could anticipate no higher destiny, while M. de Joinville was prepared to make her his wife.

"In that case, Madame", said the King, "you are forgiven. I can permit my subjects to espouse my mistresses, but I cannot allow them to play the gallants to those ladies whom I have distinguished by my own favour. You shall not be disappointed in your expectations, and this marriage shall have my sanction without delay".

It can scarcely be doubted that this ready assent must have been no slight mortification to the vanity of Madame de Moret, while it is equally certain that it was perfectly sincere on the part of the King, although from a cause altogether independent of the Countess herself. In fact, the Prince de Joinville having previously rendered himself obnoxious to the monarch by his marked attentions to the Marquise de Verneuil, the latter was anxious to see him married, and thus to rid himself of a dangerous rival. Such an alliance must, moreover, as he at once felt, deeply wound the pride of the Guises, whom it was his interest to humble by every means in his power; and accordingly he hastened upon leaving Madame de Moret to summon the young Prince to his presence, and to insist upon the fulfilment of his promise.

Startled by so unexpected an order, M. de Joinville feigned a ready compliance, but on his dismissal from the royal closet he expressed his indignation in no measured terms, declaring that had any other than the sovereign proposed to him so disgraceful an alliance, whatever might have been his rank, he would have resented the insult upon the instant; while no sooner did the Duchess his mother become apprised of the circumstance, than she hastened to throw herself at the feet of the King, beseeching him rather to take her life than to subject her son to such dishonour.

"Rise, Madame", said Henry gravely; "yours is a petition which I cannot grant, as I never yet took the life of any woman, and have still to learn the possibility of doing so".

"A Guise, Sire", pursued the haughty Duchess, as she once more stood erect before him, "cannot marry the mistress of any man, even although that man should chance to be his monarch".

"Every man, Madame", retorted the King, "must pay the penalty of seeking to humiliate his sovereign, even although that man be a Guise".

“M. de Joinville, Sire, shall never become the husband of Jacqueline de Bueil”.

“Neither, Madame”, said the King angrily, “shall he ever become her gallant. This is not the first occasion upon which he has had the insolence to interpose between me and my favourites. I have not yet forgotten his intrigue with Madame de Verneuil; and if I pardoned him upon that occasion, it was not on his own account, but from respect for the relationship which exists between us. Neither, Madame, has it escaped my memory that the House of Guise endeavoured to wrest from me the crown of France; and, in short, finding myself so ill-requited for my indulgence, I am weary of exercising a lenity which has degenerated into weakness. Your son is at perfect liberty to marry my mistress, since he has seen fit to desire it, and he shall do so, or repent his obduracy in the Bastille, where he will have time and leisure to learn the respect which he owes to his sovereign”.

“It is your Majesty who is wanting in respect to yourself”, said the Duchess haughtily.

“Madame!” exclaimed the King; “do not give me cause to forget that you are my aunt. I can hear no more until you assume a tone better suited to our relative positions. You have heard my resolve, and may retire”.

Thus abruptly dismissed, Madame de Guise withdrew, and hastened to apprise her son of the impending peril, upon which he escaped from the capital before the order issued for his arrest could be put into execution; while his relatives endeavoured by humility and submission to obtain his forgiveness. Henry, however, had been too deeply wounded, alike by the levity of the son and the overbearing haughtiness of the mother, to yield to their entreaties, and the only concession which he could be induced to make was a conditional pardon involving the perpetual exile of the culprit.

Nor was the King, who at once discovered that he had been duped, less inclined to visit upon Madame de Moret the consequences of her falsehood, and he openly declared that she should also have been compelled to quit the country had she not been on the eve of becoming a mother.

This event shortly afterwards took place, but, although during the following year Henry legitimated her son, he ever afterwards treated her with the greatest coldness; nor did the birth of the child in any way affect her position, as had been the case with the Duchesse de Beaufort and the Marquise de Verneuil, the King contenting himself by sending to her a present of money and jewels, but evincing no disposition to raise her rank.

It would appear, moreover, that the indifference was mutual, as only a short time subsequently she encouraged the assiduities of the Comte de Sommerive, from whom, according to Sully, there could be no doubt that she did actually obtain a written promise of marriage; and the King was no sooner apprised of the circumstance than he expressed, as he had previously done in the case of the Prince de Joinville, his perfect willingness to consent to the alliance, merely desiring M. de Balagny, a gentleman of his household upon whom he could rely, to watch the proceedings of the lovers, and to acquaint him with every particular, should he have cause to suspect that the intentions of the Count were equivocal. M. de Sommerive, however, who soon discovered that he was an object of *espionnage*, became so much exasperated that, having on one occasion encountered the royal confidant at a convenient moment for the purpose, he drew his sword and attacked him so vigorously that his intended victim was compelled to save himself by flight.

In this instance Henry, who had ceased to feel any interest in Madame de Moret, contented himself by reprimanding the culprit, branding him with the name of assassin, and finally exiling him to Lorraine, with strict orders not to leave that province without his express permission.

We will here terminate the history of the ex-favourite, who has already occupied only too much space. After this last adventure she ceased to make any figure at Court, her influence over the monarch having entirely ceased; and seven years subsequent to his death she became the wife of René du Bec, Marquis de Vardes, and the mother of two sons, the elder of whom,

Marie de Medicis

François René, Comte de Moret, was afterwards famous during the reign of Louis XIV under the title of Marquis de Vardes.

The estrangement of the monarch from Madame de Moret, coupled with his increasing coldness towards the Marquise de Verneuil, once more at this period restored the unhappy Queen to a comparative peace of mind, which she was not, however, long fated to enjoy; as at the close of the year a new candidate for the royal favour presented herself in the person of Mademoiselle des Essarts. This lady, who was a member of the household of the Comtesse de Beaumont-Harlay, had accompanied her mistress to England, whither M. de Beaumont-Harlay had been accredited as ambassador; and on the return of her patroness to France she appeared in her suite at Court, where she instantly attracted the attention of the dissolute King. Her reign was happily a short one, and at the close of two years she retired with the title of Comtesse de Romorantin, having previously been privately married to the Archbishop of Rheims.

We shall pass over in silence the other *liaisons* of the monarch, as they were too transitory greatly to affect the tranquillity of the Queen, until we are once more compelled to return to them in order to record his unhappy passion for the beautiful Princesse de Condé--a passion which at one period threatened to involve a European war.

On the 6th of April Marie de Medicis gave birth to her second son, who received the title of Duc d'Orléans, that duchy having always since the time of Philip VI been the appanage of a Prince of the Blood, or one of the first nobles of the kingdom. The public rejoicings were universal, and the satisfaction of the King without bounds. The little Prince was privately baptized by the Cardinal de Gondy, until the state ceremonies of his christening could take place; and on the 22nd of the month he was invested by the sovereign with the insignia of St. Michael and the Holy Ghost, in the presence of the Cardinals, and the Commanders and Knights of those Orders, with great pomp; after which a banquet was given by the King in the great hall at Fontainebleau, and at nightfall the park was illuminated in all directions by immense bonfires, and a pyrotechnic display, which was witnessed by admiring and exulting thousands.

The intelligence which reached Paris on the following day that peace had been restored between the Pope and the Venetians, through the intervention of the French monarch; that the Papal excommunication which had been fulminated against that republic had been repealed, and a general absolution accorded, excited the enthusiasm of the French people to its greatest height. They augured from this fact a brilliant future for the little Prince, who had come into the world at the very moment when the great work had been achieved; and this feeling was shared by the august parents of the royal infant. So little can human foresight fathom the designs of the Almighty Disposer of all things! Men congratulated each other in the public street; and, forgetting the Huguenot origin of Henry, considered him only as the champion of the Romish faith; while they coupled his name and that of the Queen with every endearing epithet of which they were susceptible.

The remainder of the summer was occupied by the monarch in the embellishment of the capital, in high play, and in his rapidly-waning passion for Madame de Verneuil; while the Court resided alternately at Fontainebleau and St. Germain; the Queen confining herself more and more to the society of her children and her immediate favourites, listening with jealous avidity to every rumour of infidelity on the part of her royal consort, and occasionally renewing those unhappy differences by which the whole of their married life had been embittered.

The kingdom was at peace, but anarchy still reigned within the walls of the palace. It is true that the advancing age of the monarch appeared to offer a sufficient guarantee for his moral reformation, but the daily experience of the Queen sufficed to convince her that she must never hope for domestic happiness; and this conviction doubtless tended to place her more thoroughly in the power of those treacherous advisers who, in order to strengthen their own influence, did not hesitate to exaggerate (where exaggeration was possible) the painful errors of her husband. She saw herself idolized by the people, who regarded her with earnest affection as the mother of two Princes whom they looked upon as pledges for the safety and

Marie de Medicis

prosperity of France, while she found herself at the same time an object of indifference to the monarch whom they were destined to succeed; and who, while he lavished upon his children incessant tokens of tenderness, sacrificed her personal happiness to every passing fancy, even at the time when he affected to reproach her with a coldness of which he was himself the cause.

Again we fearlessly repeat that the historians of the time have not done Marie de Medicis justice. They expatiate upon her faults, they enlarge upon her weaknesses, they descant upon her errors; but they touch lightly and carelessly upon the primary influences which governed her after-life. She arrived in her new kingdom young, hopeful, and happy--young, and her youth was blighted by neglect; hopeful, and her hopes were crushed by unkindness; happy, and her happiness was marred by inconstancy and insult. Her woman-nature, plastic as it might have been under more fortunate circumstances, became indurated to harshness; and it is not they who strive to work upon the most solid marble who should complain if the chisel with which they pursue their purpose become blunted in the process.

On the 5th of September of this year died M. de Bellièvre, the Chancellor of France, whose probity and justice had rendered him dear to the people, in whose eyes the withdrawal of his Court favour only tended to enhance his valuable qualities. He was, as a natural consequence, succeeded by Brulart de Sillery, who had already superseded him as Keeper of the Seals; and his body was attended to the church of St. Germain-l'Auxerrois by a vast concourse of the citizens.

His demise was, in November, followed by that of the Cardinal de Lorraine, who, with the usual superstition of the age, was declared to have been bewitched because his malady had baffled the skill of his physicians; while that which renders the circumstance the more melancholy, is the fact that the individual accused of his destruction was burned alive at Nancy, after having been previously subjected to a course of lingering torture.

The Court meanwhile, according to Sully, was more dissipated than it had been during any previous winter since the arrival of Marie de Medicis in France; while the account given of the state of morals throughout the capital by L'Etoile, is one which will not bear transcription. The new year (1608) commenced in the same manner. Ballets were danced both at the Louvre and at the residences of the great nobles. The ex-Queen Marguerite gave an entertainment in honour of the birth of the young Prince, which terminated with a running at the ring, where the prizes were distributed by herself and her successor; and, finally, the King commanded that an especial ballet for the amusement of the Duc de Montpensier, to whose daughter he was about to affiance the infant Duc d'Orléans, should be executed by the Duc de Vendôme, the Marquis de Bassompierre, the Baron de Thermes, and M. de Carmail, the four nobles of the Court who were distinguished by the appellation of "les Dangereux". The august party accordingly proceeded to the hotel of that Prince, who was then nearly at the point of death, having languished throughout two years in a low decline which had gradually sapped his existence; but notwithstanding the state of debility to which he was reduced, the Duke left his bed, and received his royal and noble guests in the hall wherein the ballet was performed. It may be doubted, however, whether M. de Montpensier did not make this supreme effort in consequence of the proposed alliance, and his anxiety to evince to their Majesties his sense of the honour which was about to be conferred upon himself and his family, rather than from any amusement which he could hope to derive from such an exhibition. Be that, however, as it may, the most magnificent preparations had been made for the reception of Henry and his Queen, who were met at the foot of the great staircase by the Duchess, followed by her women, and escorted by a score of pages bearing lighted tapers, and thus conducted to the canopied dais beneath which their ponderous chairs, covered with cloth of gold, had been placed, with low stools behind and on either side of the throne, for the use of such of the other guests as were privileged to seat themselves in the presence of the sovereign.

The ballet, save as regarded the dying condition of the ducal host, was executed under the happiest auspices. The King, to whom the proposed marriage of the two children was agreeable under every aspect, was in one of his most condescending and complacent moods; while Marie de Medicis, whose affection for all her offspring amounted to passion, was radiant

Marie de Medicis

with delight as she remembered that by the will of the Duke all his property and estates devolved upon the young Prince, even should his betrothed bride not live to become his wife.

On the following day the affiancing, of which this entertainment had been the prelude, took place with great solemnity. The most costly presents were exchanged, not only by the betrothed children, but also by their royal and noble relatives. This ceremony, owing to the failing health of the Duke, was also performed at the Hôtel Montpensier, and was succeeded by amusements of every description; among which those prepared for the occasion at the Arsenal by Sully afforded the most marked gratification to their Majesties. The minister had caused a spacious theatre to be constructed, in which the Italian actors who had been summoned to France by the Queen gave their representations. This pit or *salle de spectacle* was, as he himself informs us, arranged amphitheatrically, while above were galleries divided into separate boxes, each approached by a different staircase and entered by a different door. Two of these galleries were reserved entirely for the ladies who were admitted to the performance, and no man, upon any pretext whatever, was permitted to enter them; an arrangement which appears to be strikingly at variance with the lax morality of the time. So resolved, nevertheless, was Sully to enforce this restriction, that he adds with a gravity curious enough upon such a subject: "This was one of my regulations which I would not suffer to be violated, and of which I did not consider it beneath me personally to compel the observance".

To impress, moreover, upon his readers the [strength of this determination, he relates an anecdote of which we cannot resist the transcription:

"One day", he says, "when a very fine ballet was represented in this hall, I perceived a man leading a lady by the hand, with whom he was about to enter the women's gallery. He was a foreigner, and I moreover easily recognized by his sallow complexion to what country he belonged. 'Monsieur', I said to him, 'you will be good enough to look for another door; for I do not think that with your skin you can hope to pass for a lady'. 'My lord', replied he in very bad French, 'when you ascertain who I am, you will not, I can assure you, refuse to have the politeness of permitting me to enter with these fair and lovely ladies, however dark I may be. My name is Pimentello; I am well received by his Majesty, and have frequently the honour of playing with him'. This was true, and too true. This foreigner, of whom I had frequently heard, had won immense sums from the King. 'How, *ventre de ma vie!* I exclaimed, affecting extreme anger; 'you are then, I perceive, that great glutton of a Portuguese who daily wins the money of the King. *Pardieu*, you are by no means welcome here, as I neither affect nor will receive such guests'. He was about to reply, but I thrust him back, saying at the same time, 'Go, go; find another entrance, for your jargon will fail to make any impression upon me'. The King having subsequently inquired of him if he had not thought the ballet magnificent and admirably executed, Pimentello replied that he was anxious to have witnessed it, but that he had been encountered at the door by his finance minister, who had met him with a negative and shut him out; an adventure which so much amused the monarch that he not only laughed heartily himself, but made the whole Court participators in his amusement".

Banquets, running at the ring, and balls in which the Queen occasionally condescended to join, varied the entertainments; which were, however, suddenly terminated by the death of the Duc de Montpensier, which occurred on the 28th of the month; and so much was the King affected by his demise, that he forbade all the customary diversions during the ensuing Carnival.

Nothing could exceed, save in the case of a sovereign, the splendour of the funeral ceremonies observed after the Duke's decease. He had no sooner expired than his body was carried into a hall richly hung with tapestry, and surrounded by seats and benches covered with cloth of gold, elaborately embroidered with *fleurs-de-lis*, intended for the accommodation of the prelates, nobles, knights, and gentlemen of the Duke's household who were appointed to watch beside the corpse. The body lay upon a state bed covered with cloth of gold which swept the floor, and was bordered with ermine. He wore his ducal robes, with a coronet, and the great collar of St. Michael; and had his white-gloved hands crossed upon his breast. At the foot of the bier stood a small table upon which was a massive silver crucifix; and near it a second

Marie de Medicis

supporting a vase of holy water. In this state the deceased Duke remained during eight days; the officers of his household waiting upon him in the same manner, and with the same ceremonies as when he was alive. A prelate said the grace; the water, in which while in existence the Prince had been accustomed to lave his hands previously to commencing a meal, was presented to his vacant chair; the different courses were placed upon the table by the proper officers; a silver goblet was prepared at the same moment in which he had formerly been in the habit of taking his first draught; and, finally, the same prelate uttered a thanksgiving, to which he added a *De profundis*, and the prayer for the dead; when the food that had been served up was distributed to the poor.

At the termination of the eight days the funeral service was performed at Notre Dame, in the presence of the Knights of the Holy Ghost, all wearing their collars. The chief mourners were the Prince de Condé and the Comte de Soissons, the cousins of the deceased Duke; and his funeral oration was delivered by M. de Fenouillet, Bishop of Montpellier. The body was then conveyed to Champigny in Poitou, where the Duke was laid to rest with his ancestors.

Having strictly forbidden all public festivities, Henry removed the Court to Fontainebleau; and Marguerite, whose unblushing libertinism was a byword in Paris, seized the moment to erect an alms-house and convent upon a portion of the grounds of her hotel. It was stated that the ex-Queen during her residence at Usson, where, as we have already seen, her career was one of the most degrading profligacy, had made a vow that should she ever be permitted to revisit Paris, she would support a certain number of monks who should daily sing the praises of the Deity; and she accordingly gave to the chapel attached to the convent the name of the Chapel of Praise, while the house itself was designated the Monastery of the Holy Trinity. It was no sooner built than it was given by the foundress to the reformed and bare-footed Fathers of St. Augustine; but after having solicited in their favour various privileges which were accorded by the Sovereign-Pontiff, she dispossessed them in the year 1613, and established in their place the Augustine Fathers of the Congregation of Bourges.

Meanwhile the influence of Concini and his wife over the mind of the Queen unhappily increased with time, until the arrogance of the former became so great that he had the insolence to enter the lists at a grand tilting at the ring which was publicly held in the Rue St. Antoine in the presence of the monarch and his Court; a piece of presumption which was rendered still more unpalatable to Henry by the fact that the Italian, who was well skilled in such exercises, bore away the prize for which the whole of his own nobility had contended.

So arrogant, indeed, had he become, and so inflated with the consciousness of wealth--Marie de Medicis having been lavish even beyond her means both to his wife and himself--that he entered into a negotiation for the purchase of La Ferté, a property estimated at between two and three hundred thousand crowns; and he no sooner ascertained that the Duchesse de Sully had waited upon the Queen to entreat of her Majesty to forbid the transfer, as such an acquisition made by an individual who was generally known to be penniless only a few years previously would necessarily excite the public disaffection towards herself, than he had the audacity to proceed to the Arsenal and to upbraid that lady for her interference in the most unmeasured and insulting terms, declaring that he was independent both of the King of France and of his subjects, whatever might be their sex and rank; and that whoever thwarted him in his projects might live to rue the day in which they braved his anger.

This intemperance having come to the ears of the King, his indignation was excessive; but, as on previous occasions, he lacked the moral courage to assert his dignity; and satisfied himself by bitter complaints to Sully of the fatal hold which her two Italian attendants had secured upon the affections of the Queen, and by replying to the reproaches of Marie upon the subject of his new attachment for Charlotte des Essarts, and the continued insolence of Madame de Verneuil, with vehement upbraidings on the vassalage in which she lived to the indecent caprices and shameless extortions of a waiting-woman and her husband.

Marie de Medicis, who had hoped that the rank in her household which had been conceded to Leonora would protect her for the future against allusions to the obscurity of her origin, was greatly incensed by the tone of contempt still maintained by the King whenever he

Marie de Medicis

made any allusion either to Leonora or Concini; and eventually these recriminations attained to such a height that Henry abruptly quitted the Louvre (where the delicate health of his royal consort had induced him to establish his temporary residence), and proceeded to Chantilly, without taking leave of her. On his way, however, he alighted at the Arsenal, where he informed Sully of the reason of his sudden departure; and the minister became so much alarmed at this unequivocal demonstration of displeasure on the part of the monarch, that he resolved not to lose a moment in advising the Queen to some concession which might cause the King to return to the capital. After the midday meal he accordingly repaired to the Louvre, accompanied only by a secretary who was to await him in an antechamber, and made his way to the apartments of Marie. On reaching the saloon adjoining the private closet of the Queen, he found Madame Concini seated at the door with her head buried in her hands, evidently absorbed in thought. She started up, however, when he addressed her and in reply to his request that she would announce him to her royal mistress, she replied that she would do so willingly, although she apprehended that her Majesty would not receive him, as she had refused entrance to herself. She had, however, no sooner raised the tapestry, and scratched upon the door, than Marie, on learning who was without, desired that M. de Sully should be instantly admitted. When the Duke entered he found the Queen seated at a table, busily engaged in writing; and as he approached her with the customary obeisance, she hastily motioned to him to place himself upon a stool immediately in front of her.

“You are right welcome, M. le Ministre”, she said in a tone that was not altogether steady, although she struggled to suppress all outward emotion. “You are doubtless already apprised that the King has withdrawn from the capital in anger, but you have yet to learn that he has left me no whit more satisfied than himself. I was unprepared for so abrupt a departure; and as I had still much to say to him on the subject of our disagreement, I find myself compelled to the exercise of my clerkly skill, and am now occupied in telling him in writing all that I had left unsaid. There is the letter”, she continued with a bitter smile, as she threw the ample scroll across the table; “read it, and tell me if I have not more than sufficient cause to consider myself both aggrieved and outraged”.

“Madame”, said the incorruptible minister, when he had perused the document thus submitted to him, “you must pardon me if I venture to declare that you must never suffer that letter to meet the eye of your royal consort: it contains matter to induce your eternal separation”.

“Can you deny one assertion which I have made?” demanded the Queen impatiently.

“I sympathize in all the trials and troubles of your Majesty”, was the evasive reply. “I would leave no effort untried to terminate them; a fact of which you have long, I trust, Madame, felt convinced; and thus I cannot see you about to wilfully destroy every chance of happiness, without imploring of you to reflect deeply and calmly before you take so extreme a measure as that which you now contemplate. The King is already incensed against you; and if spoken words have thus angered him, I dare not contemplate the consequences of such as these before me, written hours after your contention. I therefore beseech you to suppress this letter; and both for your own sake, and for that of the French nation, rather to seek a reconciliation with His Grace your husband than to increase the ill-feeling which so unhappily exists”.

“You make no allowance for me, Monsieur, as a woman and a wife; you only argue with the Queen”.

“Madame”, persisted Sully, “in this instance it is rather to the woman and the wife that I address myself than to the Queen. As a woman, the bitterness and invective of this missive”, and he laid his spread hand emphatically upon the paper, “would suffice to cover you with blame and to deprive you of sympathy, while as a mother it would authorize your separation from your children. Let me entreat of you therefore to forego your purpose”.

Marie de Medicis sat silent for a few moments, and then making a violent effort over herself, she said slowly: “I will in so far follow your counsel, M. le Duc, that I will destroy this

Marie de Medicis

letter, although the saints bear witness that it has cost me both time and care to prepare it, but I will yield no further. I am weary of being made the puppet of an unfaithful husband and his band of unblushing favourites, who receive, each in succession, some high-sounding title by which they are enabled to thrust themselves and their shame upon me in the very halls of the palace. I must and will tell the King this”.

“Then, Madame, if such be unfortunately your decision”, said her listener, “at least let me urge you to do it in gentler terms”.

“I am in no humour to temporize”.

Sully made no reply.

“Do not wrap yourself up in silence, Monsieur”, exclaimed the Queen after waiting in vain for his reply. “I believe that you wish to serve me, and you cannot better do so than by putting these unpalatable truths into a less repulsive form. Here are the means at hand, but, mark me, I will not suffer one particular to be omitted”.

Under this somewhat difficult restriction the minister proceeded to obey her command, but she argued upon every sentence, and cavilled at every paragraph, which tended to soften the harsher features of the letter. At length, however, the task was completed, and nothing remained to be effected save its transcription by the Queen. The letter was long and elaborate, as Sully had skilfully contrived to terminate every reproach by some reasoning which could not fail to touch the feelings of the King. Thus, after upbraiding her husband with his perpetual infidelities, Marie was made to say that if she complained, it was less for herself, than because, in addition to her anxiety to be the sole possessor of his heart, she could not coldly contemplate the injury which he inflicted upon his person and dignity by becoming the rival of his own subjects, and thus compromising his kingly character; and that if she insisted with vehemence upon the exile of Madame de Verneuil, her excuse must be found in the fact that in no other way could her peace and honour be secured, or the welfare of her children be rendered sure--those children of whom he was the father as well as the sovereign, and whom she would cause to fall at his feet to implore compassion for their mother. She then reminded him of the numerous promises which he had made to her that he would cease to give her cause of complaint, and terminated the missive by calling God to witness that should he still be willing to fulfil them, she would, on her side, renounce all desire for vengeance upon those by whom she had been so deeply, wronged.

Certain, however, it is that, even with these modifications, the letter gave serious offence to Henry, who, shortly after its receipt, wrote to apprise Sully of what he denominated the *impertinence* of his wife, but declared that he was less incensed against her than against the individual by whom the epistle had been dictated, as the style was not hers, and that he had consequently discovered the agency of a third person, whose identity he left it to Sully to ascertain, as he had resolved never again either to serve or even to see him, be he whom he might, so long as he had life.

With a truth and frankness which did him honour, the finance minister, despite this threat, did not hesitate when subsequently urged upon the subject by the King to admit the authorship of the obnoxious document, and in support of his assertion to place in the hands of Henry the original draft which he had retained. On comparing this with the autograph letter of the Queen, however, Sully at once perceived that she had been unable to repress her anger sufficiently to adhere to his advice, and that the interpolations were by no means calculated to advance her interests. It was evident, nevertheless, that much of the King's indignation had subsided, and that the delicate health of his royal consort was not without its influence over his mind. Sully adroitly profited by this circumstance to impress upon Henry the danger of any agitation to the Queen, whose impressionable nature occasioned constant solicitude to her physicians, and reminded him that her late violence had been principally induced by the rumours which had reached her of a *liaison* between Madame de Verneuil and the Duc de Guise, an indignity to his own person which she had declared herself unable to brook with patience. In short, so zealously and so successfully did Sully exert himself, that he at length

induced the monarch to return to the Louvre, and the Queen to disclaim all intention of exciting his displeasure, in which latter attempt he was greatly aided by being enabled to confide to her that instant measures were to be taken for the disgrace of the Marquise, could it be proved that her friendship with the Duc de Guise had exceeded the limits of propriety.

In the beginning of March the Court removed to Fontainebleau, where, while awaiting the accouchement of the Queen, Henry indulged in the most reckless gaming; nor did he pursue this vice in a kingly spirit, for even his devoted panegyrist Péréfixe informs us that at this period he knew not how to answer those who reproached his royal pupil with too great a love for cards and dice, of itself a taste little suited to a great and powerful sovereign; and that, moreover, he was an unpleasant player, eager for gain, timid when the stake was a high one, and ill-tempered when he was a loser. In support of this reluctant testimony, Bassompierre relates that, being anxious to assist at the opening of the States of Lorraine in compliance with the invitation of the Duke, he solicited the permission of Henry to that effect on two or three different occasions, but as he always played on the side of the King, and universally with great success, he was constantly refused.

Resolved to carry his point, however, the spoiled courtier at length set forth without any leave-taking; a fact which was no sooner ascertained by the monarch than he despatched two of the *exempts* of his guard to arrest him and bring him back. This they did without difficulty, as Bassompierre did not travel at night; but as the gallant Marquis had no ambition to be conveyed to Fontainebleau in the guise of a prisoner, he despatched a letter to M. de Villeroy requesting to be liberated from the presence of his captors, and pledging himself to return instantly to Court. On his arrival the King laughed heartily at the idea of his disappointment, which he, however, lightened by pledging himself that in ten days he should be left at liberty to depart.

On the 25th of April Marie de Medicis became the mother of a third son, upon whom, after some contestation between his illustrious parents, was bestowed the title of Duc d'Anjou. The Queen was desirous that he should be called Prince of Navarre, but Henry preferred the former designation, from the fact that it had been that of many of the French Princes who had been sovereigns of Jerusalem and Sicily. The birth of another Prince to their beloved sovereign filled up the measure of joy in France; the citizens of Paris made costly gifts to the Queen, and the circumstance of the infant having come into the world on the anniversary of St. Louis increased the general enthusiasm. As the convalescence of the royal invalid was less rapid upon this than on previous occasions, the Court remained during the spring and a portion of the summer at Fontainebleau, where every species of amusement was exhausted by the courtiers. Once only, at the beginning of May, the King resided for a few days in the capital, and on his return Marie manifested such undisguised satisfaction that he accorded to her the sum of twelve thousand crowns for the embellishment of her château at Monceaux.

So early as the year 1598, during the journey of the sovereign to Brittany, a marriage had been arranged between his son, the Duc de Vendôme, and Mademoiselle de Mercoeur, but the mother and grandmother of the young lady had succeeded in inspiring her with such a hatred of the legitimated Prince, that she would not allow his name to be mentioned in her presence; and when she ascertained that the monarch had resolved upon the fulfilment of the contract, she withdrew to the Capuchin Convent, declaring that sooner than become the wife of M. de Vendôme she would take the veil. The Duchesse de Mercoeur and her mother had been anxious to marry the young heiress to the Prince de Condé, or failing in this project, to some relative of their own, in order to retain her large possessions in the family; but the King had resolved upon securing them to his son by enforcing the promise made by the deceased Duke. He accordingly adopted conciliatory measures by which he succeeded in effecting his object, and before the conclusion of the rejoicings on the birth of the infant Prince, the marriage was finally celebrated in the chapel of Fontainebleau with all the pomp and magnificence of which the ceremony was susceptible, while the King appeared beside his son at the altar blazing with jewels of inestimable price, and joined in the festivities consequent upon the alliance with a zest and enjoyment which were the theme of general comment.

Marie de Medicis

The arrival of Don Pedro de Toledo, the ambassador of Philip III of Spain, at this precise juncture gave further occasion for that display of splendour in which Henry had latterly delighted, and after his public reception at Fontainebleau the Court removed to Paris, where the ambassador had been sumptuously lodged at the Hôtel de Gondy. His arrogance, however, soon disgusted the French King; nor did he hesitate to exhibit the same unbecoming hauteur towards his kinswoman the Queen, who having despatched a nobleman of her household to welcome him to France in that character, was informed by her envoy that the only answer which he returned to the compliment was conveyed in the remark that crowned heads had no relatives; they had only subjects.

The sole occasion upon which he laid aside his *morgue*, and then to all appearance involuntarily, was while driving through the streets of the capital in the carriage of the King. He had previously visited Paris, and as he contrasted its present magnificence with the squalor, filth, and disorder which it had formerly exhibited, he could not suppress an exclamation of astonishment. "Why should you be surprised, Monsieur?" demanded Henry; "when you last saw my good city of Paris, the father of the family did not inhabit it; and now that he is here to watch over his children, they prosper as you see".

The object of this embassy was kept a profound secret; some historians assert that it was undertaken with a view to effect a marriage between the Dauphin and the Infanta of Spain, while others lean to the belief that Philip had instructed Don Pedro to endeavour to prevail upon Henry to abandon his alliance with the Dutch. Whatever were its motive, the ambassador, who had reached Paris on the 7th of July, quitted the capital on the 22nd of the same month, having only succeeded in irritating the King by his overbearing and supercilious demeanour.

It would appear that during the present year Henri IV indulged his passion for field sports to such an excess as tended seriously to alarm those who were anxious for his preservation; and it indeed seems as though, at this period, his leisure hours were nearly divided between his two favourite diversions of hunting and high play. Sully informs us, however, that the King busied himself with the embellishments of Fontainebleau, and in erecting the Place Dauphine at Paris; but adds that these great works, which were necessary to the convenience of the people, might have been carried much further if the monarch would have followed his advice and been less profuse in his personal expenditure, particularly as regarded his gambling transactions. He advances, as a proof of this assertion, that he was called upon on one occasion to deliver to Eduardo Fernandez, a Portuguese banker (who, according to Bassompierre, had made a visit of speculation to the French Court, and who unhesitatingly provided the nobles with large sums, either on security or at immense interest), the enormous amount of thirty-four thousand pistoles, for which the reckless monarch had become his debtor. "I frequently received similar orders", he proceeds to say, "for two or three thousand pistoles, and a great many others for less considerable sums".

It is scarcely doubtful that the *ennui* occasioned by the waning passion of Henri IV for Madame de Verneuil at this period induced him, even more than formerly, to seek amusement and occupation at the gaming-table, where he was emulated by his profuse and licentious nobles, while even his Queen and the ladies of the Court entered with avidity into the exciting pastime. We have frequent record of the habitual high play of Marie de Medicis, who found in it a solace for her sick-room and a diversion from her domestic annoyances, and thus the dangerous propensity of the monarch was heightened by the presence of the loveliest women of the land and the charm and fascination of wit and intellect.

Madame de Verneuil was in despair; the coveted sceptre was sliding from within her grasp, and with the ill-judged hope of regaining the affections of her royal lover by exciting his jealousy, she encouraged the attention of the Duc de Guise, who, undismayed by the previous attempt of his brother to divert the affections of another of the royal favourites and its unfortunate result, at length openly avowed himself the suitor of the brilliant Marquise, and even promised to make her his wife; while the scandalous chroniclers of the time do not

Marie de Medicis

hesitate to affirm that the Prince de Joinville himself had previously done the same, but that his proverbial fickleness had protected him from so gross a *mésalliance*.

In the case of the Duke, however, the affair wore a more serious aspect; and so earnest did he appear in his professions that Madame de Verneuil, anxious at once to secure an illustrious alliance and to revenge herself upon the monarch, caused the banns of marriage between the Prince and herself to be published with some slight alteration in their respective names, which did not, however, suffice to deceive those who had an interest in subverting her project; and the fact was accordingly communicated to the King, upon whom it produced an effect entirely opposite to that which had been contemplated by the vanity of the lady, who had been clever enough to procure from M. de Guise a written promise similar to that which she had formerly extorted from the monarch. Four years previously the knowledge of such a perfidy on her part would have overwhelmed Henry with anxiety, jealousy, and grief, but his passion for the Marquise had, as we have seen, long been on the decline, and his only feeling was one of indignation and displeasure. To the Marquise herself he simply expressed his determined and unalterable opposition to the alliance, but to the Duke he was far less lenient, reminding him of the former offences of himself and his family, and forbidding him to pursue a purpose so distasteful to all those who had his honour at heart. This was a fatal blow to Madame de Verneuil, and one which she was never destined to overcome. Clever as she was, she had suffered herself to forget that youth is not eternal, and that passion is even more evanescent than time; and thus, by a last impotent effort to assert a supremacy to which she could no longer advance any claim, she only succeeded in extinguishing in the heart of the King the last embers of a latent and expiring attachment.

CHAPTER VIII

1609

In the year upon which we are now about to enter the subject of our biography occupies, unfortunately, but a small space, destined as it was to give birth to the most violent and the most dangerous passion of the whole life of Henri IV, and that which left the most indelible stain upon his memory, both as a man and as a monarch.

On the 7th of February the Court went into mourning for the Grand Duke of Tuscany, the uncle of the Queen, to whom she was ardently attached, and all the Carnival amusements were consequently suspended, but not before the Queen had resolved upon the performance of the ballet which she had previously refused to sanction, when her royal consort had proposed as one of its performers the Comtesse de Moret, his late favourite. The rehearsal of this entertainment took place on the 16th of January, and the nymphs of Diana were represented by the twelve reigning beauties of the Court, among whom the most lovely was Charlotte Marguerite de Montmorency. So extraordinary, indeed, were her personal attractions, combined with a modesty of demeanour more than unusual at the Court in that age, that even the most experienced of the great nobles were compelled to confess that they had never heretofore seen any person who could compete with her. "The purity of her complexion," says Dreux du Radier, quoting from one of the old chroniclers, "was admirable; her eyes, lively and full of tenderness, inspired passion in the most careless hearts; she had not a feature in her face which was not gracefully moulded. The tones of her voice, her bearing, her slightest movements, had a charm which compelled admiration, and it was yielded the more willingly that it was elicited by no artifice on her part, but was a tribute to her natural merits. Nature had, indeed, done everything for her, and she had no occasion to resort to any adventitious aid however innocent."

This lady, thus richly gifted with youth, beauty, and high birth, had been, even before her appearance at Court, promised in marriage by her father to the Maréchal de Bassompierre, to whom indeed he had himself offered her hand, but she was no sooner seen by Henry in the circle of the Queen than he became violently enamoured of her person, and resolved to prevent the alliance; a determination in which he found himself strengthened by the remonstrances of the Duc de Bouillon, the nephew of the Connétable, and consequently the cousin of the young beauty, whose favour Bassompierre had, in the excess of his happiness, neglected to conciliate, and who represented to the King that he could not conceal his astonishment on ascertaining that his Majesty was about to permit the union of Mademoiselle de Montmorency with a mere noble, however deserving of such distinction, when the Prince de Condé had attained to a marriageable age, and that it would be imprudent to countenance his alliance with a foreign princess; while as regards himself, he could not discover another eligible match save his cousin or Mademoiselle du Maine; and he was inclined to believe that none of the advisers of his Majesty would counsel him to authorize his own marriage with the latter, while the remnant of the League continued so formidable as to threaten a still more forcible and dangerous demonstration should they once find themselves under a leader with the power which he possessed to further their cause. He then represented that his alliance with Mademoiselle de Montmorency would involve no such results, as the allies and interests of the Connétable were his own, and concluded by entreating that his Majesty, before he sanctioned the marriage of Bassompierre with his cousin, would give the matter ample reflection.

This contention, there can be no doubt, piqued the curiosity of the King, who in the course of the day mentioned the circumstance to the Duc de Bellegarde. The chance of the

rivals in the favour of the lady herself could scarcely be doubtful, as the Duc de Bouillon, Prince of the Blood though he was, possessed few personal attractions, while the gay, the gallant, the magnificent Bassompierre was the cynosure of all eyes; superb in person, he was moreover of high birth, great wealth (although his profusion occasionally fettered his means), in high favour with the monarch, and celebrated alike for his wit and his attainments. Unfortunately, however, for his interests, M. le Grand had already seen Mademoiselle de Montmorency, and the animated description which he volunteered to the King of the coveted beauty was far from proving favourable to the views of Bassompierre, as Henry, before he came to any decision upon so important a question, resolved to decide for himself the value of the prize which he was about to adjudge to one or other of the contending parties. For this purpose he therefore joined the evening circle of the Queen, where he first saw the daughter of the Connétable, but apparently without the effect which had been anticipated by the Duc de Bellegarde.

On the morrow, however, he proved less insensible to the surpassing loveliness of the young maid of honour; her modest dignity in a private *salon* offering, in all probability, little attraction to the licentious monarch who was accustomed to see every eye turned towards himself, and every art exerted to fascinate his notice; but on the day of the rehearsal, when the graceful and blushing nymph of Diana was presented to him in her classic garb, her quiver at her back and her spear in her hand, he at once acknowledged the potency of the spell by which others had been previously subjugated. The rehearsal took place in the great hall of the Louvre, where Henry was attended only by the Duc de Bellegarde, and Montespan, the captain of his bodyguard.

The extraordinary loveliness of the young Princess, combined with her exquisite grace and dignified bearing, at once fascinated the King, who declared to the Duc de Bellegarde that he had never before beheld so faultless a face and form; to which assurance M. le Grand replied, says Bassompierre, "according to his usual manner of extolling everything that was novel, and particularly Mademoiselle de Montmorency, who was indeed worthy of all admiration; and thus infused into the mind of the King, always ready to yield to a new fancy, the passion which subsequently caused him to commit so many extravagances."

For the moment, however, Henry was unable to pursue his unworthy purpose, being attacked the same evening by a violent fit of the gout, to which he had been occasionally subject for the last four years, and which declared itself on this occasion with so much acuteness that during fifteen days he was compelled to keep his bed. Meanwhile, the Duc de Bouillon was not idle. Considering himself aggrieved by the Connétable in not having been selected as the husband of his daughter, he complained loudly and bitterly of the slight, and even induced the Duc de Roquelaure to exert his influence with M. de Montmorency to withdraw his promise from Bassompierre, and to bestow the hand of the Princess upon himself. The Connétable, however, remained firm, declaring that he had already the honour to be the great-uncle of M. de Bouillon, a degree of kindred which quite satisfied his ambition; and that his daughter, being pledged to Bassompierre, could no longer be an object of pursuit with any prospect of success to any other noble, however great might be his rank; while, in pursuance of this resolution, the Duke caused preparations to be made for the celebration of the marriage in the chapel of his palace at Chantilly. Bassompierre was consequently at the summit of happiness; his ambition and his heart were alike satisfied, and he received the congratulations of those around him with an undisguised delight, which, in so proverbially gay and gallant a cavalier, could not fail to prove highly flattering to the object of his attachment.

Unfortunately, before the ceremony could be performed, M. de Montmorency was in his turn attacked by gout, and, greatly to the mortification of the expectant bridegroom, the marriage was necessarily deferred. Still, relying on the assurance of the Connétable that nothing should induce him to rescind his resolution, Bassompierre endeavoured to await with what patience he might the termination of the inopportune illness of the generous Prince; and in the interim he shared with M. le Grand and the Duc de Grammont the honour of passing the night in the royal chamber, where the three nobles alternately read or conversed with the King during his sleepless hours. Throughout the day the monarch received the visits of the Queen

and the Princesses of the Blood, among whom the most welcome was the Duchesse d'Angoulême, who was on every occasion accompanied by her niece Mademoiselle de Montmorency, whom Henry did not fail to engross whenever the Duchess was engaged in conversation with the members of the Court circle. Still, however, the King was careful not to betray to the young lady herself the peculiar feeling with which she had inspired him, but treated her with a kindness which was almost paternal, alluding without any apparent reluctance to her betrothal to Bassompierre, and assuring her that she should be as dear to him as a daughter, and that during the tour of duty of her husband, as First Lord of the Bedchamber, she should have a suite of apartments appropriated to her use in the Louvre; but in a few days, when he had accustomed her to converse freely with him upon the subject, Henry put a leading question which must, after all these gracious promises, have tended to startle Mademoiselle de Montmorency, by demanding to know if she personally desired the marriage, as, should it be otherwise, she need only confess the truth with frankness, when he would break off the match, and procure for her an alliance more to her taste; adding that he was even willing to bestow her hand upon his own nephew the Prince de Condé. In reply the Princess modestly but firmly assured his Majesty that as her union with M. de Bassompierre was the wish of her father, she felt convinced that her destiny would be a happy one; and there can be no doubt that she said this more emphatically than she had intended, as, from that moment, Henry became convinced that she really loved her intended husband, and he resolved in consequence to prevent the marriage.

Unhappily for all parties, the monarch appeared to have forgotten that he had reached his fifty-sixth year, that he was rapidly becoming a martyr to the gout, and that he was no longer calculated to enter into a successful rivalry with his younger and more attractive nobility; a delusion which was unfortunately encouraged, according to Mézeray, by his confidential friends, the relatives of the lady, and even the members of the Queen's household, who, in the hope of at length triumphing over his former favourites, exerted themselves to increase his passion for the daughter of the Connétable; a passion which they moreover doubtless imagined could not, from the high rank and peculiar position of Mademoiselle de Montmorency, exceed the limits of propriety. The intentions of Henry himself were, however, as was subsequently proved, of a far less innocuous tendency than those for which others so erroneously gave him credit. At eight o'clock on the following morning he sent for Bassompierre, and having caused the attendants to leave the room, he motioned him to kneel down upon the cushion beside his bed, when he assured him that he had been thinking seriously of the propriety of his taking a wife.

"Ah! Sire," said the delighted courtier, perfectly unsuspecting of the real meaning of the monarch, "had not the same unlucky disease under which your Majesty is also suffering attacked the Connétable, I should ere this have been a husband."

"No," was the hurried reply, as the King looked steadfastly at his intended victim, "such is not my meaning. What I desire is to bestow upon you the hand of Mademoiselle d'Aumale, and by this means to revive the duchy of Aumale in your favour."

"But I am betrothed, Sire, and cannot take a second wife!"

"Bassompierre," said Henry with an emotion which he was unable to conceal, "I have become passionately attached to Mademoiselle de Montmorency. If you marry her and she loves you, you will be the object of my hatred; while should I, under such circumstances, induce her to love me, you would hate me in your turn. You are aware of my attachment towards yourself, and it will be far better to avoid this risk by not placing either party in so trying a position. As regards the lady, I have resolved upon uniting her to my nephew the Prince de Condé, and keeping her at Court. Her presence and intercourse will be the charm and amusement of the old age which is fast creeping upon me. I shall give to my nephew, who is young and who prefers a thousand times a hunt to a lady's love, a hundred thousand francs a year with which to amuse himself, and all that I shall ask of his wife in return will be the affection of a child."

The habits and manners of the Court at that age admitted but of one reply to this cold and selfish declaration. Bassompierre pressed his lips upon the hand which lay upon the velvet coverlet, and assured the King that it had ever been the desire of his life to find an opportunity of sacrificing his own happiness to that of his Majesty; that he did not seek to deny the extent of his disappointment; but that he nevertheless voluntarily pledged himself never again to renew a suit which counteracted the views and wishes of his sovereign, and trusted that this new passion might be productive of as much delight to his Majesty as the loss of such a bride must have grieved himself, had he not been amply consoled by the consciousness of having merited the confidence of his King.

"Then," he says, with a *naïveté* at which it is impossible to suppress a smile, "the King embraced me, and wept, assuring me that he would further my fortunes as though I were one of his natural children, that he loved me dearly, as I must be well assured, and that he would reward my frankness and friendship."

On quitting the royal presence, the discomfited courtier hastened to confide his sorrows to M. d'Epéron, who endeavoured to console him with the assurance that the King's passion for Mademoiselle de Montmorency was a mere passing caprice, as well as his declared intention of marrying her to the Prince de Condé; reminding him, moreover, that as the admiration of the monarch for the young lady had already become matter of notoriety, it was highly improbable that M. de Condé would, under the circumstances, accept her as a wife. The worthy minister had, however, forgotten that the Prince was entirely dependent upon his royal relative; that he had not yet been invested with any government or official post; and that he was young, ambitious, and high-spirited. Bassompierre bears testimony to his possession of the latter quality by his assurance that, important as the favour of the monarch could not fail to be to the young Prince in his peculiar position, he did not finally give his personal consent to the alliance until he had obtained a solemn declaration from Henry of the perfect purity of his proffered bride.

It is very singular that throughout all the details given of this affair by contemporary writers, no mention is made of the measures adopted by the King to induce or to enforce the violation of the plighted word of the Connétable to Bassompierre. Even he himself is totally silent upon the subject, whence we are compelled to infer that the will of the sovereign was considered to be beyond appeal, and that his sole pleasure exonerated the Duc de Montmorency from his voluntary engagement. The whole transaction, indeed, is so entangled and incomprehensible, particularly when the high rank of all the persons concerned in it is considered, that it betrays an amount of recklessness and tyranny on the part of the King which it is difficult to realize in our own times.

Mézeray asserts that it was in order to compel the affections of Mademoiselle de Montmorency through her gratitude, that Henry resolved to unite her to the first Prince of the Blood, and thus elevate her to the highest rank at Court save that of the Queen. Be this as it may, it is certain that he prevailed over the reluctance of both parties, and that a week subsequently to the interview described the Prince de Condé declared his willingness to accept the bride proposed to him by the sovereign; while having a short time afterwards met a number of the great nobles at the levée of the King, he personally invited them to assist at his betrothal that same evening. Among others he thus addressed Bassompierre, who replied only by a low and ceremonious salutation. Henry had, however, remarked the circumstance, and beckoning the Marquis to his side, he inquired what had passed between them.

"Monseigneur suggested, Sire, a step which I am not inclined to take."

"And what was that?" demanded the King.

"That I should accompany him to witness his betrothal. Is he not old enough to go alone? and can he not be affianced without my presence? For thus much I can answer, that if he have no other companion than myself, his suite will be a small one."

"Nevertheless, Bassompierre, you must be there," said Henry imperiously.

Marie de Medicis

"I cannot, Sire," expostulated his companion. "I entreat of you not to insist on my compliance, as I shall be driven to disobey you. Let it suffice that I have sacrificed a passion which had become the very principle of my existence in order to secure your peace and happiness, and do not ask me to become the witness of my own bitter disappointment."

"The King, who was the best of men," pursues the chronicler, "simply replied: 'I plainly see, Bassompierre, that you are angry, but I feel sure that you will not fail when you remember that it was my nephew, the first Prince of the Blood, by whom you were invited.'"

Further expostulation was impossible, and Bassompierre saw himself compelled to drain even to the very dregs his cup of mortification. The ceremony took place in the gallery of the Louvre with almost fabulous pomp. Mademoiselle de Montmorency was attended by all the Princesses of the Blood, and took her place immediately beside the Queen, while the Prince stood upon the right hand of the King; who, being still feeble, with a refinement of cruelty which it is equally difficult to explain and to justify, selected Bassompierre upon whom to lean, and thus kept him throughout the whole of the ceremonial in the immediate vicinity of the affianced pair.

A few days after the ceremony a ballet was danced at the Arsenal in honour of the event, at which their Majesties and all the Court were present; and on Shrove Tuesday a tilting at the ring took place, where Mademoiselle de Montmorency delivered the prize to the victor. The Queen, who had remarked with apprehension the growing passion of her royal consort for the young Princess, was overjoyed at the contemplated marriage, believing as she did that she must have been self-deluded, as it was beyond credibility that, had she been correct in her surmises, Henry would have sought to unite the object of his preference to his own nephew. Thus, therefore, she overwhelmed the bride-elect with the most condescending kindness, and even arranged a ballet in her honour in which she herself appeared. "It was," says Bassompierre, "at once the most beautiful and the last in which she ever danced."

On Tuesday the 10th of March the marriage took place at Chantilly in the presence of their Majesties and the whole Court; and if the cheek of the bride were pale, and the lip of the gallant Bassompierre trembled, during the ceremony which made Charlotte de Montmorency the wife of another, all the other actors in the brilliant drama were too fully occupied with their respective parts to heed the silent emotion of the sufferers. The King presented as his offering to the lady two thousand crowns for the purchase of her *trousseau*, and jewels of the value of eighteen thousand livres; while he gave to the Prince a large amount both in plate and money. The Queen was also profuse in her generosity, and several days were spent in the most splendid festivities, after which the royal party returned to Paris, whither they were shortly followed by the Prince and Princesse de Condé, on whose arrival a grand ball was given by the ex-Queen Marguerite, where Henry was once more enthralled by the exquisite dancing of the graceful bride, and so unequivocally betrayed his admiration as to renew all the slumbering apprehensions of the unfortunate Queen.

It was soon evident, however, that M. de Condé was by no means prepared to lend-himself to the licentious views of the King, and he maintained so strict a guard over his beautiful young wife that neither sarcasm nor reproach could induce him to relax his vigilance. This opposition only served to aggravate the unhappy passion of the monarch, while the indignation of the Prince and the anger of the Queen were, although from a different motive, similarly excited; and in the month of July, during the festivities which took place on the marriage of the Duc de Vendôme with Mademoiselle de Mercoeur, the advances of the monarch to the wife of his nephew became so undisguised that the latter openly resented so great an insult to his honour; a crime for which he was immediately punished by the revocation of all the grants made to him on the occasion of his marriage, and he was thus reduced to comparative poverty. This extreme and wanton severity produced a diametrically opposite effect to that which had been anticipated by the King, the Prince instantly feeling that he had been wronged as well as insulted; while the Queen, alarmed by the evident progress of this new and fatal passion, which must, should it ultimately prove successful, overwhelm the monarch with disgrace and remorse from the near consanguinity of the parties, did not fail to

urge upon M. de Condé in the most energetic manner the necessity of preserving alike his own honour and that of the King by removing his wife from the Court. This advice found support on all sides, as those who made it a matter of conscience trembled at the idea of the scandal which must ensue; while others, who merely sought to annoy the sovereign without any regard for his reputation, still saw their purpose answered by the proposed departure of the Princess.

Difficult as it was for the Prince to consent to a separation from his beautiful young bride, the perseverance of Henry soon convinced him that he had no other alternative, and he accordingly caused her to quit the capital, and to take up her temporary abode at Saint-Valery; but the remonstrances of the monarch were so earnest, and he succeeded so thoroughly in concealing his indignation against M. de Condé personally, that for a time he flattered himself that he should be enabled to effect her recall. Upon this point, however, the Prince was firm; and as day after day went by without eliciting the obedience which he had anticipated, the entreaties of the King were exchanged for threats. Nor did Henry rest satisfied even with this show of displeasure towards his young kinsman, for, resolved to ascertain if he should not be more favourably received by the Princess herself, he assumed a disguise, and proceeded with a few attendants to the place of her retreat in order to obtain an interview. On ascertaining this fact M. de Condé removed her to Muret, but the pursuit of the King was so resolute that the harassed bridegroom ultimately found himself compelled to choose between his ruin and his dishonour.

His first measure was to change the residence of the Princess from Saint-Valery to his château at Breteuil, and to expostulate with her upon the encouragement which she gave by her levity to the advances of the monarch; but as some time passed without any further cause for alarm, the Prince at length began to feel greater confidence, and in the month of November joined a hunting expedition which compelled him to absent himself from his wife, a circumstance that was forthwith communicated to Henry, who immediately assumed a second disguise and proceeded to Breteuil. M. de Condé had, however, been careful to establish a strict watch over his household, and being apprised in his turn of the royal visit, he suddenly returned, and the disappointed monarch was compelled to leave the château.

Madame de Verneuil, to whom the adventure was soon made known, and who, despite the extreme precariousness of her position, never failed to revenge herself upon the King whenever an opportunity presented itself, related the whole story in his presence during a Court reception, only suppressing the name of the adventurous lover; an indiscretion which so offended and alarmed the Prince that he determined to emancipate himself from the threatened disgrace.

He felt that he had but one alternative, for he was too high-spirited to condescend to disgrace, whatever might be the penalty of his resistance; and driven at length to an expedient which wounded his pride, but which he found it impossible to reject, he affected to be determined by the anger of the monarch, and requested permission to go in person to conduct the Princess back to Court. This was instantly and joyfully conceded, and M. de Condé no sooner found himself free to act than he set forth; but, instead of returning to Paris as Henry had anxiously anticipated, he took the precaution to have relays of post-horses secretly secured all along the road to the Low Countries.

On his arrival at Muret the Prince lost not a moment in causing the Princess to enter a carriage drawn by eight horses which he had provided for the purpose, and at once proceeded to Flanders by way of Artois. The dread of dishonour, coupled with the fear of arrest upon the road, lent wings to his speed; and without once alighting the Prince and his fair companion reached Landrecies; the entire suite of the first Prince and Princess of the Blood comprising on this occasion only Messieurs de Rochefort and de Tournay, and Mademoiselle de Certeau, with a valet and a femme-de-chambre, who followed on horseback.

The news of their flight reached Fontainebleau on the following evening, while the Queen was still convalescent (having given birth to her third and last daughter, Henriette Marie, on the 26th of November), and the King was endeavouring to employ the interval which must ensue before the arrival of the Princess by pursuing with renewed ardour his favourite

pastime. Pimentello, the hated of Sully, had returned to Court, and the play was consequently "fast and furious." It was in the very height of this maddening excitement, when he was surrounded by piles of gold, and devotees as earnest as himself at the same shrine discreetly assembled in his private closet, that Henry, whose spirits were exalted by his hopes, and who was risking sum after sum with a recklessness which would have taken away the breath of his finance minister, received from M. d'Elbène, and subsequently from his lieutenant of police, the important and mortifying intelligence that his destined prey had escaped him. The agitation which the King exhibited when convinced of the truth of this report exceeded any that he had hitherto evinced even upon the most important occasions, and hastily rising from the table, he murmured in the ear of Bassompierre who was seated next to him, "Ah! my friend, I am lost. The man has taken his wife into the depths of a forest. I know not if it be to escape with her from France, or to put her to death. Take care of my money, and keep up the play until I have procured more certain and detailed information."

From his closet Henry proceeded to the last place on earth which might, under the circumstances, have been anticipated. He went straight to the chamber of the Queen, where her Majesty was still unable to leave her bed, and there he gave full scope to the anguish under which he was labouring. "Never," says Bassompierre, "did I see a man so lost or so overcome." In the room were also assembled the Marquis de Coeuvres, the Comte de Cramail, and MM. d'Elbène and de Loménie, with whom he unscrupulously discussed, in the presence of his outraged wife, the readiest means of compelling the immediate return of the fugitives. As may naturally be anticipated, the advice likely to prove the most flattering to his wishes was offered on all sides, and a thousand expedients were suggested and discussed only to be found unfeasible, until the King, in despair, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, resolved upon summoning his ministers. Accordingly MM. de Sillery, de Villeroy, de Jeannin, and de Sully soon joined the party, which had, moreover, been augmented by the presence of several of the most confidential friends of the monarch, among others by De Gêvres, De la Force, and La Varenne; and once more the King sought a solution of the difficulty. Here, however, the judgment and policy of the several councillors differed upon every point. The Chancellor gave it as his opinion that a strong declaration should be made against the step taken by the Prince himself, and another equally stringent against those by whom he should be aided and abetted in his evasion; M. de Villeroy advised that despatches should forthwith be forwarded to the several ambassadors of the French King at foreign Courts to warn the sovereigns of those states against receiving the fugitive Prince within their territories, and to exhort them to take measures for enforcing his return to France; M. de Jeannin declared that the most expeditious method of compelling obedience, and forestalling the inconvenience and scandal of the self-expatriation of the first Prince of the Blood, would be to cause him to be immediately followed by a captain of the bodyguard, instructed to expostulate with him on his disloyalty and imprudence, and to threaten instant war against any state by whom he should be harboured; while when Sully at length spoke it was only to deprecate each and all of these measures, by which he insisted that the monarch would give an importance to the departure of the Prince that his enemies would but too gladly turn to their own account; whereas, if he made no comment upon the flight of M. de Condé, and treated it as a matter without importance, he would at once render him insignificant in the eyes of those sovereigns who would fain look upon him as a martyr, and use him as a means to harass and annoy his own monarch.

Henry was, however, too much excited to defer to the sober reasonings of his finance minister, and declared that he would suffer no petty prince to harbour the first noble of his kingdom without resenting so gross an affront. The advice of Jeannin suited his views far better, and he accordingly despatched M. de Praslin on the following day to Landrecies with a peremptory order for the return of the fugitives. His messenger was met by a firm refusal on the part of the Prince; upon which, finding that his expostulations were of no avail, he proceeded, as he had been ordered, to Brussels, where, in an interview with the Archduke Albert, he delivered to him the message of his sovereign, and explained the danger of the position in which he would personally be placed should he venture to oppose the royal will.

This intelligence greatly embarrassed the Archduke, who had already given to M. de Rochefort an assurance of the readiness with which he would offer an asylum to the princely

fugitives; but as M. de Praslin continued to press upon him the certain indignation of the French monarch should he venture to receive them at his Court, his previous resolution gave way; and he hastened to despatch a messenger to Landrecies to decline the honour proffered to him by M. de Condé, but at the same time to assure him of a safe passage through his territories. On the receipt of this unexpected prohibition the self-exiled Prince, who had gone too far to recede, had no other alternative than to proceed through the duchy of Juliers to Cologne; in which, being a free city, and perfectly neuter in the affairs of France and Spain, the chief magistrate granted him permission to reside.

Although the Prince de Condé had been refused a retreat in Flanders, the Archduke willingly yielded to the request of the Princess that she might be permitted to reside for a time in Brussels, until the final abode of her husband should be decided; and she accordingly arrived in that city under his escort, where the illustrious couple were received with great ceremony and cordiality by the Papal Nuncio and the other dignitaries of the town. Their arrival was no sooner known than Philip of Orange and his Princess (the sister of M. de Condé) hastened from Breda to welcome them; and they were followed a few days afterwards by the Archduke and Archduchess, by whom the royal fugitives were entertained with all the honour due to their exalted rank, and their unmerited misfortunes. The Prince then took his departure for Cologne, while the fair cause of his flight remained in the Flemish capital under the protection of her new friends.

Marie de Medicis had, meanwhile, no sooner ascertained that the embassy of M. de Praslin had been successful, and that the self-expatriated pair had been denied a refuge in the Low Countries, than she addressed a letter to the Marquis de Spinola, entreating him to cause a revocation of the denial, and representing how entirely her domestic peace depended upon the absence of the Princesse de Condé; an absence which could not fail to be abridged by the necessity of residing in a city like Cologne, where the ardent spirit of the Prince could not but revolt at the tedium around him. The effect of her appeal was all that she had anticipated, strengthening as it did the preconceived measures of the confidential minister of Philip III, who hastened to represent to that monarch the gross error into which the Archduke had fallen, and the favourable opportunity which he had thus lost of retorting upon Henry the protection that he had accorded to Don Antonio Perez, a traitor to his sovereign and to his country; and of securing to the Court of Spain the advantage which it must have derived from having in its power, and securing to its interests, the first Prince of the Blood in France. His arguments proved conclusive, the jealousy of Philip always prompting him to lend a willing ear to every project by which he might be enabled to accomplish any triumph over the French monarch; and accordingly instructions were forwarded to the Archduke to repair his fault without delay, by inviting the Prince to rejoin his bride at Brussels. Little as the sovereign of the Low Countries was disposed to involve himself in a war with France, he did not hesitate to comply with the injunction. He placed so firm a reliance on the support of Spain in the event of hostilities, and had been so long accustomed to conform to her counsels, that he immediately made known to M. de Condé his change of resolution, and declared himself ready to receive him whenever he should see fit to return to his territories; while at the same time he wrote to apprise the French King of what he had done, assuring him that the permission granted to the fugitive Prince involved no want of respect for himself or of deference to his wishes, but had been accorded in the full persuasion of his ultimate approval.

The Spanish minister also despatched a messenger to the Prince, declaring that he was at liberty to take up his abode in the Low Countries, where he would be treated in a manner worthy of his birth and dignity, and, under the protection of the King his master, be assured of safety and respect. M. de Condé gladly availed himself of this permission, and a short time subsequently established himself in the palace of his sister, the Princess of Orange.

Enraged at this open violation of his wishes, and still reluctant to commence a war which he was conscious would rather owe its origin to private feeling than to national expediency, Henry resolved, as a last resource, to invest M. de Coeuvres with full powers to treat with the revolted Prince; and for this purpose he furnished him with an autograph letter, in which he assured the fugitive of an unreserved pardon in the event of his immediate return

to France; but threatened, should he persist in his contumacy, to declare him guilty of the crime of *lèse-majesté*. M. de Condé simply replied to this missive by a declaration of his innocence, and his respect for the person of the King, and by protesting against all that might be done to prejudice his interests; nor did the interviews which took place between himself and the royal envoy prove more satisfactory, although the Marquis exerted all his eloquence to induce him to comply with the will of the sovereign. Moreover, the letter of Henry, instead of exciting his confidence, had rendered the Prince more suspicious than ever of the designs of the monarch; and he accordingly left Brussels, where he no longer considered himself safe, at the end of February (1610), and took refuge at Milan with the Condé de Fuentes, the governor of that city.

More than one rumour had meanwhile reached the Archduchess that Madame de Condé was by no means so indifferent to the degrading passion of the King as was befitting to her honour, and the Princess was accordingly soon made sensible that her sojourn at Brussels had degenerated into a species of ceremonious imprisonment. Naturally vain and volatile, dazzled by the consciousness that she had become a sort of heroine, and moreover saddened by her memories of the brilliant existence from which she had been so suddenly shut out, the widowed bride would gladly have followed her husband to the gayer city of Milan, even wounded as she was by his indifference and coldness, rather than remain at the austere Court of the pious Infanta, where she was aware that her words and actions were subjected to the closest scrutiny; but the will of her father compelled her to remain at Brussels, the Connétable being apprehensive, from the marked neglect and suspicion evinced towards her by the Prince, that this latter might endeavour to remove her beyond the reach of her friends in order to hold her more completely in his power. Under this impression her father had consequently insisted upon her residence at the Archducal Court, and had instructed her to solicit the influence of the Infanta, and to employ every means in her own power, to prevent M. de Condé from effecting her removal in the event of his finding it himself expedient to leave Flanders.

Not satisfied with this precaution, moreover, M. de Montmorency also demanded an audience of the King, in which he laid before him the apprehensions that he entertained; and finally he entreated his Majesty's permission to compel his daughter to return to France, and to take up her residence with the Duchesse d'Angoulême, her aunt. Henry made a ready and gracious reply to this request, and before he finally retired from the royal closet, the Connétable asked and obtained the royal sanction to authorize the Marquis de Coeuvres to concert with him some scheme for carrying off the Princess.

M. de Coeuvres had no sooner received these instructions than he admitted to his confidence Madame de Berny, the wife of the French Ambassador at the Flemish Court (who from political reasons was himself kept in ignorance of the plot), and M. de Châteauneuf, who was at that period residing in Brussels on a special mission from his Government; and the quasi-conspirators were not long ere they flattered themselves that their success was certain.

Near the palace of the Prince of Orange, in which Madame de Condé had taken up her residence, was a breach in the city wall by which it was easy to descend into the moat; and it was decided that the Princess should effect her escape from this point during the night. Saddled horses were to be prepared for herself and her retinue near the outer bank of the ditch, and nothing remained undecided save the moment of her evasion. She was to proceed at all speed to Pontarmé, where a relay of fresh horses and an armed escort were to await her arrival, and similar arrangements were to be made throughout the whole of the route to Rocroy. Finally, the precise night of her flight was decided on; and this had no sooner been determined than M. de Coeuvres despatched a courier to the Connétable, informing him that there now remained no doubt of the immediate return of the Princess to his protection.

This intelligence reached Paris on the Wednesday, and the following Saturday was the period fixed for the projected evasion, a fact which M. de Montmorency had no sooner ascertained than he hastened to communicate the success of M. de Coeuvres to the King. Henry was overjoyed, and in the fulness of his satisfaction was guilty of an indiscretion which was fated to overthrow his hopes; for, believing that in so short a time no effectual measures

could be taken to frustrate the plot, he was incautious enough to confide the whole conspiracy to the Queen, who was still an invalid, not having yet recovered from the birth of her third daughter. Agitated and alarmed, Marie listened to the narrative with an earnest attention, which only tended to render her royal consort more communicative than he might otherwise have been; and, in the excess of his self-gratulation, he moreover exhibited such unequivocal proofs of the interest which he personally felt in the result of the evasion, that she at once resolved to prevent the reappearance of the Princess in France. The King had accordingly no sooner quitted her apartment than she desired Madame Concini to bring her kinsman the Nuncio Ubaldini to her private closet without losing an instant, a command which was so zealously obeyed by her favourite that she was enabled, after a prolonged conference with this ecclesiastic, to despatch a courier secretly to Spinola the same night to acquaint him with the projected design, and to entreat him to frustrate it should there yet be time.

The royal messenger travelled so rapidly that he reached Brussels at eleven o'clock on the morning of Saturday, and Spinola had no sooner read the despatch than he hastened to communicate its contents to the Archduke and the Infanta, who instantly sent a company of the light horse of the bodyguard to possess themselves of all the approaches to the palace of the Prince of Orange. This done, their Imperial Highnesses next caused several state carriages to be prepared, which were placed under the charge of one of the principal officers of their household, who received directions to invite Madame de Condé in their joint names to take immediate possession of a suite of rooms in the Archducal palace which they desired to appropriate to her use and that of her suite, as better suited to the dignity of her high rank than those which she then inhabited. He was, moreover, instructed to accept no denial, but to insist upon the compliance of the Princess; and thus armed the courtier proceeded to the Hôtel d'Orange, where he communicated the subject of his mission to Madame de Condé in the presence of her two confidants. The consternation of the whole party may be imagined when, just as they conceived themselves secure of success, they thus discovered that their design had been betrayed; nor was it until the Princess had exhausted every subterfuge she could invent that she found herself compelled to accompany the Archducal envoy. It was in vain that she represented the greater propriety of her residence under the roof of her husband's sister during that husband's absence; she was assured that she would find the palace equally eligible and far more worthy of her occupation. She then pleaded her reluctance to intrude further upon the splendid hospitality of her princely hosts; her objection was met by an assurance that so eager were the sovereigns to receive her as a guest that they were even at that moment waiting in the greatest anxiety to bid her welcome, an intimation which served to convince Madame de Condé that she had no alternative save to submit to this polite tyranny, and that upon the instant. She accordingly summoned her attendants, and without having been permitted to hold any private communication with her equally discomfited friends, she entered the carriage assigned to her, and was rapidly driven to the palace.

The indignation of the Prince de Condé equalled the mortification of the King when he learnt the failure of the projected evasion; while the Marquis de Coeuvres and M. de Berny demanded an audience of the Archduke, at which they loudly complained of the insults to which the Princess had been subjected, and which were, as they alleged, calculated to strengthen the odious suspicions that had already been generated against the King their master. M. de Berny, who was entirely ignorant of the plot, was naturally the loudest in his denunciations of the violence offered to Madame de Condé, and the species of captivity to which she was condemned, when she had been led to expect nothing but consideration for her rank and sympathy for her misfortunes. He, moreover, assured the Archduke that nothing could be more wild and absurd than the idea of her flight, warmly demanding wherefore she was likely to leave a capital wherein she had hitherto been so well and so generously received.

The genuine indignation of the Ambassador produced as little effect upon the Archduke as the laboured arguments of M. de Coeuvres, and he contented himself by courteously regretting that an attention, intended to convey to the Princess the extent of the respect and friendship with which she had inspired him, should have been so ill-interpreted, adding, moreover, that far from disapproving the step which he had taken, he felt convinced that the French King would recognize in it only his earnest desire to do honour to the first Princess of

the Blood. Further argument was useless, the imperturbable composure of the Archduke totally overpowering the wordy violence of his interlocutors, who were eventually compelled to withdraw without having effected the restoration of Madame de Condé. On the return of the Marquis de Coeuvres to Paris, Henry, still believing that the Archduke would not venture to brave his displeasure by any further opposition to his will, accredited M. de Preau to the Court of Brussels, with instructions to demand the immediate return of the Princess in the joint names of the Duke her father and Madame d'Angoulême her aunt; but this new procuration was met by the Austrian Prince with the announcement that he had pledged himself to M. de Condé not to permit the Princess to leave Brussels without his consent, and that he consequently could not without dishonour forfeit his plighted word.

Exasperated by a firmness for which he was unprepared, and satisfied that the support of the Spanish Cabinet could alone have induced the Archduke thus to drive him to extremities, Henry at once resolved no longer to delay the hostilities which he had long meditated against Spain, and to which he was now urged as much by private feeling as by state policy. A sufficient pretext offered itself, moreover, in the efforts which had been made by several of the German Princes to possess themselves of the duchies of Clèves and Juliers; the death of Jean Guillaume, Duc de Clèves, Juliers, and Bergh, Comte de la Mark, and Lord of Ravenstein, which had occurred on the 25th of March, and the numerous claims made upon his succession, having rendered the ultimate disposition of his duchy a matter of extreme importance to Henry, who was reluctant to strengthen the power of Austria by permitting this increase of territory to pass definitely into her hands, as it had already partially done, the Emperor having hastened to place the duchy under sequestration.

The petty sovereigns thus despoiled protested energetically against such an usurpation, and several among them had even entreated the protection of France, to the great gratification of Henri IV, who thus found himself doubly armed, as his interference on behalf of the aggrieved Princes assured their cooperation in his own project of recovering from the Emperor the provinces of Franche-Comté and Flanders, which had been in the possession of Spain since the time of Charles V, and which had formed, as we have elsewhere stated, the dowry of the Infanta on her marriage with the Archduke Albert. Thus in the eyes of Europe the French King was about to engage in this new war simply to enforce justice to himself and his allies; but it was so evident to all who considered the subject that these pretensions might have been put down at once by the slightest show of resistance on his own part, and that so comparatively unimportant a campaign might prudently have been entrusted to one of his many able generals, that when it became known that an army of forty thousand infantry, six thousand Swiss, the bodyguard, and a corps of four [pg 446] thousand mounted nobles, together with a strong park of artillery, were about to take the field under the command of the King in person, there were few individuals acquainted with the circumstances which we have just narrated who did not feel convinced that the monarch was rather about to undertake a crusade for the deliverance of the Princesse de Condé than a war for the preservation of his territories.

This opinion was, moreover, strengthened by the fact that throughout all these hostile preparations Henry did not discontinue his negotiations for the return of Madame de Condé to France. He pleaded the authority of her father, the anxiety of her more than mother the Duchesse d'Angoulême, his own authority over his subjects, the inclination of the Princess herself to be once more under the protection of her family; but all these pretexts signally failed. Yet neither Henry nor his agent M. de Preau would yield to discouragement; passion on the one hand, and ambition on the other, lent them strength to persevere; and having exhausted their first scheme of attack, they next represented the necessity of her presence at the approaching coronation of the Queen, where it was important that she should occupy the position suited to her rank as first Princess of the Blood; and next they alleged the impossibility of furthering her views in the separation from her husband which she was about to demand, unless she were enabled personally to expose her reasons to the Parliament. Moreover, Madame de Condé had written to the French ministers to complain of violence and imprisonment, and the King insisted upon the necessity of her liberation.

Marie de Medicis

De Preau, however, zealous as he was, made no impression upon the firmness of the Archduke. The Spanish Cabinet had rendered itself responsible for his opposition, and he defied the menaces of France, a circumstance which decided Henry upon immediate war. The resolution which he had taken of heading the army in person determined him, before his departure from France, solemnly to invest the Queen with the title of Regent during his absence; but the precautions which he took to name an efficient Council by whom she was to be assisted in the government of the kingdom excited the indignation and resentment of her personal favourites, especially of Concini, who thus saw himself rendered powerless when he had hoped to assert his influence and to improve his fortunes; and under the pressure of this disappointment he hastened to represent to his royal mistress the utter emptiness of the dignity with which Henry proposed to invest her.

"You are an uncrowned Queen," he said, "and you are about to become a powerless Regent. Thus, Madame, you will be known by two high-sounding titles, neither of which will in reality appertain to you. Cause yourself to be crowned, and then you will indeed possess the authority which is your due and the honour of which you have heretofore been unjustly deprived. Cease to be a puppet in the hands of a faithless husband, and at least compel this coming war, undertaken for the recovery of new mistress, to be the means of establishing your own rightful position."

This advice was eagerly accepted by Marie, whose ambition had at length been aroused by a consideration of the failing health and advanced age of the King and the prospect afforded by the extreme youth of the Dauphin of a protracted minority, and she consequently hastened to express to Henry her earnest desire to feel herself in reality Queen of France before his departure from the kingdom, in order that she might not have to apprehend any neglect of her legitimate authority upon the part of the ministers whom he had selected to share with her the burthen of state affairs. The monarch, who had hitherto refused to listen to every suggestion which had been made to him of the propriety of showing this mark of consideration to his royal consort, was even less inclined to make the concession at this particular moment, when the expenses of his meditated campaign had been estimated at twelve hundred and fifty livres a month for the support of his own troops and an equal sum for those of his allies; and he replied with considerable warmth that she had chosen her time for such a request most injudiciously, since she must be aware that he had neither the time nor the funds necessary to the indulgence of so puerile a vanity. The Queen, however, urged by her advisers, resolutely returned to the charge, declaring that she could assume no prominent position in the temporary government of the kingdom while her own remained so vague and undefined. She reminded him, moreover, of the uncomplaining patience with which she had awaited his pleasure upon this particular; a patience which, as she asserted, she could still have exercised had he not been about to cross the frontier, but which, under existing circumstances, she now considered as weak and pusillanimous in the mother of three princes.

"At length, however," says Bassompierre, whose own more than questionable morality did not permit him to enact the censor upon his sovereign, "as he was the best husband in the world, he finished by giving his consent, and delayed his departure until she should have made her public entry into the capital."

On retiring to his closet the King declared to one or two of his confidential friends, as he had already done on former occasions when the same question had been mooted, that the actual cause of the repugnance which he felt to accede to the wishes of the Queen arose from a firm conviction that her coronation would cost him his life, and that he should never leave Paris in safety, as his enemies could only hope to triumph by depriving him of existence.

"Assuredly," pursues the quaint old chronicler from whom we have just quoted, "heaven and earth had given us only too many prognostics of what was to happen to him: it was in the year 1608 that a great eclipse nearly covered the whole body of the sun; in the preceding year 1607 that the terrible comet appeared; after which some three months or thereabout we had two earthquakes; then several monsters born in divers provinces of France; bloody rains that fell at Orleans and at Troyes; the great plague that afflicted Paris in the past year 1609; the

furious overflowing of the Loire; next the Curé of Montargis found upon the altar, when he went to celebrate the mass, a scroll by which he was informed that his Majesty would be killed by a determined blow, and the said Curé of Montargis carried the paper to the Due de Sully. Several conspiracies," he goes on to say, "must have been formed against the life of this good King, since from twenty quarters he received notice of it. The Pope Paul V sent him a courier express to warn him to be upon his guard, as very high and powerful ladies and some of the greatest nobles of his Court were involved in a plot against his life."

What reason the King may have supposed himself to possess for considering his own death to be consequent upon the coronation of Marie, or whether he did actually so combine the two events in his own mind, it were impossible for posterity to decide; but it is at least certain that Rambure himself is not singular in adducing extraordinary coincidences and in lending his support to these superstitious terrors, for it is on record that Cardinal Barberino, who subsequently (in 1623) became Pope under the title of Urban VIII, and who was, at the period of which we now write, celebrated for his acquaintance with the occult sciences, as well as for his skill in astrology, sent a message to the King in the month of January, by which he cautioned him not to sojourn in any large city throughout the whole of the year, but more especially during the months of March, April, May, June, and July; declaring that, should he disregard the warning, he would be assassinated by an unfrocked monk of saturnine temperament born in his own kingdom; and adding that he would do well carefully to ascertain whether any individual answering to this description were then residing within his dominions, in order that should such an one be discovered, he might be closely watched; and he, moreover, concluded by assuring the monarch that if he would submit to absent himself from all the great cities of his kingdom during the months specified, he (the Cardinal) would answer with his life that he should escape the threatened peril.

This intimation, extraordinary as it seems, was, however, insignificant beside another which reached Henry at the same period through the Marquis Dufresne, his ambassador at the Court of Constantinople, who was instructed by the Sultan to desire him to take off the heads of the six principal nobles of his nation immediately on the receipt of his letter, and to be upon his guard against the greatest lady in his dominions, as well as against three persons who were in her confidence, whom he advised him to imprison during their lives, the whole of them being implicated in the plot.

Both these communications may, however, find a probable solution in the circumstance of their having been made by individuals who had obtained information of a conspiracy against the life of the French King, a supposition rendered the more rational by the fact that although aware of the formidable army then organized in France, the Austrians made no preparation to resist a force which they were conscious was to be used against themselves; an inertness which could only be accounted for by the supposition that they were about to employ other and surer methods of evading the threatened evil. But in addition to these probably political prophecies, others of a still more singular nature were made to Henry of his approaching fate. A young female named Anne de Comans voluntarily declared that a fatal conspiracy had been organized, whose avowed object was to terminate the existence of the monarch by violence, and even after his death she persisted in maintaining the truth of her assertion, not only orally but in writing; for which persistence she was pronounced to be insane, and so closely confined in an asylum for lunatics as actually to become in a few months the madwoman which she had been represented, although it would appear that great doubts were entertained as to her previous hallucination. Six months before his death the King being in the house of Zamet retired immediately that he had dined to a private apartment, whence he sent to summon Thomassin, one of the most celebrated astrologers of the time, whom he interrogated respecting his own future destiny and that of his kingdom. In reply he was warned as usual to beware of the approaching month of May, and at length, irritated by his scepticism, the professor of the black art predicted to him not only the day but the very hour which was to terminate his existence.

A short time subsequently a nobleman of Béarn arrived in Paris and requested an audience of the King, which he had no sooner obtained than he informed him that he had been

instructed in a vision to seek his presence in order to warn him of his approaching death. Henry, however, who piqued himself in public upon denying credence to these supernatural revelations, and who, moreover, imagined that the object of his countryman was to obtain a recompense for his zeal, treated the matter lightly and ordered three hundred crowns to be presented to the stranger to defray his travelling expenses. This present he, however, respectfully refused, protesting that he had acted only upon a principle of duty, and that he should be amply recompensed should his warning suffice to induce the monarch to adopt such precautions as would enable him to escape the threatened peril.

Only a few nights previous to her coronation the Queen suddenly awoke from a profound slumber uttering a piercing shriek and trembling in every limb. Alarmed by her evident state of agony, the monarch, having at length succeeded in restoring her to a state of comparative composure, urged her to explain the cause of her terror, but for a considerable time she refused to yield to his entreaties. Overcome at last, however, by his evident anxiety and uneasiness, she informed him that she had just had a frightful dream, in which she had seen him fall under the knife of an assassin.

Two remarkable coincidences also demand mention, particularly as they occurred at a distance from the capital. On the day of the King's assassination his shield, bearing his blazon, which was attached to the principal entrance of the château of Pau in Béarn, fell heavily to the ground and broke to pieces; while immediately afterwards the cows of the royal herd, which had previously been grazing quietly in the park, began to low in a frightful manner, and suddenly the bull known as *the king* rushed violently against the gate whence the trophy had fallen and then sprang into the moat, where it was drowned. The effect produced upon the inhabitants of the district was instantaneous; loud and lamentable shouts of "The King is dead!" arose on all sides, and within two hours every Béarnais felt convinced that his beloved monarch had ceased to exist.

It is useless to multiply these strange tales; but it is certain that they did not fail in their effect upon the mind of the monarch, however he might struggle to conceal the feelings which they excited, for Bassompierre relates that during the preparations which were making for the coronation of the Queen, Henry repeatedly alluded to his approaching death with a sadness which evinced his entire belief in the predictions that had reached him.

"I know not wherefore, Bassompierre," he said on one occasion, "but I am persuaded that I shall never again see Germany, nor do I believe that you will go to Italy. I shall not live much longer."

On the 1st of May, when returning from the Tuileries by the great gallery to the Louvre, supported in consequence of his gout by the Duke de Guise and the narrator himself, he said on reaching the door of the Queen's closet to his two attendants, "Wait for me here. I will hasten the toilet of my wife that she may not keep my dinner waiting." He was of course obeyed, and the Duke and Bassompierre, in order to while away the time, walked to the balcony that overhung the court of the Louvre, against which they leant watching what passed below, when suddenly the great hawthorn which occupied the centre of the area swayed for an instant and then fell to the earth with a loud crash in the direction of the King's private staircase without any apparent agency, as not a breath of air was stirring, nor was any one near it at the time.

The impressionable imagination of Bassompierre was deeply moved. "Would," he exclaimed to his companion, "that any sacrifice on my part could have averted so dire a presage as this. God preserve the King!"

"You are mad," was the reply of the Duke, "to connect the fortunes of the King with the fall of a tree."

"It may be so," was the melancholy rejoinder; "but neither in Italy nor in Germany would this circumstance fail to produce alarm. Heaven guard the monarch, and all who are near and dear to him!"

Marie de Medicis

"You are two fools to amuse yourselves with these absurd prognostics," said Henry, who had approached them unheard during their momentary excitement. "For the last thirty years all the astrologers and mountebanks in the kingdom, as well as a host of other impostors, have predicted at given intervals that I was about to die, so that when the time comes some of these prophecies must prove correct and will be quoted as miracles, while all the false ones will be studiously forgotten."

The young nobles received the rebuke in silence; but the inexplicable accident which had just occurred was sufficient in so superstitious an age to arouse the liveliest forebodings in the minds of those by whom it was witnessed.

CHAPTER IX

1610

Having resolved that the coronation of the Queen should take place before his departure for Germany, and being anxious to commence the projected campaign with the least possible delay, Henry named the 5th of May as the day on which the ceremony was to be performed; but having learnt from a private despatch that the Archduke had resolved at the eleventh hour not to incur the hazard of a war with France upon so frivolous a pretext as the forcible retention of a Princess, who moreover, remained under his charge against her own free will, and that Madame de Condé was accordingly about to return to the French Court, he resolved to defer the pageant until the advent of the fair fugitive who would, as he felt, constitute its brightest ornament. The succeeding courier from the Low Countries, however, dispelled this brilliant vision. Whatever might have been the personal inclination of the Archduke, Philip of Spain determined to retain his hostage; and the return of the Princess to France was interdicted. Enraged by the deceit which had been practised upon him, but unwilling to forfeit his word to the Queen, Henry had no alternative save to order the instant renewal of the preparations which he had himself suspended; and despite the entreaties of the municipal authorities of Paris, who represented the impossibility of completing their arrangements before the end of the month, he persisted in his resolution of causing the Queen to be crowned on the 13th, and commanded her public entry into Paris for the following Sunday.

On the 11th (Tuesday) he said to those around him, "I shall sleep at St. Denis tomorrow night, and return to Paris on Thursday; I shall arrange all my private affairs on Friday; on Saturday I shall drive about the city; Sunday will be the state entry of the Queen; on Monday my daughter De Vendôme will be married; on Tuesday the banquet will take place; and on Wednesday I mount for Germany."

The Court accordingly slept at St. Denis on the night of the 12th, in order to be in readiness for the ceremony of the morrow; and the morning of the eventful day which was to witness the crowning triumph of Marie de Medicis at length dawned. A brilliant spring sun robed the earth in brightness; but nowhere did it light up a scene of greater magnificence than when, filtered through the windows of stained glass, it poured itself in a living mosaic over the marble pavement of the cathedral, and flashed upon the sumptuous hangings and golden draperies which were distributed over the spacious area of the edifice. Immediately in front of the high altar a platform had been erected eleven feet in height, and upwards of twenty feet square, in the centre of which was a daïs richly carpeted, supporting the throne of the Queen, covered with crimson velvet embroidered with *fleurs-de-lis* in gold, and overshadowed by a canopy of the same material. On either side of this throne two other platforms were appropriated to the Princes of the Blood, the Knights of the several Orders, the Gentlemen of the Bedchamber, the great nobles, the foreign ambassadors, and the ladies of the Queen's household. Within the altar-rail on the left hand, a bench draped with cloth of gold was prepared for the cardinals; and behind this was a second bench reserved for the archbishops, bishops, and other ecclesiastics who were to assist at the ceremony; while on the same side of the shrine stood a table overlaid by a costly drapery, upon which were to be deposited the crown, the coronet, the sceptre, the hand of justice, and the ring destined to be employed during the ceremony. On the right hand of the altar was placed a *prie-dieu* covered with violet velvet bordered and fringed with gold, upon which were placed two cushions of the same material for the use of the Cardinal de Joyeuse, who was to officiate; and behind this was a table corresponding with that on the left, and covered by a similar drapery, supporting the bread, wine, and waxen tapers which the master of the ceremonies was instructed to deliver to the ladies who were selected to make the offering for the Queen.

Marie de Medicis

The floor of the choir extending from the principal platform to the high altar was carpeted with crimson velvet edged with gold; and above this was stretched a second drapery of cloth of gold for the passage of her Majesty; myriads of lights were grouped about the lateral shrines, the carved columns of the venerable edifice were veiled by magnificent hangings, and the gorgeous vestments of the prelates cumbered the open presses of the sacristy.

An hour after dawn a compact crowd peopled the vast interior of St. Denis; persons of all ranks, from the artizan to the petty noble and his family, rushed tumultuously towards the sacred edifice, in order to secure a sight of the august solemnity; and great was the surprise of all to find themselves already preceded by the King, who came and went throughout the early part of the morning, superintending every arrangement in person, and apparently overlooking his bodily ailments in the extraordinary excitement under which he laboured.

The Dauphin, Madame the elder Princess, the ex-Queen Marguerite, the Princes of the Blood, and great dignitaries who were summoned to assist at the ceremony, accompanied by the Cardinals de Gondy and de Sourdis, proceeded at an early hour to the Louvre to conduct the Queen to the cathedral; and it was no sooner announced that her Majesty was prepared to set forth than the procession formed.

The ceremonial had not, however, been definitively arranged without considerable difficulty. Marguerite, who, whatever might be her errors, could not contemplate her presence at this solemnity as a mere spectator without considerable heart-burning, considered herself aggrieved by the fact that instead of following immediately behind the Queen, she was to be preceded by Madame Elisabeth, still a mere child; and so great was her indignation at this discovery, that she was very reluctantly induced to abandon her intention of pretexting illness, and absenting herself entirely from the pageant. The earnest remonstrances of her friends, who represented to her the certainty of the King's serious displeasure, alone determined her to sacrifice her dignity; and although she ultimately consented to submit to an arrangement which she considered as an encroachment upon her rights as the daughter of a long line of sovereigns, rather than draw down upon herself the resentment of the monarch, she wept bitterly while she prepared to swell the retinue of her successor. The Comte de Soissons was less compliant; for it was no sooner announced to him that the Duchesse de Vendôme, the wife of the King's natural son, was to appear in a mantle embroidered with *fleurs-de-lis* similar to those worn by the Princesses of the Blood, than he loudly declared that he would not countenance so disgraceful an innovation; and having ordered his household to prepare for an instant departure from Paris, he left the capital with the Princess his wife, and retired to one of his country seats.

Despite this secession, however, the suite of Marie de Medicis was one of supreme magnificence. The procession was opened by the Swiss Guards, habited in velvet vests of her own colours, tawny, blue, crimson, and white; then followed two companies, each composed of a hundred nobles, the first wearing habiliments of tawny-coloured satin braided with gold, and the second pourpoints of white satin and breeches of tawny colour; these were succeeded by the Lords of the Bedchamber, chamberlains, and other great officers of the royal household, superbly attired; who were, in their turn, followed by the Knights of the Holy Ghost wearing the collar of their Order. A body of trumpeters walked after them richly dressed in blue velvet; and then came the heralds in full armour, and the Ushers of the Chamber with their maces.

When these had passed the more important personages of the procession issued from the gates of the Louvre; and the glorious spring sun flashed upon the jewelled caps and capes of the Princes of the Blood, glistened over their vests of cloth of gold, and toyed with the gemmed hilts of their diamond-studded weapons. Preceding the Queen were the Prince de Conti and the Comte d'Anquien; while immediately before her walked the Dauphin clad in a habit of cloth of silver, profusely ornamented with precious stones; and then came Marie herself, in the full glory of conscious dignity and triumph, wearing a coronet of jewels, a richly-gemmed stomacher, a surcoat of ermine, and a royal mantle seven French ells in length, composed of purple velvet embroidered with *fleurs-de-lis* in gold and diamonds, and bordered with ermine, which was borne on either side of her by the two Cardinals, and at its extremity

Marie de Medicis

by the Dowager Princess of Condé, the Princesse de Conti, the Dowager Duchess of Montpensier, and the Duchesse de Mercoeur; whose trains were in like manner supported by four nobles habited in cloth of gold and silver, and covered with jewels.

Then followed Madame Elisabeth de France and the ex-Queen Marguerite, wearing mantles covered with *fleurs-de-lis* embroidered in gold, carried by four nobles richly attired, with their capes and caps laced with jewels; and the gorgeous train was finally closed by the Princesses of the Blood and Duchesses, whose trains were in like manner borne by some of the principal noblemen of the Court. All these ladies wore their coronets enriched with pearls and diamonds, save such as were widows, to whom the use of gems was interdicted by the fashion of the age.

To these succeeded the ladies of the Queen's household, among whom the Marquise de Guercheville and Madame de Concini excited the most curiosity; the latter from the high favour which she enjoyed, and the extraordinary elevation to which it had conduced; and the former from a cause infinitely more honourable to her as a woman. While the widow of her first husband, Henri de Silly, Comte de la Rochepot, her grace and beauty attracted Henri IV, who pertinaciously endeavoured to win her affections. His degrading suit was, however, so resolutely although respectfully rejected, that the King, impressed by her merit, on one occasion declared that the title which would be the most applicable to her would be that of a lady of honour, and that such she should become whenever another Queen ascended the throne of France. The Marquise curtsied her thanks, without attaching any importance to so very prospective a distinction; but six years subsequently, when the Court of Marie de Medicis was formed, the promised appointment was conferred upon her; and she fulfilled the duties of her office with a dignified and unobtrusive zeal which secured to her the esteem and respect of her royal mistress.

Thus escorted, Marie de Medicis entered the cathedral; where, having been conducted to the front of the high altar, she knelt upon a cushion near which stood the Cardinal de Joyeuse in his pontifical robes, surrounded by a group of high ecclesiastical dignitaries, and supported by the Cardinal Duperron. When the Queen had concluded her prayer, and kissed the reliquary which was presented to her by Mgr. de Joyeuse, she was led to her throne in the same state as that with which she had approached the altar; and she had no sooner taken her place than the Dauphin seated himself in the chair which had been prepared for him; and Madame and the ex-Queen, followed by the Princesses of the Blood and the great ladies of the Court, after having successively made a profound curtsy to the Queen, followed his example. This done, the Cardinals de Gondy and de Sourdis descended from the platform, and took up their position on the left of the altar, while the Princes were marshalled to their places by the royal ushers; and meanwhile the musicians of her Majesty performed divers melodies suited to the place and the occasion.

After the lapse of a few moments the two Cardinals again ascended the platform to reconduct her Majesty to the altar, which she reached in the same order as she had previously done, save that the Dauphin now walked on her right hand and Madame Elisabeth upon her left. Having knelt as before in silent prayer, she was ultimately raised by the Prince and Princess, and stood with her head bowed upon her breast while the Cardinal de Joyeuse commenced the appropriate orisons, and received from the hand of two of the bishops the vase containing the holy oil, and the platen. Having poured out a portion of the former, the prelate anointed the Queen upon the head and chest; after which he received from a third bishop the consecrated ring, which he placed upon her finger.

The sceptre and the hand of justice were then tendered to him, and transferred to the august recipient; and finally the crown of state was presented upon a cushion, and held above her head by the Dauphin and Madame Elisabeth, by whom it was subsequently consigned to the keeping of the Prince de Conti, while another of smaller size, enriched with a profusion of diamonds, rubies, and pearls of immense value, was placed upon her brow; and Marie de Medicis at length stood in the midst of her assembled Court the crowned and anointed Queen of France.

Marie de Medicis

A vigorous flourish of trumpets proclaimed the termination of the ceremony. Marie resigned the sceptre and the hand of justice to the two Princes who stood next to her, and once more ascended the throne; where she was no sooner seated than M. de Conti placed before her the crown of state which he had carried upon a stool covered with cloth of gold, and knelt beside it. The Prince who bore the sceptre then assumed the same attitude on the right hand of the Queen, and his companion carrying the hand of justice upon her left. A solemn high mass was next performed, and at its close the herald-at-arms cast, in the Queen's name, a shower of gold and silver coin among the crowds who thronged the church; while Marie herself, descending from the platform, and attended as before, slowly left the sacred edifice and returned to the robing-room.

The King, who had witnessed the whole ceremony from his private tribune, was more rapid in his movements, and hastened to regain his chamber; whence he watched the brilliant procession as it advanced with an undisguised delight that was inexplicable to those who were aware of the reluctance with which he had yielded to the desire of the Queen, and who had consequently anticipated no demonstration on his part save one of irritation and annoyance. Greatly, therefore, were they surprised when, as she passed beneath the window at which he had taken up his station, they saw him scatter some perfumed water on her head in order to induce her to look up; after which he hurriedly descended the great staircase to receive and welcome her, and with every possible exhibition of affection and respect conducted her to the hall in which the banquet had been prepared.

Throughout this sumptuous repast the gaiety of the monarch excited the comments of all by whom he was surrounded; and it was generally remarked that he had not for many months yielded to such an effervescence of spirits. At length, however, the festival drew to its close; lords and ladies were alike overwhelmed by the fatigues of the past day; and their Majesties, having taken a gracious leave of their illustrious guests, entered one of the royal carriages and proceeded to the Louvre.

The numerous foreigners who had assembled from every part of Europe in order to witness the ceremony were lost in astonishment at the profusion of jewels displayed upon the occasion, declaring that they had never before witnessed such a spectacle; and that even at the world-famed entry of the Spanish Queen into Madrid, where Italy and Spain had alike exhibited all their riches, they could not be compared with those possessed by the French Court alone; nor was their surprise diminished when they learnt that on the following Sunday, when Marie de Medicis was to enter Paris in state, they would be convinced that they had not as yet seen a tithe of the splendour which the great nobles and ladies of the kingdom were enabled to display upon such occasions.

From the moment in which the King decided upon personally superseding the Maréchal de Lesdiguières in his command of the army in Champagne, he had been unwearied in his advice to the Queen for the efficient government of the country. He exhorted her to great caution in changing her ministers, earnestly impressing upon her the danger of entrusting state affairs to individuals whose probity and experience were not well assured, or of displacing others without great and serious cause. He, moreover, especially besought her never to permit the interference of foreigners in the internal economy of the kingdom, as by such ill-placed confidence she could not fail to alienate from herself the affections of all true Frenchmen; to uphold the authority of the Parliament, but on no account to countenance its dictation, confining its operations to their legitimate sphere, and enforcing its submission to her own delegated supremacy; never to suffer herself to be misled by her passions or prejudices, but to weigh all her measures maturely before she insisted upon their enforcement; to protect the Jesuits, but at the same time to be careful not to allow them to increase their numbers, or to form establishments upon the frontiers; to attach the nobility by favours which could not endanger the interests of the throne, but to be cautious in her concessions where they might tend to any undue aggrandizement of their former power and influence; and, above all, not rashly to undertake any war against the Huguenots until she had received full assurance of being enabled to terminate it successfully. As regarded the Dauphin, he declared that his greatest desire was to see him the husband of Mademoiselle de Lorraine, provided the

Marie de Medicis

Duke should not have other children; as, in such case, the French nation would be aggrandized by the territories of a state from which it had received much and grievous injury. He expressed, moreover, the greatest repugnance to the proposed marriage between Madame Elisabeth and the Infant of Spain, alleging as his reason the perpetual rivalry of the two powers, and the circumstance that the prosperity of the one must necessarily involve the abasement of the other; and finally he declared that were he compelled to give the hand of his daughter to a Spanish Prince, it should be to a younger brother who might be declared Duke of Flanders, and not to the heir to the throne.

The Queen, while listening to these counsels, did not cease her entreaties that he would abandon his intention of quitting the kingdom, and leave the conduct of the campaign to his generals. She represented her own inexperience in state affairs, the extreme youth of the Dauphin, and the long life which he himself might still enjoy if he did not voluntarily place himself in situations of peril, which was the less required of him as he had already established his fame as a soldier throughout the whole of Europe. Henry answered only by a jest. Love and ambition alike lured him on; and beneath their baneful influence prudence and reason were silenced.

On the morning succeeding the coronation of his royal consort, the King attended mass at the church of the Feuillants, where he was accompanied by the Duc de Guise and M. de Bassompierre; and as he was still in the same exuberant spirits as on the preceding day, a great deal of light and desultory conversation took place during their return to the palace; which was, however, abruptly terminated by Henry, whose countenance became suddenly overcast as he said in reply to a gay remark made by M. de Guise—

"Even you do not understand me now; but one of these days, when I am dead, you will learn my value."

"My God! Sire," exclaimed Bassompierre, "will you never cease to pain us by these constant allusions to your approaching death? These are things which should not be said. You will live, please God, long and happy years. What fate can be more enviable than your own? You are now in the prime of life, strong and healthy; surrounded by honour and respect; in tranquil possession of the most flourishing kingdom upon earth; adored by your subjects; rich in money, palaces, and lands; wooed by fair women; loved by handsome favourites; with a host of noble children growing up about you. What can you require beyond this, and what more do you wish?"

"My friend," replied the King with a long-drawn sigh, "I must resign all these things."

As he uttered these words, the usher on duty threw open the door of his closet; and extending his hand to his two companions, which they successively raised to their lips, he disappeared.

As the Queen was to dance a *branle* and to appear in a ballet that evening at the Louvre, she was on the King's return closeted with the Princesse de Conti, the Maréchale de Fervaques, the Comtesse du Fargis, and Madame Concini, her ladies of honour, busied in the selection of the costume in which she purposed to appear. Having ascertained this fact, Henry remained alone in his apartment, until it was announced to him that the Duc de Vendôme solicited the honour of a private audience. He was instantly admitted; and after having excused himself for thus intruding upon the privacy of the monarch at a moment when, as he was well aware, the mind of the King was occupied by subjects of importance both to himself and to the state, he informed his royal father that La Brosse, a famous astrologer, had declared that the constellation under which his Majesty was born threatened him with imminent danger during that particular day; and that he consequently implored of him to be more than usually cautious until its close.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the King gaily; "La Brosse is an old sharper who is anxious to obtain some of your money; and you are a young fool to believe him. My days are numbered before God."

Marie de Medicis

When he had dined Henry threw himself upon his bed, but he tried in vain to sleep; he then rose and paced gloomily about the room for a considerable time, after which he once more lay down; but the result proving the same, he again sprang to his feet, and turning abruptly to the *exempt* of the guard, he demanded to know the time.

"It is just four o'clock, Sire," replied the officer; "and I would venture to suggest to your Majesty to try the effect of the open air, as you appear harassed and out of spirits."

"You are right," said the King; "cause my coach to be prepared, and I will go to the Arsenal and visit the Duc de Sully, who is unwell, and takes a bath to-day."

When the carriage was announced, the King stepped into it, followed by the Ducs de Montbazou and d'Épernon, the Maréchaux de Lavardin and de Roquelaure, the Marquises de Mirabeau and de la Force, and M. de Liancourt, his first equerry.

Being anxious to obtain a good view of the preparations which were making for the entry of the Queen, Henry desired that the leathern curtains, which were at that period the clumsy substitute for windows, should be looped back; and during this operation M. de Vitry presented himself, with the intention of escorting the royal equipage with his company of the bodyguard.

"No, no," said the King impatiently; "remain in the palace, and see that everything goes on as I have ordered, and with as much speed as possible."

"At least, Sire, suffer my guards to attend you," urged De Vitry.

"I will neither take you nor your guards," was the abrupt reply; "I want no one near me."

And upon this command the disappointed courtier was compelled to withdraw.

"Drive from the palace," shouted the monarch in a tone of excitement; "in the direction of the Hôtel de Longueville." The carriage started at a rapid pace, and it had no sooner reached the spot indicated, than he again exclaimed, "And now to the Cross of Trahoir." Arrived at this wretched nook, he next desired to be driven to the Cemetery of the Innocents, for which purpose it was necessary to pass from the Rue St. Honoré into that of La Ferronnerie, which was at that period extremely narrow, and rendered still more so by the numerous shops built against the cemetery wall. On reaching this point the progress of the royal carriage was impeded by two heavily-laden waggons, and the footmen who had hitherto run beside it pressed forward towards the end of the thoroughfare in order to rejoin it at the other extremity of the street. Two attendants only remained at their station, one of whom was employed in hastening the movements of the embarrassed waggoners, while the other was engaged in arranging some portion of his dress which had become displaced. At this moment a man advanced towards the King's equipage, wrapped in a wide mantle, and carefully picked his way between the trading-booths and the carriage, which he had no sooner reached than, placing one of his feet on a spoke of the wheel, and the other on a doorstep, he plunged a knife into the side of the King, who was at that moment engaged in reading a letter.

As he felt the blow Henry exclaimed, "I am stabbed!" While he uttered the words, he flung up his arms, an action by which the assassin profited to take a surer and more fatal aim; and before the horror-stricken companions of the unfortunate monarch could make a movement to prevent it, a second thrust pierced the lobe of his heart. The blood gushed in torrents from his mouth, and from the wound itself, when again the remorseless knife descended, but only to become entangled in the sleeve of the Duc d'Épernon; while with one thick and choking sob Henri IV fell back a corpse.

No one had seen by what hand the King had fallen; and had the regicide flung away his weapon, he might have stood unquestioned among the crowd which instantly collected upon seeing the six nobles who had accompanied the sovereign spring to the ground, with loud exclamations of dismay; but Ravaillac stood firm, with his reeking and two-edged knife still in his hand, and avowed his crime with a boldness which in a better cause would have savoured of heroism.

Marie de Medicis

Meanwhile one of the royal party, perceiving that Henry remained perfectly motionless, while the carriage was inundated with his blood, incautiously exclaimed, "The King is dead!" upon which a loud wail arose from the assembled spectators; and the agitation of the crowd became so excessive that the Duc d'Epéron called loudly for a draught of wine, asserting that his Majesty was faint from a hurt, and required refreshment. A number of the inhabitants of the adjacent houses thereupon hastened to procure the desired beverage; while the companions of the monarch, profiting by the movement, let fall the leathern curtains of the coach, and informed the populace that they must immediately convey his Majesty to the Louvre in order to secure proper assistance. This was done with all speed, while as they passed through the city the attendants replied to the inquiries which were made on every side that the King was merely wounded; and on arriving at the palace the body was stretched upon a bed, without having been cleansed or clothed, and in this state it remained for several hours, exposed to the gaze of all who thought proper to visit the chamber of death.

During this time the Queen, fatigued by her previous exertions, was lying upon a sofa in her private cabinet, in order to recruit her strength against the evening, which was, as we have shown, to have been one of gaiety and gala, when her affrighted attendants hastened to convey to her the fatal tidings of her widowhood. In a paroxysm of uncontrollable anguish she rushed towards the door of the closet, and was about to make her way to the chamber in which the royal body had been deposited, when she was met by the Chancellor, to whom the fearful news had already been communicated, and who obstructed her passage.

"Let me pass, Sir," she faltered out, "the King is dead."

"Pardon me, Madame," said Sillery, still impeding her purpose, "the Kings of France never die. Return, I implore of you, to your apartment. Restrain your tears until you have insured your own safety and that of your children; and instead of indulging in a grief which can avail you nothing, exert all your energies to counteract the possible effects of this disastrous and lamentable event."

M. de Vitry was immediately instructed to assemble all the royal children in the same apartment, and not to permit any one, whatever might be his rank or authority, to have access to them; an order which was implicitly obeyed; and meanwhile six-and-twenty physicians and surgeons, who had been hastily summoned to the palace, commenced opening the corpse, which was discovered to be so universally healthy as to promise a long life. The intestines were, according to the prescribed custom, at once forwarded to St. Denis; while the Jesuits demanded the heart, in order to convey it to their church of La Flèche; and it was no sooner removed from the body, and placed in a silver basin, than it was eagerly pressed to the lips of all the nobles who assisted at the operation; each of those who carried away traces of the blood which issued from it upon his moustachios, esteeming himself highly honoured by the vestiges of the contact.

The royal remains were then embalmed, and placed in a sumptuous coffin upon a bed of state, in one of the most spacious apartments of the Louvre, which was hung with the richest tapestry appertaining to the crown. A magnificent canopy of cloth of gold surmounted the bier, and on either side of the catafalque were placed two temporary altars; ten others having been erected in the state-gallery, at which the bishops and the curés of the several metropolitan parishes daily performed six high and one hundred low masses. Platforms covered with cloth of gold had been prepared for the cardinals and prelates; and at the foot of the royal body, cushions of black velvet were arranged for the Princes of the Blood and the higher nobility. A golden crucifix and a silver vase containing holy water were deposited on a table of carved oak; and at the extremity of the room were grouped enormous tapers of wax, near which stood two heralds-king-at-arms, in their splendid state costume, leaning upon their swords. The face of the corpse was exposed, the head covered by a cap of crimson velvet laced with gold, and the body attired in a vest of white satin, over which was flung a drapery of cloth of gold, having in the centre a cross elaborately embroidered in silver.

On the day which succeeded the embalmment, while the clergy were praying in suppressed voices at the several altars, a distant sound was heard, which gradually

approaching nearer and nearer to the death-chamber, became ere long blent with their murmured orisons; and as they looked towards the entrance of the apartment, they saw the young King standing upon the threshold, attended by a numerous suite of Princes and nobles. Louis XIII was wrapped in a mourning cloak of violet-coloured velvet; his vest was of dark silk; and his pale and melancholy face was half-hidden by the hood which had been drawn over his head. The high dignitaries who composed his retinue wore mantles of black velvet, and were entirely without arms. The two younger sons of France, the Ducs d'Orléans and d'Anjou, walked on either side of the new-made sovereign, each grasping a fold of his heavy cloak; and immediately behind them came the Cardinals de Joyeuse and de Sourdis. The Prince de Condé, the Comte de Soissons, the Duc de Guise, the Prince de Joinville, and the Duc d'Elboeuf bore the royal train; and were in their turn succeeded by the prelates who assisted at the ceremony, each wearing his mitre, and carrying his crozier. In the rear followed a crowd of nobles and great officers of the household, who, however, advanced only a few yards from the doorway, while Louis and his immediate attendants slowly approached the bier. The scene was an affecting one: the boy-King, timid and trembling, surrounded by the flower of his nation's chivalry and greatness, moved with a faltering step towards the resting-place of that father who had so lately wielded like a toy the sceptre which he was himself still too impotent to bear, and whose bold spirit had been quenched while it was yet strong within him. On every side the vanity of human pride, which will not learn a lesson even under the stern teaching of death, was contrasted with the awe that sat upon the faces of the assistants, and with the immobility of the livid countenance which gleamed out pale and ghastly from amid its glittering drapery!

As the youthful mourner reached the death-couch, the kings-at-arms were about to present to him the aspergillus, in order that he might sprinkle the corpse with the consecrated water, when a movement among the nobles who stood near the entrance of the apartment caused them to pause; and in another moment a group of ladies, attired in deep mourning, appeared beneath the portico; where, separating into two ranks, they left a passage open for the widowed Queen; who, clad in violet velvet like her son, with a high ruff, and her head uncovered, advanced with an unsteady step and streaming eyes towards her children.

"Pray with me, my son," she murmured amid her sobs as she stood beneath the mortuary canopy; "there lies your happiness and mine. May it please God that our hopes may not also have expired with him who was but a few short hours ago the glory and the greatness of his kingdom! The sturdy tree has fallen, and the saplings are still weak and frail. The mission of the great Henry is accomplished, and the weight of sovereignty is transferred to your own brow. And you also, my beloved ones," she continued, glancing towards her younger sons, "come nearer to me, and let us kneel together beside the body of your august and lamented father."

The two young Princes relaxed their hold of the royal mantle, and placed themselves beside their mother. The illustrious widow and her orphans then sank upon their knees, and continued for a considerable time absorbed in silent and earnest prayer. At intervals a sob which could not be controlled broke upon the stillness, but at length the mourners rose; and Marie, taking the hand of the boy-King, drew him towards her, and murmured in his ear a few hurried words which were inaudible to all save himself. As she ceased speaking, Louis glanced up into her face for an instant; and then, extending his right hand towards the corpse, he said in a clear and steady voice—

"Mother, I swear to do so."

Even at that awful moment a strange light flashed from the eyes of the Queen, and a smile, which was almost one of triumph, played about her lips as she glanced at the assembled nobles; but the emotion, by whatever cause produced, was only momentary; and after having cast another long and agonized look upon the face of the dead monarch, and aspersed the body with holy water, she bent her head reverentially to the King, and withdrew, followed by her ladies.

When the whole of the royal party had paid this last mark of respect to the remains of the deceased sovereign, the coffin was finally closed; and the death-room, in which the corpse

was to remain for the space of eighteen days, was opened to the public from ten o'clock in the morning until six in the evening. Then, indeed, as the vast crowds succeeded each other like the ceaseless waves of an incoming sea, the bitter wail of universal lamentation rang through the halls and galleries of the palace. Henri IV had been essentially the King of the People; and, with few and rare exceptions, it was by the people that he was truly mourned; for his sudden decease had opened so many arenas to ambition, hatred, jealousy, and hope, that the great nobles had no time to waste in tears, but were already busily engaged in the furtherance of their own fortunes.

During the exposition of the body the necessary preparations had been completed for the interment of the deceased King, which exceeded in magnificence all that had previously been attempted on a similar occasion; and this pomp was rendered even more remarkable by the privacy with which his predecessor Henri III had been conveyed to St. Denis only a week previously, the remains of the latter sovereign having hitherto been suffered to remain in the church of St. Camille at Compiègne, whence they were removed under the guard of the Ducs d'Epéron and de Bellegarde, his former favourites; the etiquette in such an emergency not permitting the inhumation of the recently deceased King in the vaults of the royal abbey until his predecessor should have occupied his appointed place.

The first stage of the funeral procession was Notre-Dame; and as the gorgeous *cortège* approached the church, all its avenues, save that which was kept clear by the Swiss Guards, were thronged by the citizens and artisans of the capital; sounds of weeping and lamentation were to be heard on every side; yet still, divided between grief and curiosity, the crowd swept on; and as the last section of the melancholy procession disappeared beneath the venerable portals of the cathedral, its vast esplanade was alive with earnest and eager human beings, who, fearful of exclusion from the interior of the building, pressed rudely against each other, overthrowing the weak and battling with the strong in their anxiety to assist at the awful and solemn ceremony which was about to be enacted.

Only a few moments had consequently elapsed ere a dense mass of the people choked almost to suffocation the gothic arches and the nave of the sacred edifice, while the aisles were peopled by the more exalted individuals who had composed the funeral procession. Upwards of three thousand nobles, and a great number of ladies, all clad in mourning dresses, and attended by their pages and equerries, blended their melancholy voices with the responses of the canons of the cathedral; the bishops of the adjacent sees, and the archbishops in their rich raiment of velvet and cloth of silver, carried in their hands tapers of perfumed wax; Oriental myrrh and aloes burned in golden censers, and veiled the lofty dome with a light and diaphanous vapour which gave an unearthly aspect to the building; the organ pealed forth its deep and thrilling tones; and amid this scene of excitement, splendour, and suffering, the Cardinal de Gondy celebrated the mass, and the Bishop of Aire delivered the funeral oration. The coffin was then raised, and the crowd, hurriedly escaping from the church, once more spread itself over the neighbouring streets until the procession should again have formed; after which all this immense concourse of people accompanied the body of their beloved monarch to St. Lazare, where the clergy halted and returned to Paris; while the nobles who were to escort the mortuary-car to St. Denis, and who had hitherto followed it on foot, either mounted on horseback, or entered their carriages, in order to reach the Leaning Cross at the same time as the corpse.

There, the grand prior and the monks of the royal abbey, in their mourning hoods, received the body of Henri IV from the hands of De Gondy, the Archbishop of Paris; and on the following day the Cardinal-Duc de Joyeuse celebrated a solemn mass and performed the funeral service of his late sovereign.

At the close of the lugubrious ceremony the iron gates of the house of death swung hoarsely upon their hinges. The "De Profundis" pealed from the high altar, and Henry the Great was gathered to his ancestors.

BOOK II
MARIE DE MEDICIS AS REGENT

CHAPTER I

1610



The news of the King's decease had no sooner been communicated to Marie de Medicis than, profiting by the advice of the Chancellor, she made a violent attempt at composure; and although still with streaming eyes and ill-suppressed sobs, she gave her assent to the suggestions of her councillors. The Ducs de Guise and d'Epéron were instructed to mount upon the instant, and to assemble as many of the nobles as were within reach, whom they were

to accompany through the streets of the city, declaring upon their way that the King was not dead, although grievously wounded; the city gates were ordered to be closed, the keys delivered to the lieutenant of police, and strict commands issued to prevent all gatherings of the populace in the thoroughfares; while the guards who were distributed through the faubourgs were hastily concentrated in the environs of the Parliament, in order, should such a measure become necessary, to enforce the recognition of the Queen as Regent of the kingdom.

These arrangements made, MM. de Guise, d'Epernon, de Villeroy, and de Lavardin demanded an audience of the august widow, at which, kneeling before her, they kissed her hand, and assured her of their unalterable devotion. Their example was imitated by all the great nobles of the Court, with the sole exception of the Duc de Sully, who was encountered by Bassompierre in the Rue St. Antoine, accompanied by about forty mounted followers, and evidently in a state of intense agitation. "Gentlemen," he exclaimed, as the two parties met, "if the loyalty which you each vowed to the monarch whom we have just been unhappy enough to lose is as deeply impressed upon your hearts as it should be upon those of all faithful Frenchmen, swear at this precise moment to preserve the same fidelity towards the King his son and successor, and that you will employ your blood and your life to avenge him."

"Sir," haughtily replied Bassompierre, who had probably more deeply mourned the death of his royal master and friend than any other individual of the Court, and who was consequently revolted by the imperious tone of this address, "it is we who have been enjoined to enforce this oath upon others, and we do not need any exhortations to do our duty."

Sully regarded the speaker gloomily for an instant, and then, as though overcome by some sudden apprehension, he coldly saluted the group of nobles, and retraced his steps to the Bastille, where he forthwith closed the gates; having previously, on his way thither, caused his attendants to carry off all the bread which they could collect either in the shops or markets. He, moreover, no sooner thus found himself in safety than he despatched a courier to his son-in-law, the Duc de Rohan, who was with the army in Champagne at the head of six thousand Switzers, desiring him to march straight upon Paris; an indiscretion which he was subsequently destined to expiate, from the heavy suspicion which it necessarily entailed upon him. Vainly did MM. de Praslin and de Créquy, who were sent to summon him to the presence of the young King, endeavour to induce him to lose no time in presenting himself at the Louvre; the only concession which he could be prevailed upon to make, was to desire the Duchess, his wife, to hasten to the palace, and to offer to the Regent and her son his sincere condolence upon their irreparable misfortune.

The Duc d'Epernon, after having stationed the guards at the palace, was instructed by the Queen to proceed at once to the Parliament, which was then assembled, and to inform its members that her Majesty had in her possession a decree signed and sealed by the late King, conferring upon herself the regency of the kingdom during the minority of her son; entreating them at once to ratify the appointment in order to ensure the public tranquillity. She also privately despatched a messenger to the President de Harlay, whom she knew to be attached to her interests, and to be at once able and zealous, to instruct him to assemble the Court without delay, and to use all his influence to enforce her rights. De Harlay, who on receipt of her message was confined to his bed by gout, immediately caused himself to be dressed, and proceeded in a chair to the Augustine monastery; where he had scarcely arrived when the Duc d'Epernon entered the hall, and declared the will of the late King, and the confidence felt by the Queen that the Parliament would, without repugnance, recognize her right to the dignity thus conferred upon her. This they immediately did; and owing to the absence of the Prince de Condé and the Comte de Soissons, both of whom aspired to the high office about to be filled by Marie de Medicis, without the slightest opposition or disturbance.

This happy intelligence was conveyed to the Queen by M. d'Epernon, who returned to the palace accompanied by one of the members of the Parliament, when the latter, after having been presented to his royal mistress, on whose right hand sat the young King bewildered by what was passing about him, bent his knee before their Majesties, and tendered to Marie a

Marie de Medicis

scroll, which having been returned by her to the accredited envoy of the supreme court, was read aloud as follows:—

"THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL, having represented to the Parliament in full assembly that the King having just expired by the act of a most cruel, most inhuman, and most detestable regicide committed upon his sacred person, it became necessary to provide for the safety of the reigning monarch and of his kingdom, required that an order should be promptly issued concerning his safety and that of the state, which could only be ruled and governed by the Queen during the minority of the said Lord her son; and that it should please the said Court to proclaim her Regent, in order that it might, through her, administer the affairs of the realm; The subject having been duly considered, the said Court declared, and still declares, the said Queen, the King's mother, Regent of France, to be entrusted with the administration of all matters of state during the minority of the said Lord her son, with all power and authority.

"Done in Parliament, this 14th of May, 1610.

"(Signed) DU TILLET."

During the course of the day guards had been sent to the residence of the several foreign ambassadors, in order to protect them from the violence of the populace, and especially to that of the Spanish minister, who was peculiarly obnoxious to the Parisians. The governors of provinces and fortresses who chanced to be at that moment sojourning in the capital were ordered to repair without delay to their several commands, to maintain tranquillity within their separate jurisdictions; and, save the audible lamentations which throughout the night broke the silence of the mourning city, all was calm and quiet, except in the immediate neighbourhood of the Augustine monastery, where the Attorney-General had authorized the workmen to prepare the great hall for the reception of the young King, and where the necessary preparations for his presence on the following day were continued until dawn.

The parliamentary envoy having quitted the palace, and the crowd of nobles, by whom its spacious halls and galleries had been filled, having retired, Marie was at length left at liberty to indulge her grief, rendered only the more poignant from the constraint to which she had been so long subjected. Her first impulse was to command that the bed of the young sovereign should be removed to her own chamber, and this done, she abandoned herself to all the bitterness of her sorrow.

She had, indeed, legitimate cause for tears. With a son still almost a child, ambitious nobles jealous of her power, and a great nation looking towards herself for support and consolation, she might well shrink as she contemplated the arduous task which had so suddenly devolved upon her. Moreover, death is the moral crucible which cleanses from all dross the memories of those who are submitted to its unerring test; and in such an hour she could not but forget the faults of the husband in dwelling upon the greatness of the monarch. Who, then, shall venture to follow her through the reveries of that fatal night? Who shall dare, unrebuked, to assert that the ambition of the woman quenched the affection of the wife? or that Marie, in the excess of her self-gratulation, forgot the price at which her delegated greatness had been purchased? That some have been found bold enough to do this says little for their innate knowledge of human nature. The presence of death and the stillness of night are fearful chasteners of worldly pride, and with these the daughter of the Medici was called upon to contend. Her position demanded mercy at the hands of her historians, and should not have sought it in vain.

From one reproach it is, however, impossible to exonerate her, and that one was the repugnance which she evinced to encourage any investigation into the real influence under which Ravailiac had committed the murder of the King. In vain did she receive communications involving individuals who were openly named; she discouraged every report; and although among these the Duc d'Epemon made a conspicuous figure, she treated the

accusation with indifference, and continued to display towards him an amount of confidence and favour to which he had never previously attained.

Indignant at this extraordinary supineness, the President de Harlay only increased his own efforts to unravel so painful a mystery; and refusing all credence to the assertion of the regicide that he had been self-prompted—an assertion to which he had perseveringly adhered amid torture, and even unto death, with a firmness truly marvellous under the circumstances—the zealous magistrate carefully examined every document that was laid before him, and interrogated their authors with a pertinacity which created great alarm among the accused parties, of whom none were so prominent as Madame de Verneuil and the Duc d'Épernon.

The latter, indeed, considered it expedient to wait upon the commissioners appointed by the Parliament to investigate these reports, in order to urge the condemnation of their authors; these being, as he asserted, not only guilty of defaming innocent persons, but also of exciting a dangerous feeling among the people, at all times too anxious to seek the disgrace and ruin of their superiors. He found, however, little sympathy among those whom he sought to conciliate; and on addressing himself to the President, whom he entreated to inform him of the details of the accusation made against himself, that magistrate, without any effort to disguise his feeling of repulsion towards the applicant, coldly replied, "I am, Sir, not your prosecutor, but your judge."

"I ask this of you as my friend," was the retort of the Duke.

"I have no friend," said the uncompromising minister. "I shall do you justice, and with that you must content yourself."

So uncourteous a reception excited the indignation of M. d'Épernon, who forthwith hastened to the Louvre to complain to the Regent of the insult to which he had been subjected; and Marie had no sooner been apprised of the affair than, with a want of caution highly detrimental to her own reputation, she despatched a nobleman of her household to M. de Harlay, to inform him that she had just learnt with extreme regret that he had failed in respect to the Duke, and that she must request that in future he would exhibit more deference towards a person of his quality and merit. This somewhat abrupt injunction, addressed to the first magistrate of the kingdom, and under circumstances so peculiar, only tended, however, to arouse M. de Harlay to an assumption of the dignity attached to his office, and he replied with haughty severity to the individual who had been charged with the royal message:—

"During fifty years I have been a judge, and for the last thirty I have had the honour to be the head of the sovereign Court of Peers of this kingdom; and I never before have seen either duke, lord, or peer, or any other man whatever might be his quality, accused of the crime of *lèse-majesté* as M. d'Épernon now is, who came into the presence of his judges booted and spurred, and wearing his sword at his side. Do not fail to tell the Queen this."

So marked an exhibition of the opinion entertained by the Parliament on the subject of the complicity of the Duke in the crime then under investigation, did not fail to produce a powerful effect upon all to whom it became known, but it nevertheless failed to shake the confidence of Marie de Medicis in the innocence of a courtier who had, in the short space of a few days, by his energy and devotion, rendered himself essential to her; while thus much must be admitted in extenuation of her conduct, reprehensible as it appeared, that every rumour relative to the death of her royal consort immediately reached her, and that two of these especially appeared more credible than the guilt of a noble, who could, apparently, reap no benefit from the commission of so foul and dangerous a crime. In the first place, the Spanish Cabinet had been long labouring to undermine the power of France, in which they had failed through the energy and wisdom of the late King, whose opposition to the alliance which they had proposed between the Dauphin and their own Infanta had, moreover, wounded their pride, and disappointed their projects; and there were not wanting many who accused the agents of Philip of having instigated the assassination; while another rumour, less generally disseminated, ascribed the act of Ravallac to the impulse of personal revenge, elicited by the

circumstance that Henry had first dishonoured and subsequently abandoned a sister to whom he was devotedly attached.

That M. d'Epéron was politic enough to impress upon the mind of the Queen the extreme probability of either or both of these facts, there can be little doubt, as it would appear from the testimony of several witnesses that the intention of the murderer was known for some time before the act was committed; and nothing could be more rational than the belief that if the agents of Spain were indeed seeking to secure a trusty tool for the execution of so dark a deed, they would rather entrust it to one who could by the same means satiate his own thirst for private revenge, than to a mere bravo who perilled life and salvation simply from the greed of gain.

Day by day, moreover, the ministers were overwhelmed by accusations which pointed at different individuals. Those who had opposed the return of the Jesuits to France openly declared that they were the actual assassins; while even in the provinces several persons were arrested who had predicted before its occurrence the death of the King, and the means by which it was to be accomplished; and finally the affair became so involved that, with the exception of the woman De Comans to whom allusion has been elsewhere made, and who was condemned to imprisonment for life, all the suspected persons were finally acquitted.

At eight o'clock on the morning succeeding the assassination of the King all the members of the different Chambers assembled in their scarlet robes and capes, the presidents wearing their cloaks and mortar-shaped caps; and half an hour afterwards the Chancellor, accompanied by several masters of the Court of Requests, and dressed from head to foot in black velvet, took his place below the First President in the great hall of the Augustine monastery, where the young King was to hold his Bed of Justice, the ordinary place of meeting being still encumbered with the costly preparations which had been made for the state-reception of the Queen. This ceremonial was essential to the legal tenure of the regency by his mother, which required the ratification of the sovereign; and his assent in the presence of his princes, dukes, peers, and officers of the Crown, to her assumption of entire and complete control over his own education, and the administration of the government during his minority, as well as his approval of the decree delivered on the previous day by the Parliament.

Then arrived in rapid succession the Duc de Mayenne, the Connétable de Montmorency, the cardinals, prelates, and other great dignitaries; who were finally succeeded by the King himself, habited in a suit of violet velvet, and surrounded and followed by a numerous retinue of princes, dukes, nobles, and high officers of the Court. Louis himself was mounted on a white palfrey, but all the members of his suite, whatever their rank, were on foot. The Queen came next in her coach, attended by the Princesses of the Blood and the other great ladies of her household; not as she had anticipated only two days previously, blazing with jewels and clad in royal robes, but covered with an ample mourning drapery of black crape.

The necessary ceremonies having been observed, the King at length took his place upon the Bed of Justice, having the Queen upon his right hand; while below their Majesties were seated the Prince de Conti, the Comte d'Enghien, who represented his father, M. de Soissons, the Duc de Guise, the Duc de Montmorency, the Duc d'Epéron, the Duc de Sully, all peers of France, and the Maréchaux de Brissac, de Lavardin, and de Bois-Dauphin; while the other dignitaries of the State and Church were arranged upon either hand of the young monarch, and the body of the hall was occupied by the members of the several Courts.

When all had taken their places, and silence was restored, the Queen, rising from her seat, and throwing back her veil, proceeded to address the assembly, but for a time her voice was inaudible, and choked with sobs. At length, however, she mastered her emotion, and with a gesture full of mournful dignity, she besought all present to continue to her son and to herself the same loyalty and devotion which they had exhibited towards the monarch of whom the state had been so cruelly bereft; assuring them that it should be her study to induce the King to be guided by their counsels in all things, and imploring of them to afford him such advice as should on all occasions be compatible with his own dignity and the welfare of the country over which he was called upon to rule.

Marie de Medicis

Short as was this harangue, it was not without considerable difficulty that she accomplished its utterance. More than once, suffocated by her grief, she was compelled to pause until she could regain her voice; and when at its close she drew her veil once more over her head, and prepared to leave the hall, the assembly rose simultaneously, and implored of her to honour the meeting by her presence until it should be dissolved. Exhausted and wretched, Marie strove to utter her thanks, and to retire; but the opposition offered to this resolution was so great and so unanimous that she was at length prevailed upon to resume her seat; and she had no sooner done so than Louis, raising for a moment the cap from his head, in his turn addressed the Court.

The reply of the Chancellor was pregnant with wisdom and loyalty; in it he assured the King of the fidelity and devotion of all ranks of his subjects, and confirmed the Queen in her regency; after which the Attorney-General having spoken at great length to the same effect, the royal and august personages rose and returned to the Louvre in the same order as they had observed on their arrival, followed throughout the whole distance by the acclamations of the citizens, and reiterated cries of "Vive le Roi!"

An hour or two subsequently Marie de Medicis accorded an audience to the Duc de Sully, who had, with considerable difficulty, been induced by M. de Guise to present himself at the palace, to offer his condolences to the young sovereign and his august mother; and he was accordingly introduced into the private apartment of the Queen, where he found her surrounded by the ladies of her household, and absorbed in grief. As he was announced she burst into a passion of tears, and for a time was unable to welcome him; but having at length succeeded in controlling her emotion, she desired that the King should be brought to her; and he had no sooner appeared than she pointed out to him the Duc de Sully, when the young monarch threw himself into his arms, and loaded him with the most affectionate caresses.

"You do well, my son," sobbed Marie, as she remarked the emotion of the boy; "you must love M. de Sully, who was one of the best and most faithful servants of the King your father, and who will, I trust, continue to serve you with the same zeal."

The interview was a lengthy one, and the urbanity of the Queen produced so powerful an effect upon the mind of the finance minister that he ceased to apprehend any diminution of his influence, and accordingly sent to countermand the return of the Duc de Rohan, who had already advanced a day's march towards the capital.

Meanwhile the Dowager-Princesse de Condé had hastened to inform her son of the assassination of the King, and to urge his instant return to the capital; a summons to which he replied by forwarding letters of condolence both to the King and the Regent, containing the most earnest assurances of his loyalty and devotion alike to their personal interests and to those of the nation; and declaring that he only awaited their commands to return to Court, in order to serve them in any manner which they might see fit to suggest.

The Comte de Soissons, who had left Paris only a few days before the coronation of the Queen, for the reason elsewhere stated, and who had retired to his estate near Chartres, was invited by a messenger despatched by Marie to return without delay to the capital, where the interests of the state required his presence. This command he prepared to obey with alacrity; but his zeal was greatly damped when, on arriving at St. Cloud, he ascertained that the Queen had been already recognized by the Parliament as Regent of the kingdom, and that her dignity had been publicly confirmed by the young sovereign. On first receiving this intelligence his rage was without bounds; he even questioned the legality of an arrangement of this description made without his sanction, he being, during the absence of the Prince de Condé, the first subject in France after the Queen herself; and then, moderating the violence of his expressions, he complained that by the precipitation of the Parliament, he had been deprived of the privilege of signifying his assent to the nomination, as he had previously pledged himself to do. He next questioned the right of the Parliament to interfere in so important a measure; declaring that their fiat was null and void, as the Chambers had no authority to organize a government, and still less to appoint a regency, which could only be effectively done by a royal testament, a declaration made before death, or by an assembly of the States-General. He,

moreover, insisted that the case was without precedent; that the power of the Parliament was restricted to the administration of justice; and that while it was desirable that the mothers of princes, heirs to the throne, should be entrusted with the care of their education, the government of the country belonged by right to the Princes of the Blood, to the exclusion of all other claimants.

Every effort was made to calm his anger; and it is probable that the representations of his personal friends convinced him of the impolicy of further opposition; although he so long delayed his arrival in the capital that he could only explain his tardiness by declaring that the sudden intelligence of the King's murder had so seriously affected his health that he was unable to obey the summons of the Queen until the 16th of May, when he was met at the gate of the city by the Duc d'Epéron, at the head of a large body of the nobility.

The pomp in which he reached Paris, however, sufficed to prove that he was totally unprepared for the existing posture of affairs, and that he had taken every precaution to enforce his claims, should he find the public mind disposed to admit them. His retinue consisted of three hundred horse, and he travelled with all the pretensions of royalty. A few words, nevertheless, sufficed to dispel the illusion under which he laboured, and once convinced that the supreme authority of the Queen had been both recognized and ratified, he had no other alternative save to offer his submission; which he did, moreover, with so good a grace that Marie bestowed upon him, in token of welcome, the government of Normandy, which had hitherto been held by the Dauphin; while a short time subsequently, when he manifested fresh symptoms of discontent, the Duc de Bouillon was instructed to inquire by what means he could be conciliated; upon which he demanded a pension of fifty thousand livres, the reversion of the government of Dauphiny for his son, who had not at that time attained his fifth year, and the sum of two hundred thousand crowns with which to pay a debt to the Duke of Savoy, contracted on the duchy of Moncalieri belonging to his wife. These exorbitant claims were at once admitted, and M. de Soissons forthwith declared himself the firm ally of the Queen.

All the cities and provinces of the kingdom hastened to despatch deputations to the capital, to present their assurances of respectful homage to the young sovereign, and to recognize the regency of his mother; and these were shortly afterwards succeeded by the plenipotentiaries and envoys of the different European states, whose condolences and congratulations were graciously acknowledged by Marie and her ministers in the name of the new monarch.

On the 18th of the month the regicide Ravaillac was put upon his trial, during which he exhibited a stoical indifference, that filled his judges with astonishment. Far from seeking to evade the penalty of his crime, he admitted it with a calmness and composure perfectly unshaken; and on the 27th his sentence was pronounced and executed with such barbarity that we shall avoid the detail.

On the following day the Duc de Bouillon arrived in Paris, and proceeded directly to the palace to kiss the hand of the Queen-Regent and take the oath of fidelity to the King, by both of whom he was warmly welcomed; Marie being anxious to rally about her all the high nobility, especially such as had formerly exhibited symptoms of discontent. M. de Bouillon had not, however, been long in the capital when a quarrel arose between himself and the Duc de Sully, whom he accused of arrogance and presumption, reminding him that he had not always been in the exalted position which he then occupied, while as regarded himself, he was born to higher fortunes than he had yet attained. The anger of both parties was so much excited during the interview, that great apprehensions were entertained of the result of so serious a misunderstanding; nor was it until the Duc de Guise had exerted all his influence with both parties that a partial reconciliation took place, which was subsequently completed through the good sense of the two nobles themselves, who in their cooler moments reflected upon the injury which must accrue alike to the national interests and to those of the reformed religion, of which they both were adherents, should they permit their private feelings to interfere with their public duties.

On the second day after the interment of the King the Regent proceeded in state to Notre-Dame, in order to assist at a solemn service which she had caused to be celebrated for the repose of his soul. The *cortège* consisted of seven coaches, containing herself, the Princesses of the Blood, the Duchesses, and other great ladies of her household, under a strong escort of guards and harquebusiers, commanded by M. de la Châtaigneraie. All the principal nobility, with the exception of the Comte de Soissons, attended by their several retainers, were already mounted when she descended to the court of the palace, and were awaiting her without the gates, when considerable excitement was created by the Duc d'Epéron, who, detaching himself from his followers, rode to the side of her carriage. As no Prince of the Blood had ever assumed this privilege, not even the Guises, lofty as were their pretensions, a general murmur arose among the assembled nobles; but M. d'Epéron, regardless of this demonstration of displeasure, and aware that he had already obtained considerable influence over the mind of the Queen, retained his position, to the extreme indignation of the other Princes.

The Regent and her retinue first proceeded to the Archbishop's palace, whence the procession was formed to the cathedral. At its head walked the Princes of the Blood then present at the Court, and the principal nobles, with the exception of the Prince de Conti and the Comte de Soissons, who supported the Queen, whom they upheld by each placing a hand beneath her arms. The Dowager Princess of Condé, the Princesse de Conti, and the Comtesse de Soissons bore her mourning train, which was seven French ells in length; and after them came Madame and the ex-Queen Marguerite, both habited in the deepest black; who were in their turn followed by all the great ladies of the Court and household. At the conclusion of the service, the Regent returned to the Louvre; and in the afternoon, attended as she had been on the previous occasion, she proceeded to perform her devotions in the church of St. Victor, amid the respectful salutations of the assembled populace.

The grief of the citizens still continued unabated, but it was apparent that a struggle for pre-eminence had already commenced among the higher class. The Regent, whose affliction was as brief as it had been violent, seemed suddenly endowed with a new nature. Her ambition grew with her responsibility, and instead of participating in political questions as she had previously done with undisguised reluctance, she entered eagerly into public affairs, and sought earnestly to establish her authority; an attempt in which she was seconded by the principal ministers of state, who at once felt that by supporting her power they were consolidating their own.

M. de Condé, the first Prince of the Blood, was still in Italy; his brother the Prince de Conti, being totally deaf and partially dumb, was incapable of government; the Comte de Soissons was at variance with both; and the Duc de Nevers was commanding the army in Champagne, until he should be superseded by the arrival of the King in person, according to the arrangement made by that unhappy monarch before the departure of the troops from France; while the Prince de Joinville, who, it may be remembered, had been banished from the Court for his intrigue with Madame de Verneuil, and who had been travelling in England and Germany, and afterwards retired to Lorraine until his brother the Duc de Guise should be enabled to procure his recall, was also absent. To each and all of these Princes Marie, who at once felt the necessity of their immediate presence in order to give dignity and stability to her position, hastened to forward messengers to request their instant return; a summons which was promptly obeyed by the Duc de Nevers and all the principal officers under his command, as well as by M. de Joinville, who also received a pressing letter from the Duc de Guise, enjoining him to profit without delay by so admirable an opportunity of regaining his forfeited favour. But whatever were the haste with which all endeavoured to reach the Court, it still required time for them to do so; and meanwhile the other great nobles were anxious to shake off the control to which they had been subjected during the previous reign. Individual hatred came to the assistance of personal ambition, and those whose talent enabled them to acquire influence at Court began to exercise it no less zealously in the ruin of others than in their own aggrandizement.

The Prince de Condé had no sooner forwarded to the Queen the letter to which allusion has been already made, than he received a pressing invitation to return to France, for which

purpose he prepared to leave Milan; a step so obnoxious to Spain that the Condé de Fuentes spared no pains in dissuading him from its adoption. He represented in earnest terms the exceptional position of the Prince, whose rank as the first subject of the realm justified him in aspiring to a throne filled by a mere boy, who could be considered only as a puppet in the hands of an ambitious woman; following up his arguments by an offer of efficient aid from his own monarch to enable M. de Condé to enforce his pretensions; and while he was thus endeavouring to shake the loyalty of his guest, the Spanish Ambassador at the Court of Rome was engaged with equal zeal in seeking to impress the necessity of the same policy upon Paul V. Both were, however, destined to fail in their efforts, the Sovereign-Pontiff declining to interfere in so extreme a case, and the Prince resolutely refusing to adopt the course thus treacherously suggested.

At Brussels the persecution was renewed by the Spanish minister, seconded by the Papal Nuncio, Cardinal Bentivoglio, whose zeal for the interests of Spain caused him to overlook the wishes of the Pope. All, however, proved unavailing; and the Prince, after a brief sojourn in the Belgian capital, finally departed for Paris; whither his wife had previously repaired, accompanied by her step-sister the Comtesse d'Auvergne, and where she had been warmly and honourably welcomed by the Queen.

Meanwhile, it having been considered advisable that the King should make a declaration on the Edicts of Pacification, it became previously necessary to form a council, under whose advice the Queen-Regent might proceed to act. When preparing to quit France, Henri IV had drawn up a list of fifteen persons whom he had selected for this purpose, and had decided that every question should be determined by a majority of votes, the Queen herself commanding only one vote; the death of the King had, however, unfortunately tended to render the execution of his purpose impossible, all the Princes and great officers of the Crown asserting their right to admission, and resolutely maintaining their claim.

The Comte de Soissons urged his privilege of birth, and haughtily declined to advance any other plea; while the Connétable de Montmorency loudly declared that no council could legally be formed from which he was excluded; and the Cardinal de Joyeuse maintained the same argument. As regarded the Guises, who affected at this juncture a perfect equality with the house of Bourbon, their eagerness to hold office defeated its own object, the Duc de Mayenne and the Duc de Guise equally declaring their right to assist in the government of the kingdom; while it was considered as incompatible with the interests of the Crown that two members of the same family should be admitted into so important an assembly. The Duc de Nevers, who disputed precedency with the Guises, also came forward as a candidate; while the Ducs de Bouillon and d'Epéron, who were at open feud, and each ambitious of power, heightened the difficulty by arrogantly asserting their personal claims. To receive both was impossible, as from their known enmity nothing but opposition could be anticipated; and thus, upon the threshold of her reign, Marie de Medicis found herself trammelled by the very individuals from whom she had hoped for assistance and support.

To select between the two last-mentioned nobles was difficult as well as dangerous; the position of M. d'Epéron as colonel-general of the infantry, and his immense possessions, rendering him a formidable adversary; while the Duc de Bouillon was still more powerful from his occupation of Sedan, his intelligence with foreign states, and his influence over his co-religionists. Moreover, Marie was no longer in a position to oppose the pretensions of the Duc d'Epéron, even had she felt it expedient to do so; the unlimited confidence which she had reposed in him since the death of her royal consort having invested him with a factitious importance, by which he was enabled to secure a strong party in his favour upon every question in which he was personally interested. She had assigned to his use a suite of apartments in the Louvre, declaring that his continual presence and advice were essential to her; and, in addition to this signal favour, she communicated to him the contents of all the despatches which she received, and followed his advice upon all matters of state as implicitly as though she considered it to be unanswerable.

His credit at Court was also greatly increased by the Comte de Soissons, who, having ascertained the extent of his favour with the Regent, spared no pains to secure his friendship before the arrival of the Prince de Condé, believing that the support of one who was all-powerful for the moment might be of essential service in counteracting the ambitious views of so formidable a rival; and, moreover, advantageous in assisting him to accomplish the marriage of his son Louis de Bourbon with Mademoiselle de Montpensier, an alliance which was the great object of his ambition.

Thus the Duc d'Epéron was not only powerful in himself, but found his pretensions recognized and sanctioned by a Prince of the Blood, an advantage of which he was not slow to appreciate the value; and he consequently listened to the expostulations which were addressed to him by those who dreaded the effects of his interference in state affairs with a quiet indifference that satisfied them of their utter inutility.

But while the Queen was bewildered by these conflicting claims, her ministers, who were anxious to retain the power in their own hands, were not displeased to see the number of candidates for place daily increase. They were aware that on the arrival of the Prince de Condé he must necessarily take his seat in the council, while it would be equally impossible to exclude the Comte de Soissons, the Duc de Montmorency, or the Cardinal de Joyeuse; and they felt that nothing could more effectually limit the power of these great dignitaries than the admission of so large a number as must tend to diminish their influence over the Queen, and to create a confusion in the management of public affairs which would necessarily render her more dependent upon their own wisdom and experience. Under this persuasion they consequently impressed upon her the absolute necessity of satisfying every claimant; and a council was accordingly formed which was more noisy than efficient; and where, although each was free to deliver his opinion, the ministers were careful, in their secret audiences of the Queen, during which they exposed their own views and sentiments, to carry out their preconceived measures.

The struggle which the late King had foretold between the Regent and her son had, meanwhile, already commenced. The character of Louis XIII was, from his earliest boyhood, at once saturnine and obstinate; and thus, aware of the importance which the Queen attached to the exercises of religion, he commenced his predetermined opposition to her will by refusing to observe them. Remonstrances and arguments were alike unavailing; the boy-King declined to listen to either; and Marie ultimately commanded that he should undergo the chastisement of the rod. The order was given, but no one volunteered obedience; the vengeance of the man might hereafter compensate for the mortification of the child; and the son of Marie de Medicis, stolid and gloomy though he was, had already imbibed a full sense of the respect due to his sovereign rank.

"How now, M. de Souvré!" exclaimed the Queen; "is the frown of a wayward boy more dangerous than the displeasure of a mother? I insist that the King shall undergo the chastisement which he has so richly merited."

Thus urged, the unwilling governor was compelled not only to lay his hands upon the sacred person of royalty, but also to prepare to execute the peremptory command of his irritated mistress; and the young Louis no sooner perceived the impossibility of escape than he coldly submitted to the infliction, merely saying, "I suppose it must be so, M. de Souvré, since it is the will of the Queen; but be careful not to strike too hard."

An hour or two afterwards, when he paid his usual visit to the Regent, her Majesty rose on his entrance, according to the established etiquette, and made him a profound curtsy. "I should prefer, Madame," said the young Prince, "fewer curtseys and fewer floggings."

At the commencement of June intelligence reached the Court of the death of the Archbishop of Rouen, the natural brother of the late King, and it was no sooner authenticated than the Regent hastened to bestow his abbey of St. Florent upon M. de Souvré, and that of Marmoutier, one of the most wealthy and beautiful in France, upon the brother of her favourite Leonora, an unhappy being who was not only deformed in person, but so wholly

deficient in intellect that every effort even to teach him to read had proved ineffectual. So abject was he, indeed, that Concini had been careful never to allow him to come into contact with Henri IV lest he should be banished from the Court; and this ill-advised donation consequently excited great disapprobation, and elicited fresh murmurs against the Italian followers of the Queen.

These were, moreover, augmented by another circumstance which immediately supervened. A report was spread of the decease of M. de Boëce, the Governor of Bourg-en-Bresse, a brave and faithful soldier, who had rendered good service to his country; and the Queen, urged by her favourite, was imprudent enough, without awaiting proper confirmation of the rumour, to confer the government upon Concini, whose arrogance, fostered as it was by the indulgence of his royal mistress, was already becoming intolerable to the native nobility. This fact was, however, no sooner made known to M. de Boëce, who had not, as it subsequently appeared, even laboured under indisposition, than he addressed a letter of respectful expostulation to the Regent, in which he expressed his concern at the necessity of interfering with the pleasure of her Majesty in the rapid disposal of his government, and assured her that he was still able and anxious to discharge the duties of the trust confided to him by the late King; informing her, moreover, that he had in his possession a grant from her royal husband, bestowing the survivorship of his appointment upon his son, of which he solicited the confirmation by herself, feeling convinced that she could never be served by a more zealous or able subject.

Concini was accordingly divested of his government as abruptly as he had acquired it; reluctantly resigning the coveted dignity amid the laughter and epigrams of the whole Court.

In addition to these extraordinary instances of imprudence, Marie de Medicis had also compromised herself with the people by the reluctance which she evinced to investigate the circumstances connected with the murder of her husband. Ravaillac had suffered, as we have shown, and that too in the most frightful manner, the consequences of his crime; persisting to the last in his assertion that he had acted independently and had no accomplices; but his testimony, although signed in blood and torture, had failed to convince the nation which had been so suddenly and cruelly bereft of its monarch; and among all classes sullen rumours were rife which involved some of the highest and proudest in the land. Among these the Duc d'Epemon, as already stated, stood out so prominently that he had been compelled to justify himself, while the favour which he had so suddenly acquired turned the public attention towards the Queen herself.

Suspicious of her complicity, however ill-founded, had, indeed, existed even previously to this period, for Rambure, when speaking of the visit of Sully to the Louvre on the day after the assassination, a visit in which he professes to have accompanied him, says without any attempt at disguise, "The Queen received us with great affability, and even mingled her tears and sobs with ours, although we were both aware of the satisfaction that she felt in being thus delivered from the King, *of whose death she was not considered to be wholly guiltless*, and of becoming her own absolute mistress.... She then addressed several other observations to the Duke, during which time he wept bitterly, while she occasionally shed a few tears of a very different description."

These assertions, vague as they are, and utterly baseless as they must be considered by all unprejudiced minds, nevertheless suffice to prove that the finger of blame had already been pointed towards the unfortunate Marie; an unhappy circumstance which doubled the difficulties of her position, and should have tended to arouse her caution; but the haughty and impetuous nature of the Tuscan Princess could not bend to any compromise, and thus she recklessly augmented the amount of dislike which was growing up against her.

On the 8th of July the ex-Queen Marguerite gave a magnificent entertainment to the Court at her beautiful estate of Issy; on her return from whence to the capital, the Regent mounted a Spanish jennet, and, surrounded by her guards, galloped at full speed to the faubourg, where she dismounted and entered her coach, still environed by armed men. As she had her foot upon the step of the carriage, a poor woman who stood among the crowd

Marie de Medicis

exclaimed with an earnestness which elicited general attention, "Would to God, Madame, that as much care had been taken of our poor King; we should not then be where we are!"

The Queen paused for a moment, and turned pale; but immediately recovering her self-possession, she took her seat, and bowed affably to the people. The greeting on their part was, however, cold and reluctant. They were still weeping over the bier of their murdered sovereign, and they could not brook the apparent levity with which his widow had already entered into the idle gaieties of the Court.

"Only five months after Henry's assassination," says Rambure, "such of the nobles as were devoted to his memory expressed among themselves their indignation at the bearing of the Queen; who, although compelled at intervals to assume some semblance of grief, was more frequently to be seen with a smiling countenance, and constantly followed the hunt on horseback, attended by a suite of four or five hundred princes and nobles."

In order to avert all discontent among the people, the ministers had induced the Regent not only to diminish the duty upon salt, a boon for which they were always grateful, but also to delay the enforcement of several obnoxious commissions, and to revoke no less than fifty-four edicts which had been issued for the imposition of new taxes; while presents in money were made to the most influential of the Protestant party, and the Edict of Nantes was confirmed.

Such was the state of the French Court on the return of the Prince de Condé, whose arrival had been anxiously anticipated by his personal friends and adherents, and strongly urged by the Regent herself; but when she ascertained that a large body of nobles had gone as far as Senlis to receive him, and that among these were all the Princes of Lorraine, the Maréchal de Bouillon, and the Duc de Sully, she became apprehensive that a cabal was about to be formed against her authority; a suspicion which was augmented by the regal state in which he entered the capital, attended and followed by more than fifteen hundred individuals of rank.

Her fears were, moreover, eagerly fostered by the Comte de Soissons, the Duc d'Epemon, and the Cardinal de Joyeuse, who, desirous of retaining the influence which they had already acquired, neglected no method of arousing her jealousy against the first Prince of the Blood. In pursuance of this purpose M. d'Epemon, to whom the safety of the city had been confided during the first alarm created by the murder of the King, no sooner learnt the approach of the Prince than he doubled the guards at the different gates, and even proposed to form garrisons in the avenues leading to them; a circumstance which was immediately made known to M. de Condé, who expressed great indignation at such an imputation upon his loyalty. This affront was, however, remedied by the able courtier, who, being anxious to conciliate both parties, had no sooner convinced the Queen of his zeal for her interests than he proceeded, accompanied by a hundred mounted followers, to welcome the Prince before he could reach the city.

M. de Condé dined at Le Bourget, where he expressed his acknowledgments to the several nobles by whom he was surrounded, and declared his intention of upholding by every means in his power the dignity and authority of the Regent. At the close of the repast he once more ordered his horses, and retraced his steps as far as St. Denis, where he caused a mass to be said for the soul of the deceased King, and aspersed the royal coffin; after which he proceeded direct to Paris, receiving upon his way perpetual warnings not to trust himself within the gates of the capital. He, however, destroyed these anonymous communications one after the other, and was rewarded by a note hastily written by the President de Thou, in which he was entreated to disregard the efforts which were made to dissuade him from entering Paris, where the Queen was prepared to receive him with all possible honour and welcome.

Thus assured, M. de Condé, mounted upon a pied charger, which had been presented to him by the Archduke, and habited in the deepest mourning, continued his journey, having his brother-in-law the Prince of Orange on his right hand and the Comte de Beaumont on his left, with whom he occasionally conversed; but it was remarked that as he drew near the capital he became absent and ill at ease; and his discomposure was destined to be increased by the

circumstance that on his arrival at the Louvre the gates were closed upon the greater number of his followers, and only a slender retinue permitted to enter with him. On ascending the great staircase, in order to pay his respects to the King, he was informed that his Majesty was in the Queen's apartment, towards which he immediately proceeded. His reception was gracious and affectionate, and he had no sooner knelt and kissed hands than the Regent assured him of the joy that she felt at his return, and the confidence with which she looked forward to his advice and assistance. On quitting the royal presence, after a prolonged interview, the Prince warmly expressed his gratification at the welcome which had been accorded to him, declaring that he should for ever hold himself indebted to the Queen for an amount of affability which he could not have anticipated.

From the palace M. de Condé proceeded to his residence at the Hôtel de Lyon, accompanied by the Duc de Guise, and followed by the same suite with which he had entered the capital; and thence he hastened to the residence of the Comtesse d'Auvergne to greet the Princess. Their meeting was warm and affectionate; both were anxious to forget the past, and to profit by the future; while the sincerity of the reconciliation on the part of Madame de Condé was fully proved by her subsequent devotion to his interests and happiness. Their interview was a long and affecting one, and the Prince spent the remainder of the day in her society, returning, however, in the evening to the Louvre to be present at the *coucher* of the King, whom he assisted to undress; after which he waited upon the Queen, with whom he remained until a late hour.

During the ensuing week Condé was entirely occupied in receiving the visits of the nobility, who unanimously hastened to pay their respects, and to solicit his protection. He held, in fact, a species of court, upon which the favourites of the Regent did not fail to comment with an emphatic bitterness that once more awakened the suspicions of Marie; who, aware of the popularity of the Prince, was easily persuaded to believe that these demonstrations were pregnant with danger to the interests of her son; and, aware of the instability of her own position, the prejudices which were entertained against her person, and the ambition of the great nobles, she listened with avidity to the suggestions of MM. de Soissons, d'Epéron, and de Joyeuse, that she should effect the arrest of Condé before he had time to organize a faction in his favour. In addition to the public homage of which he was the object, they pointed out to her that frequent councils were held, which were attended by all the chiefs of his party, both at the Hôtel de Mayenne and at the Arsenal, where the treasure amassed by the late King still remained under the guardianship, and at the discretion of, the Duc de Sully. They reminded her also of the manner in which the Prince had quitted the capital, and the vehemence with which he had expressed his indignation at the treatment he had received, not only to his personal friends, but also at the foreign courts which he had visited during his absence; and they besought her to take proper precautions before it became too late.

These arguments were also warmly advocated by Concini and his wife, the Papal Nuncio, the Spanish Ambassador, the Chancellor Sillery, Villeroy, Jeannin, Arnaud, and the celebrated Père Cotton, who had fully possessed himself of the confidence of the Queen, and who was admitted to all her private councils. Fortunately, however, Marie hesitated to hazard so extreme a step; and day after day went by without any hostile manifestation on the part of the Prince, who openly declared himself resolved to support her authority. As her alarm on this subject diminished, the private friends of the Queen turned their attention to other matters of political interest; and according to the testimony of Sully, zealously employed themselves in contravening all the wishes, and disappointing all the views, of Henri IV. "There can be no difficulty," he says with a bitterness which shows how deeply he felt his own exclusion, "in deciding upon the subject of their deliberations. The union of the crowns of France and Spain, the abolition of ancient alliances with foreign powers, the abolition of all the edicts of pacification, the destruction of the Protestants, the exclusion of those of the reformed religion from places of trust, the disgrace of all who will not submit to the yoke of the new favourites, the dissipation of the treasures amassed by the late King, in order to secure the services of the greedy and the ambitious, and to load with wealth and power such as are destined to rise to the highest dignities in the realm—that is to say, a thousand projects as pernicious to the King and

Marie de Medicis

to the state as they were advantageous to our most mortal enemies,—such were the great objects of the deliberations of these new counsellors."

Be this as it may, it is certain that as regarded the Prince de Condé, the Queen was better served by accident than she would have been by the dangerous advice of her friends. The wise precaution which she had taken of arming the citizens of Paris, and of placing them under the command of individuals chosen by herself, and who had taken an oath of fidelity to her service in the Hôtel de Ville, secured the loyalty of the populace; while the jealousy of the Guises, who, even while professing the most ardent attachment to M. de Condé, were gradually becoming cooler in his cause and quarrelling among themselves, gave no encouragement to an attempt at revolt on his part, even should he have been inclined to hazard it.

The Duc de Bouillon alone laboured incessantly to undermine the power of the Regent; and he at length suggested to the Prince that in order to counterbalance the authority of the Court, and to maintain his own rightful dignity, he would do well to return to his original religion, and to place himself at the head of the Protestants, who would form a very important and powerful party. M. de Condé, however, declined to follow this advice, protesting that he had no desire to involve the kingdom in intestine commotion, and was content to await the progress of events. It is probable that he was the more readily induced to exert this forbearance from the extreme generosity of the Queen, who, remembering the abruptness with which he had been deprived, on the occasion of his marriage, of the many lucrative appointments bestowed upon him, hastened to present him with a pension of two hundred thousand livres; to which she added the Hôtel de Conti in the Faubourg St. Germain, which she purchased for that purpose at a similar sum, the county of Clermont, and other munificent donations.

Nor was M. de Condé the only recipient of her uncalculating generosity, as may be gathered from the following document from the pen of Richelieu:

"The good management of the savings fund of the late King left us, when he was taken away, five millions in the Bastille; and in the hands of the treasurer of the fund from seven to eight millions more, with which he had intended to pay the army that he had raised in order to extend the limits of his glory, which would admit no others than those of the universe itself. The uncertainty in which we were left by that fatal event rendering it necessary that we should secure the safety of the state by the counterpoise of a certain body of troops, we found ourselves constrained to employ a portion of the finances in maintaining during a few months a large military force which had already been raised; so that this outlay, the funeral of the King, and the coronation of the Queen, of which the expenses were not paid, reduced these savings very considerably. After the death of that great Prince, who was the actual ruler of the state, it was impossible to prevent a certain disorder, which even went so far as to induce several individuals, who measured their deserts by their ambition, shamefully to seek, and pertinaciously to persist in demanding, benefits which they could never have hoped to secure during his lifetime. They profit by the difficulties of the period, offer to serve the state, declare how they have it in their power to injure the national interests, and, in short, make it clearly understood that they will only do their duty upon the most advantageous terms; and so conduct themselves that even those who had assisted the King in amassing his treasure advise the Queen to yield to the exigences of the time, to open her hands, and to give largely to every one.

"In accordance with these counsels she increases the pensions and establishments of the Princes, the nobles, and the old servants of the Crown; she grants new ones; she augments the garrisons of her fortresses, as much to satisfy those who hold them as for the safety of the country, and maintains a greater number of troops than formerly; the increase of these pensions amounting on an average to three millions annually. The expense of the light horse and infantry is at present (1617) three millions three hundred thousand livres; while in 1610 it amounted only to fifteen hundred thousand francs. She makes numerous presents, and this under advice, without increasing her receipts, as well as reducing them annually two millions five hundred thousand livres by the diminution of the duty on salt; and so augments her

Marie de Medicis

expenses that, upon mature consideration, we shall rather be applauded for being in the state we still are after so many necessary outlays, than blamed for having incurred them. M. le Prince (Condé) received during six years three millions six hundred and sixty thousand livres; the Prince and Princesse de Conti above one million four hundred thousand; the Duc de Guise nearly one million seven hundred thousand; M. de Nevers one million six hundred thousand; M. de Longueville one million two hundred thousand; MM. de Mayenne, father and son, two millions and several thousands; M. de Vendôme near six hundred thousand; M. d'Epéron and his children near seven hundred thousand; and M. de Bouillon near a million.

"All the Marshals of France, of which the number was increased one half, received four times as much as formerly, their pensions being augmented twenty-four thousand livres, which, in six years, allowing to each one hundred and forty-four thousand livres, and calculating them at eight in number, as they have always been, make, one with the other, one million one hundred and fifty-two thousand livres.

"Six other dukes, or officers of the Crown, received the same allowance, augmenting the outlay in six years by eighty-six thousand four hundred livres. Hence it is easy to see how the treasury of France was exhausted, since eleven or twelve articles in favour of the great nobles of the state carry off nearly seventeen millions, without including all that was paid to them in the shape of salaries and appointments, the *deniers du talion* for their companies of men-at-arms, grants for the maintenance of the garrisons of their fortresses, and finally, without calculating the troubles occasioned by several among them; troubles which, having compelled us on three several occasions to take up arms, have cost us, upon a strict computation, more than twenty millions of additional outlay."

We have copied this document at full length, and in this place, in order, in so far as we are enabled so to do, to exonerate Marie de Medicis from the charge of reckless extravagance unsparingly brought against her by the Duc de Sully. Richelieu himself, at the period at which this report was furnished to the ministers, was little disposed to extenuate the errors of the Regent; and cannot, consequently, be supposed to have volunteered any palliative circumstances. Moreover, it is worthy of notice that the enormous sums registered above were not lavished upon the personal favourites of the Queen, but were literally the price paid by the nation to purchase the loyalty of its Princes and nobles; a frightful state of things, which exhibits more forcibly than any argument the utter powerlessness of Marie to restrain the excessive expenditure by which the kingdom was so soon reduced to the brink of bankruptcy.

The Regent having renewed all the alliances of France with the several European powers, they at this period accredited extraordinary ambassadors to the French capital, to offer the condolences and congratulations of their respective sovereigns to the young King and his mother. Among these the most interesting to the personal feelings of Marie was Lord Wharton; who, in addition to the merely verbal compliments common on such occasions, presented to Louis XIII, in the name of his royal master, James I, the Order of the Garter, accompanied by his affectionate assurances that he had not forgotten the promise exchanged between himself and the late monarch, that whichever of the two survived would be as a father to the children of the other; a pledge which he declared himself to be both ready and anxious to ratify. Nor was this the first proof of sympathy which the English monarch had evinced towards Marie and her son, the Court of London having immediately put on mourning on learning the death of Henri IV, and a suspension of all public amusements having taken place throughout the capital. Gratified by so signal a demonstration of respect and regard, the Regent accordingly no sooner ascertained that the British envoy was approaching Paris than she despatched a party of four hundred mounted nobles to meet him outside the gates, and herself took her station at a window in order to see him pass; a condescension which was considered to be a signal honour at that period.

The most important of these missions, politically considered, was, however, that of the Duque de Feria, who arrived in France with a brilliant suite, charged with the most specious and high-sounding professions and promises of Philip of Spain, who pledged himself to support the Regency under all circumstances, and to place at the disposal of the Queen

Marie de Medicis

whatever assistance she might require against both external and internal enemies. These magnificent assurances were coldly received by most of his hearers, who distrusted alike the Spanish monarch and his envoy; and who had not yet forgotten that only a few months had elapsed since Philip had himself endeavoured, not merely to dispossess Marie of her authority, but also to incite M. de Condé to dispute the throne itself with her young son. Upon the Queen and her immediate friends they, however, produced a contrary effect; her leaning towards the Court of Spain inducing her to welcome every symptom of a desire on the part of that Cabinet to maintain a good understanding with her own Government. Her reception of the Duque de Feria was consequently so gracious that he immediately proceeded to renew the negotiation already mooted for the double alliance between the two nations, which must, should it ever be effected, render their interests, at least for a time, inseparable. No proposition could be more acceptable to Marie de Medicis, who, harassed and dispirited, gladly welcomed any prospect of support by which she might hope to keep her turbulent nobility in check; while Philip on his side was anxious to effect so desirable an alliance, as it would enable him, irrespectively of its contingent advantages, to gain time, and thus secure the means of settling the affairs of Germany, which were embroiled by the misunderstanding between the Emperor and his brothers.

The Spanish Cabinet was, moreover, desirous of widening the breach between the Catholics and Protestants of France, an attempt in which it was zealously seconded by the Pope, who was readily persuaded that no measure could be so desirable for the accomplishment of such a purpose as a union between the two crowns. Thus the objections which had appeared insuperable to Henri IV lost all their weight in the mutual anxiety of Marie and Philip to secure the advantages which each sought to gain; and, as the youth of Louis XIII forbade the immediate celebration of the marriage, a private pledge was exchanged between the ministers of France and the Spanish envoy, that the Regent should not interfere with the measures of the House of Austria in Germany, while Spain should refuse all support to the malcontents in her own kingdom; and this mutual understanding once established, the double alliance was concluded.

In the midst of the important interests by which the mind of Marie de Medicis was at this period occupied, a fresh demand upon her attention was made by Madame de Verneuil, who on the 15th of September laid before the Comte de Soissons, the Cardinal de Joyeuse, and the Duc d'Epemon, the written engagement which she had received from the Duc de Guise, and urged its enforcement. Her claim was warmly espoused by M. de Soissons, who at once declared the document to be valid and unanswerable; while it was admitted by all by whom it was examined to be strictly legal in form, and to authorize her in demanding its ratification. Unlike that which she had previously extorted from Henri IV, the promise which the Marquise now produced was not only signed by M. de Guise himself, but also by two notaries, a priest, and several witnesses. Unfortunately, however, whether by accident, or intention on the part of the Duke, both the notaries by whom it had been attested were aged men, one of whom had subsequently died; while the other had become so imbecile that when interrogated upon the subject, he first doubted, and subsequently denied, all knowledge of the transaction; but as these contingencies did not affect the signature of M. de Guise himself, his position was sufficiently embarrassing; and the rather that, his passion for the Marquise having been long extinguished, he had become the acknowledged suitor of the Dowager Duchess of Montpensier.

There can be little doubt that had Henri IV still lived Madame de Verneuil would have been enabled to enforce her claim, as that monarch would not have suffered so admirable an opportunity of mortifying the Guises to have escaped him; and thus individual imprudence would have afforded him a triumph which the fortune of arms had hitherto denied, and the most jealous watchfulness failed to secure; but his death had changed the position of all the parties interested in the affair, and Marie de Medicis looked upon it with very different feelings. Her old and still existing hatred of the Marquise was renewed by an exhibition of arrogance which recalled to memory some of the most bitter moments of her existence; and her pride as a sovereign was revolted at the prospect of seeing the woman by whom her peace

had been destroyed elevated to the rank of a Princess of the Blood, and placed beside the very steps of her throne.

She was, moreover, anxious to limit the power of the Comte de Soissons, and to prevent the proposed marriage of his son Louis de Bourbon with the heiress of Montpensier, which would have opened up a still wider field for his ambition. She accordingly espoused the cause of the Duc de Guise, who, having no other alternative by which to rid himself of the Marquise, did not scruple to deny the authenticity of the signature ascribed to him; and he had no sooner resolutely done this, than the Regent placed the affair in the hands of the President Jeannin, who with his usual ability at length succeeded in inducing Madame de Verneuil to withdraw her claims. Aware that he could hope nothing either from her generosity or her dread of ridicule, the astute lawyer represented to her the inequality of the contest in which she was about to engage without any ulterior support; whereas the Duc de Guise was not only powerful in himself, but would necessarily be supported by all the members of his family, as well as protected by the Queen.

The Marquise for a time affected to believe that the legality of the document in her possession must enable her to triumph even over these obstacles, formidable as they were; but Jeannin reminded her of the death of one of her witnesses, the denial of another, and the solemn declaration of the Duke that his own signature was feigned; assuring her that these circumstances must prove more than sufficient to prevent the recognition of the deed in any court of law. When he found that this argument had produced the desired impression, he next proceeded to expatiate upon the benefit which she could not fail to derive from the gratitude of the Guises, should she voluntarily withdraw her claim without subjecting the Duke to the annoyance of a public lawsuit; during which, moreover, her former *liaison* with his brother, the Prince de Joinville, could not fail to be made matter of comment and curiosity. He urged upon her the desirability of avoiding a publicity which must tend to dishonour both herself and her children; and, finally, he pointed out the propriety and policy of seizing so favourable an opportunity to secure the goodwill of the Regent, who would as a natural consequence be gratified by such a concession, and be thus induced to bury the past in oblivion.

Madame de Verneuil wept and argued in vain. Jeannin was indeed too subtle an antagonist to afford her one inch of vantage-ground; and he so thoroughly undermined the reasonings which she advanced, that, wearied and discouraged, she at length consented to forego her claim.

Deprived of the position which she had formerly held at the Court, she never re-appeared there, but spent the remainder of her life either on her estate at Verneuil, or in her hôtel at Paris, in such complete retirement that nothing more is known of her save the period of her death, which took place on the 9th of February 1633, when she had reached her fifty-fourth year.

CHAPTER II

1610

For a short time Marie began to hope that the conciliatory measures she had adopted would ensure the tranquillity of the country over which she had been called to govern. All the cities and provinces had sworn fidelity to the King, and obedience to herself; all the governors of fortresses had followed their example; and the great nobles, whose plans were not yet matured, and whose cupidity was for the moment satisfied, testified no inclination to disturb, or to trammel the measures of the Government. The relief afforded to the middle and lower classes by the diminution of some of the national imposts, and the abolition of others, began to produce its effect upon the popular mind; and the young King was received whenever he appeared in public with warm and enthusiastic greetings. All the members of the House of Guise, traditionally the most dangerous enemies of the Crown, affected a respectful deference towards the Regent, and an earnest desire to uphold her authority; while the Duc d'Epéron, who had, in her first hour of trial, at once declared himself her devoted adherent, appeared to exist only to fulfil her wishes. The ministers deferred to her opinions with a respect which caused their occasional opposition to be rather matter of argument than mortification; and, finally, Concini and his wife seemed to have forgotten their own interests in those of their royal mistress.

Meanwhile, the bearing of the young sovereign, ably prompted by the wisdom of M. de Souvré, was admirable. Gifted with an intellect beyond his years, and with an agreeable person, he soon engaged the affections of the people; who, eager to love the son of Henri IV, and to anticipate under his rule the same glory and greatness which had characterized the reign of his father, drew the happiest auguries from his slightest actions; while the modesty of his demeanour towards the princes and nobles equally tended to establish a feeling of interest and sympathy towards his person which promised a favourable result. When he received the homage of his Court on his accession he said sadly: "Gentlemen, these honours have devolved upon me too soon; I am not yet old enough to govern; be faithful, and obey the commands of the Queen my mother."

Unfortunately, the ambition of Concini was more powerful than his devotion to his benefactress; and his influence continued unabated. Moreover, his vanity was mortified, as he could not conceal from himself that he was indebted for his position at Court, indefinite as it was, to the affection of the Regent for his wife; and he consequently urged Leonora to induce the Queen to purchase for him the town of Ancre in Picardy, whose possession would invest him with the title of marquis, and assure to him the consideration due to that rank. Madame de Concini accordingly proffered her request, which was conceded without difficulty; for Marie was at that moment, to adopt the expression of Richelieu, keeping her hands open; and this purchase formed a comparatively unimportant item in her lavish grants. Encouraged by so facile a success, the Italian adventurer was, however, by no means disposed to permit even this coveted dignity to satisfy his ambition, and through the same agency he ere long became Governor of Péronne, Roye, and Montdidier, which he purchased from M. de Créquy for the sum of forty thousand crowns. The Queen had been induced to furnish an order upon the royal treasury for this amount, which was presented without any misgiving by the exulting favourite; but M. de Villeroy, who considered himself to have been slighted on some occasion by her Majesty, refused to countersign the document, an opposition which so enraged Concini that he hastened to pour out his complaints to Marie; who, overcome by the wrath of the husband and the tears of the wife, summoned the Duc de Sully, of whom she inquired if it were not possible to procure the requisite amount by having recourse to the money lodged at the Arsenal. Sully replied in the negative, declaring that the sums therein deposited were not available for such a

purpose, and reminding her that seven millions of livres had already been withdrawn since the death of the King. It was, consequently, necessary to raise the desired purchase-money by other means, which having been at length effected, Concini found himself not only placed by his court-appointment on a par with the peers of the realm, but also enabled, by the munificence of the Regent, and the revenues of his new government, to rival them in magnificence.

Then it was that his talent for intrigue boldly developed itself. In vain did his wife warn him of the danger of further forcing his fortunes, and thus drawing down upon himself the hatred and envy of the native nobility; in vain did she represent that by indulging his passion for power and display he must eventually create enemies who were certain to prove fatal to his prosperity; Concini, as weak and vain as he was greedy and ambitious, disregarded her advice, and strenuously turned his attention to fomenting a misunderstanding among the most influential of the nobles, in order to prevent a coalition which threatened to diminish his own importance. He was well aware of his unpopularity with the Princes of the Blood, who could not without indignation see themselves compelled to treat with him almost upon equal terms, protected as he was by the favour of the Queen; and he consequently lived in perpetual apprehension of their forming a cabal to effect his ruin. Skilfully, therefore, with a smiling countenance, but an anxious heart, he availed himself of every opportunity to foment the jealousies and hatreds which policy had for a brief while laid to rest. To each and all he appeared zealous in their several interests, but to each and all he was alike a traitor.

Nature had been lavish to Concini; his person was well-formed and graceful, while his countenance beamed with intelligence, and gave promise of far greater intellect than he in reality possessed. It was this handsomeness which had inspired Leonora Galigai with a passion that was destined to be her destruction, for no doubt can be entertained that had she never become his wife her career might have been one of happiness and honour; but while Concini, absorbed in his wild schemes of self-aggrandizement, trampled upon every consideration of honour and honesty in order to attain his object, Leonora, conscious of her own want of personal attractions, and loving her husband with a devotion made up of gratitude and admiration, suffered herself to be overruled by his vanity and arrogance, and sacrificed her reason and her judgment to her affection.

The Maréchal de Bouillon having failed in his attempt to induce M. de Condé to revolt against the authority of the Regent, by one of those sudden transitions of feeling which formed so strange a feature in his character, next sought to reconcile that Prince and the Duc de Guise, who were already at feud upon the prerogatives of their rank; and he began to anticipate a successful issue to his enterprise, when the ministers, being apprehensive that a good understanding among the Princes of the Blood would tend to weaken their own influence over the Regent, gave him to understand that should M. de Condé and the Duc de Guise become firm friends, his personal importance in the country would be greatly lessened, if not entirely overthrown. This argument was all-sufficient with the ambitious and intriguing Bouillon, who forthwith began to slacken in his exertions to restore peace. But these had already proceeded so far as to render his position extremely embarrassing; and between his apprehension of sacrificing his own interest on the one hand, and of incurring suspicion upon the other, he was somewhat at a loss how to proceed, when the adroit interference of Concini, who deprecated the coalition of the Princes as much as the ministers themselves, furnished fresh fuel to the expiring flame, and widened the chasm between them more hopelessly than ever; and that, moreover, with such dexterity, that M. de Bouillon never suspected what friendly hand had come to his aid; although the Italian favourite did not fail to propitiate the haughty Duke by every means in his power, and so thoroughly succeeded in flattering his vanity, and encouraging his ambitious aspirations, that, anxious to secure the interest and assistance of so influential a person as the husband of the Queen's foster-sister and confidential friend, M. de Bouillon was induced to sell to him his office of First Lord of the Bedchamber; a circumstance which at once secured a permanent footing at Court to Concini, and opened before him a long vista of prosperity.

Marie de Medicis

One of the first decisions arrived at by the Regent was the completion of all the public edifices commenced by the late King, and the erection of such as he had resolved upon, but had not lived to commence; an admirable act of policy by which she at once evinced her respect for the memory of her husband, and procured employment for hundreds of workmen, who must otherwise have been severe sufferers from want of occupation. Those which were originated under her auspices were the castle of Vincennes and the Royal College, the latter of which she caused to be built strictly according to the design executed by Henry himself; and the first stone was laid on the 28th of August by the young King, assisted by his whole Court. It bore the arms of France and Medicis, and beneath them was inscribed in deeply-chiselled characters: "In the first year of the reign of Louis XIII, King of France and Navarre, aged nine years, and of the regency of the Queen Marie de Medicis his mother, 1610." Four medals, bearing the same inscription, two of gold, and two of silver gilt, having been placed at the corners of the stone, which was then lowered, the Due de Sully presented the silver trowel, while two of the attendant nobles alternately offered the hammer and the silver trough containing the mortar.

During the following month the Queen herself performed the same ceremony at Vincennes, respecting the fortress, and the magnificent tower built by Charles VII, but erecting beneath its shadow a commodious residence on the space which had heretofore been cumbered with a mass of unsightly buildings, totally unsuitable for the reception of a Court.

The Due de Mayenne, although suffering from severe indisposition, had hastened to offer his services to the Regent; who, recognizing his ability, and grateful for the zeal which he evinced in her interests, expressed all the gratification that she felt at his prompt and earnest offers of aid; which he moreover followed up with such untiring perseverance that he caused himself to be conveyed every day to the Louvre in his chair, in order to discuss with her Majesty the various measures necessary to the peace and welfare of the state. Above all he exhorted her to restrain her munificence, by which not only the Treasury fund, but also the revenues of the country could not fail ere long to be dangerously affected; representing to her the indecency of those who, profiting by the calamity with which France had so suddenly been stricken, were endeavouring to build up their own fortunes upon the misfortune of the nation, and who were aspiring to honours suited only to such as by their high birth and princely rank were imperatively called upon to uphold the dignity of the Crown. This argument was warmly seconded by Sully, Villeroy, and Jeannin; but Marie had already suffered so deeply from the arrogance and presumption of the nobles that she was anxious to purchase their support, and her own consequent tranquillity, however exorbitant might be the demands of those about her; and, accordingly, scarcely a day passed in which fresh claimants did not present themselves, while the original recipients remained still unsatisfied.

It was not long ere the parties most interested in these donations became aware of the attempt made to limit the liberality of the Queen, and they did not affect to disguise their indignation at what they designated as an interference with their just claims. It appeared to have grown into an admitted opinion that all who had not revolted against her authority should be recompensed for their forbearance, as though it had been some signal service rendered to the state; and immediate deliberations were held as to the best measures to be adopted in order to silence the prudent counsels to which she could not finally fail to yield. As regarded the Duc de Mayenne, he was beyond the reach of the cabal; while Jeannin and Villeroy could oppose nothing save words; with Sully, however, the case was widely different; he was not only finance minister, but also keeper of the royal treasury, and his fearless and sturdy nature was so well understood and appreciated, that none who knew him doubted for an instant that should the Regent persevere in her generosity in opposition to his advice, he would not hesitate to adopt the most extreme measures to limit her power in the disposal of the public funds.

Sully, meanwhile, like a generous adversary, had not only endeavoured to restrain the liberality of the Queen, but had even ventured to expostulate with many of the applicants upon the ruinous extravagance of their demands; a proceeding which was resented by several of the great nobles, and by none more deeply than the Prince de Condé, who was upheld in his

pretensions by his adherents, all of whom alleged that as the royal treasury was daily suffering diminution, and must soon become entirely exhausted, he had a right to claim, as first Prince of the Blood, the largest portion of its contents after their Majesties. They also reminded him of the offices and honours of which he had been despoiled by the late King, when he would not consent to retain them as the price of his disgrace; and, finally, they bade him not to lose sight of the fact that liberal as the Queen-Regent might have appeared on his return to France, he did not yet possess the revenues necessary to maintain his dignity as the first subject in the realm. M. de Condé was haughty and ambitious, and he consequently lent a willing ear to these representations; nor was it long ere he became equally convinced that his power was balanced by that of Sully; that a Bourbon was measured with a Béthune; a Prince of the Blood with a *parvenu* minister; and that such must continue to be the case so long as he permitted money to be poised against influence.

The effect of these insidious counsels soon made itself apparent in the altered manner of the Prince towards the man whom he had thus been taught to consider as the enemy of his greatness; for although he endeavoured to conceal his growing dislike, his nature was too frank, and moreover too impetuous, to second his policy; and Sully, on his side, was far too quick-sighted to be easily duped on so important a matter. The resolution of the Duke was therefore instantly formed; eager as he had been for office under the late King, he had, at the death of that monarch, ceased to feel or to exhibit the same energy. He already saw many of the favourite projects of Henry negatived; much of his advice disregarded; and as he looked into the future he taught himself to believe that he contemplated only a long vista of national decline and personal disappointment. While he had preserved the confidence and affection of his sovereign, he had held popularity lightly, too lightly it may be, for he was conscious of his strength, and scorned to seek for support where he believed that he ought only to afford it; but the knife of Ravaillac had changed the whole tenor of his existence: he saw that he was regarded with suspicion and distrust by those who envied the greatness which he had achieved; that however the Queen might veil her real feelings in the garb of esteem and kindness, she shrank from the uncompromising frankness of his disapproval, and the resolute straightforwardness of his remonstrances; that his desire to economize the resources of the country rendered him obnoxious to the greedy courtiers; and that his past favour tended to inspire jealousy and misgiving in those with whom he was now called upon to act. He was, moreover, no longer young; his children were honourably established; and, whatever it may have accorded with the policy of his enemies to assume, there can be no doubt that M. de Sully was perfectly sincere in the desire which he at this period expressed to retire from the cares and responsibilities of office to the comfort and tranquillity of private life. That such a resolution was most unpalatable to the Duchess is equally certain; but Sully nevertheless persisted in his intention, and even announced his proposed resignation to the Regent, entreating at the same time that she would not oppose the measure.

The moment was one of extreme difficulty for Marie. On all sides she was pursued by complaints of the finance minister, whose want of deference wounded the pride of the Princes, while the ministers reproached him with an undue assertion of authority, and the nobles murmured at his interference in matters unconnected with his official character. The Marquis d'Ancre and his wife were, moreover, among the most bitter of his enemies, and at this precise period their influence was all-sufficient with the Queen, who had so accustomed herself to be guided by their advice, and led by their prejudices, that they had obtained a predominance over her mind which invested them with a factitious power against which few ventured to contend. She endeavoured, nevertheless, to temporize, for she was aware of the absolute necessity of securing the services of Sully until he could be satisfactorily replaced; and although there were not wanting many about her who would readily have undertaken to supersede him in his ministry, Marie herself doubted that, wherever her selection of a successor might be made, its duties would be as efficiently fulfilled. She was, moreover, at that particular time earnestly occupied with the preparations necessary for the coronation of her son, and the retirement of Sully could not fail to involve her in embarrassment and difficulty; she consequently sought to conciliate the veteran minister, expressed her resentment at the annoyances of which he complained, declared her perfect satisfaction with everything that he

had done since the recognition of her regency, and finally entreated him to take time and to reflect calmly upon the subject before he pressed her to accede to his request.

Sully complied with her wishes, but he did so without the slightest feeling of exultation. He was convinced that his favour was undermined and his removal from office already determined, and he accordingly experienced no sensation of self-gratulation at the expressed reluctance of the Queen to deprive herself of the oldest and ablest servant of her late consort. He was, perhaps, proud of being so acknowledged, but he was also aware that what he had been to the murdered King he could never hope to become to the Regent, who had already suffered herself to be governed by greedy sycophants and ambitious favourites.

The most important subject which occupied the Council at the commencement of the Regency was the question of the expediency or non-expediency of pursuing the design of the late King relative to the duchies of Juliers and Clèves. During the time which had elapsed since the levy of the French troops the several pretenders to the succession had not been idle, and hostile measures had already been adopted. The Catholic Princes of Germany were opposed to the claims of the Protestant party, the Dutch and the Spaniards siding with the former and the English with the latter; several towns had already been taken by each faction, and the virulence displayed on both sides threatened the infraction of the truce with Flanders, if not a universal war throughout Christendom. Nevertheless, the general voice was against any interference on the part of France, the ministers being anxious to avoid an outlay which under the then circumstances of the kingdom they deemed alike useless and impolitic, while the nobles, fearing to lose the advantages which each promised himself by confining the attention of the Queen to the internal economy of the state, came to the same decision. Sillery alone combated this resolution, declaring that as the protection of the Princes who had appealed to him for aid had been one of the last projects of the late King, his will should be held sacred and his intentions fully carried out.

To this declaration, which produced an evident effect upon the Regent, Sully replied by asserting that in order to have done this effectually, and with the dignity worthy of a great nation, the French troops should long ago have taken the field; whereas they had been suffered to remain so long inactive that their interference was no longer required, and could only be regarded by all parties as superfluous, the Prince of Orange having so skilfully invested the city of Juliers that it would be impossible for the enemy to make any effectual resistance; while Austria remained perfectly inactive, evidently considering the struggle at an end. The argument of the Chancellor had, however, decided the Queen, who exclaimed vehemently: "Say no more; I will never abandon the allies of the French Crown; and you have now, gentlemen, only to decide upon what general it will be expedient to confer the command of the campaign."

The Duc de Bouillon, on ascertaining the decision of the Regent, immediately advanced his claim. He had already become weary of the Court, and he was, moreover, anxious to obtain some employment which might form an honourable pretext for his departure before the approaching coronation of the King, at which he could not assist owing to his religious principles. This difference of faith, however, determined the Council to decline his services, his ambition and spirit of intrigue being so notorious as to render it inexpedient to entrust him with a command of so much importance, and one which must, moreover, bring him into constant contact with his co-religionists; a refusal by which he was so much mortified that he made immediate preparations for retiring to Sedan. The choice of the Council ultimately fell upon the Maréchal de la Châtre, who was appointed chief and lieutenant-general of the King's army, consisting of twelve thousand infantry and two thousand horse.

The brave old soldier was not, however, fated on this occasion to add to his well-earned laurels, the words of Sully having been verified to the letter. Juliers was invested in the beginning of August, and on the 18th of the same month, when the French troops arrived before the city, the Prince of Orange had already made himself master of the fortress; and although the Imperial general gallantly persisted in his defence, he found himself at its close compelled to capitulate, being no longer able to resist the cannonade of the enemy, who had

Marie de Medicis

effected an irreparable breach in one of the walls, by which they poured an unceasing fire into the streets of the town.

The capitulation was signed on the 1st of September, and executed on the morrow, after which M. de la Châtre and his forces returned to France, and the different Princes who had been engaged in the campaign retired to their several states.

Meanwhile the Court of Paris was rapidly becoming a scene of anarchy and confusion. The Prince de Conti and the Comte de Soissons were alike candidates for the government of Normandy, which the Regent, from its importance and the physical disqualifications of the Prince, conferred, despite the solicitations of Madame de Conti, upon M. de Soissons; and she had no sooner come to this decision than the two Princes were at open feud, supported by their several partisans, and the streets of the capital were the theatre of constant violence and uproar. The Duc d'Epemon, who was the open ally of the Count, on his side supported M. de Soissons in order to counterbalance the influence of the Prince de Conti and the Guises; an unfortunate circumstance for Marie, who had so unguardedly betrayed her gratitude for his prompt and zealous services at the first moment of her affliction, that the vain and ambitious Duke had profited by the circumstance to influence her opinions and measures so seriously as to draw down the most malicious suspicions of their mutual position, suspicions to which the antecedents of M. d'Epemon unhappily lent only too much probability.

In addition to this open and threatening misunderstanding between two of the first Princes of the Blood, a new danger was created by the imprudence of the same noble, who, presuming upon his newly-acquired importance, uttered the most violent and menacing expressions against the Protestants, declaring that they had been tolerated too long, and that it would soon become necessary to reduce them to a proper sense of their insignificance; an opinion which he had no sooner uttered than the Marquis d'Ancre in his turn assured the Regent that if she desired to secure a happy and prosperous reign to her son, she had no alternative but to forbid the exercise of the reformed religion, to whose adherents the late King had owed his death.

Conscious of the cabal which was organizing against them, and having been apprised that M. d'Epemon had doubled the number of his guards, the Duc de Bouillon, de Guise, and de Sully adopted similar precautions, and even kept horses ready saddled in their stables in order to escape upon the instant should they be threatened with violence. The minor nobility followed the example of their superiors, and soon every hôtel inhabited by men of rank resembled a fortress, while the streets resounded with the clashing of arms and the trampling of horses, to the perpetual terror of the citizens.

Coupled with these purely personal feuds others were generated of an official nature, no less subversive of public tranquillity. M. de Villeroy had purchased the government of Lyons from the Duc de Vendôme, for his son the Comte d'Alincourt, having at the same time disposed of the appointment of Lieutenant of the King previously held by the Count, and this arrangement was no sooner concluded than he resolved to solicit from the Queen a force of three hundred Swiss Guards to garrison the city; a demand in which he succeeded in interesting Concini, and to which he consequently anticipated no opposition on her part. He was correct in his conclusion, but the sole consent of the Regent did not suffice upon so important a question, which it was necessary to submit to the consideration of the Council, where it was accordingly mooted. Sully, although previously solicited by the Queen to support the proposal, resolutely refused to do so, alleging that he would never consent to see the King subjected to an outlay of twelve hundred thousand livres in order to enable M. d'Alincourt to pocket one hundred thousand, and that Lyons, by the treaty concluded with the Duke of Savoy, had ceased to be a frontier town, and consequently required no garrison. This reply, which made considerable impression upon Marie, she repeated to M. de Villeroy, who retorted, loud enough to be heard by a friend of Sully, that he was aware the Spaniards and Savoyards were no longer to be feared, and that it was consequently not against them that he was anxious to secure the city of Lyons, but that the real enemies whom she had to fear were the Huguenots, who were at that moment better situated, more prepared, and probably also more inclined to

oppose her authority than they had ever before been. This intemperate and ill-judged speech was instantly reported to Sully, who, rising indignantly from his seat, approached the Queen and audibly informed her that he considered it his duty to remark that, as in order to render her favourable to the demand of his son, M. de Villeroy had not scrupled to malign the Protestants, but had designated them as more dangerous enemies to herself and to the state than those who were labouring to further the interests of Spain, he only entreated her to afford to his denial the same weight as that which she attached to the assertion of the State Secretary, and by placing both upon the same footing exclude them equally from the Council, to which neither could any longer advance a claim for admittance. To this bold and public accusation M. de Villeroy attempted no reply, but thenceforward the two ministers no longer maintained even a semblance of amity.

Hitherto M. de Condé had taken no part in the dissensions which were going on about him, but on the night of the 10th of July he in his turn received a warning to be upon his guard, and in consequence he caused a strong patrol to keep watch on all sides of his palace. Not an hour passed in which the gallop of a party of horsemen was not heard clattering over the rough and ill-paved streets. At midnight the Marquis d'Ancre waited upon the Prince to convey to him an invitation from the Regent to take up his abode in the Louvre should he not consider himself safe in his own house, but M. de Condé coldly declined to avail himself of the offer, alleging that the manner in which her Majesty had replied on the previous day, when he had informed her of his having been assured of her intention to cause his arrest, had given him no encouragement to become her guest; an answer which by no means tended to relieve the increasing apprehensions of the Queen, who felt the necessity of appeasing at any sacrifice the discontent of the Princes. She accordingly desired the presence of M. de Condé at the Louvre, a summons which he reluctantly obeyed; and it was long before the urbanity of her welcome assured him of the sincerity with which she entreated him to endeavour in her name to conciliate the Prince de Conti, who, on the refusal of the coveted government, had quitted Paris in disgust, and to induce his return to the Court.

It was not the fashion of that period even for Princes of the Blood to make concessions whence they derived no personal benefit, and it was accordingly without any compunction that M. de Condé declared the terms upon which he would undertake the proposed mission. He was to receive as recompense for his condescension the sum of fifty thousand crowns, with the first government which should become vacant, and was authorized to promise two hundred thousand crowns to the Duc de Guise for the payment of his debts, as well as several lesser sums to others of the Princes, on condition that they should return to their allegiance and forego their personal animosities.

These preliminary arrangements concluded, M. de Condé hastened to represent to his uncle the necessity of his immediate return to Paris before the departure of the King for Rheims, whither he was about to proceed for his coronation; and the Prince de Conti having with considerable difficulty been induced to comply with his request, the princely relatives entered the capital with so numerous a retinue of nobles and gentlemen that it excited general remark.

On the following day the two Princes, similarly attended, and accompanied by the Duc de Guise and M. de Joinville, proceeded to the Parliament, where they took their accustomed seats; but neither M. de Soissons nor the Duc d'Epéron were present, the first pretexting indisposition and the second declining to adduce any reason for his absence.

On the 27th the Marquis d'Ancre was admitted into the Council of State, and took the customary oaths at the Louvre; but he received few congratulations on this new honour, the arrogance in which he indulged tending to disgust the higher nobles, and to alarm those who had reason to deprecate his daily-increasing influence.

Both M. de Bouillon and the Duc de Sully, professing the reformed religion, were ineligible to officiate at the coronation of the sovereign, and they accordingly received the royal permission to absent themselves, by which both hastened to profit, but from very different motives. Sully, who was well aware that he must either voluntarily resign his governmental

dignities or submit to see them wrenched from him, proceeded to his estate at Montrond with the firm intention of never returning to the capital; a resolve which he was, however, subsequently induced to forego by the entreaty of the Queen that he would continue to afford to her son the same good service as he had done to the late King his father, coupled with assurances of her firm confidence in his zeal and fidelity; while Bouillon prepared to resume his attempts to reconcile the Princes, by which means he hoped to overthrow the Regency and to secure to himself a prominent position in the government of the kingdom. This effort was, however, destined to fail, too many interests adverse to any such coalition being involved in the question to enable him to carry out his project; and he accordingly departed for Sedan, where he forthwith began to excite the Huguenots to discontent, representing that they would never have a more favourable opportunity for enforcing their rights than at a moment when the nation was shaken to its centre by the assassination of the King, and during the minority of his successor. This argument produced, as he had anticipated, a powerful effect upon the minds of his co-religionists, to whom he also expatiated on the repugnance with which the Regent conferred place or power upon a Protestant, whatever might be his personal merit. In conclusion he urged them to demand a general assembly, a proposition to which they readily acceded, and with the greater willingness that the time allowed to them for this purpose by the edict of 1597 would expire at the close of the year.

Thus the weight of government pressed heavily upon Marie both from within and without; and meanwhile the young King began to betray symptoms of that suspicious and saturnine temper by which he was afterwards so unhappily distinguished. On one occasion when all the efforts of Père Cotton, his confessor, had failed to overcome his gloom and reserve, the priest inquired in a tone of interest the nature of the annoyance by which he was thus oppressed. "I shall not tell you," was the resolute reply; "for you will immediately write to Spain to inform them."

The confessor, whose intimate connection with the ministers of Philip had rendered him obnoxious to the French people, was startled by this unexpected answer, and immediately complained to the Queen of the affront that had been offered to him; upon which Marie summoned the offender, and insisted upon his immediately informing her who had dared to suggest such an idea, when with considerable reluctance the boy-King stated that his nurse had warned him to be cautious because the reverend father was in correspondence with that country.

"Since she permits herself to play the politician," said the Queen, "she shall be dismissed."

"Be it so," retorted the young Prince; "but," turning towards the Jesuit, "I shall remember that it was his work, and I shall not always be a child."

A short time subsequently, while playing with a favourite fawn, he hid himself among the shrubs in the gardens of the Tuileries, and remained so long in his concealment that his attendants became alarmed and were compelled to inform the Queen that although they had sought the King everywhere, to entreat him to return, they could not ascertain where he had gone. Marie in great alarm caused all around her to join in the search, while she remained at one of the windows in a state of agonizing anxiety. At length the retreat of the fugitive was found, and M. de Souvré threatened him with the rod.

"As you please," he said sullenly; "but if, in order to satisfy the Queen, you lay a hand upon me to-day, I will keep up appearances with you, but I will never forget it."

Only a few days subsequently (2nd of October) Louis XIII, attended by his Court, proceeded to Rheims for his coronation, the royal ornaments used upon such occasions having been removed from St. Denis to that city. The Cardinal de Joyeuse performed the ceremony, the archiepiscopal chair being vacant at the time; and the Princes de Condé and de Conti, the Comte de Soissons, the Duces de Nevers, d'Elboeuf, and d'Epemon represented the ancient Dukes of Burgundy, Normandy, and Aquitaine, and the Counts of Toulouse, Flanders, and Champagne.

Marie de Medicis

On the morrow the young sovereign was invested with the Order of the Holy Ghost, which he immediately afterwards conferred upon the Prince de Condé, and on Tuesday the 19th he stood sponsor for the child of the Baron de Tour; after which he proceeded to St. Marcou, where he touched a number of persons suffering under the loathsome disease which it was the superstition of the age to believe could be removed by contact with the royal hand.

On the 30th of the month the Court returned to Paris, and was met at the Porte St. Antoine by the civic authorities, at the head of two hundred mounted citizens, amid a cannonade from the Bastille, and ceaseless flourishes of trumpets and hautboys. The Regent had, however, preceded her son to the city, and stood in a balcony at the house of Zamet to see him pass, where he no sooner perceived her than he withdrew his plumed cap, which he did not resume until having halted beneath the window he had saluted her with a profound bow. He then proceeded by torchlight to the Louvre, accompanied throughout his progress by the same acclamations of loyalty and enthusiasm as had greeted the ears of his dead father only a few months previously.

It had been a great relief to Marie de Medicis that before the departure of the Court for Rheims a reconciliation had been effected between the Prince de Condé and the Comte de Soissons; but her tranquillity was not destined to last, the attendants of the Cardinal de Joyeuse and those of the Marquis d'Ancre having had a violent altercation during the journey on the subject of the accommodation provided for their respective employers; and this quarrel was no sooner appeased than the new-made Marquis originated another with the Duc de Bellegarde, alleging that as First Lord of the Bedchamber he had a right to take precedence of the Duke, who was Grand Equerry of France. M. de Bellegarde, irritated by this presumption, complained loudly of the affront, and was supported in his indignation by the Duc d'Epemon and by the Comte de Soissons, who was becoming weary of the Italian adventurer.

Even the Queen herself could neither support nor justify such undue pretensions; and M. d'Ancre, reluctantly convinced that he had on this occasion swooped at too high a quarry, swallowed his mortification as best he might, and endeavoured to redeem his error; an attempt in which he was seconded by the Queen, in obedience to whose wishes M. le Grand somewhat contemptuously consented to forego any further demonstration of his resentment; while the Duc d'Epemon agreed, with even more facility, to follow his example. The Comte de Soissons was not, however, so easily to be appeased; and he accordingly, with the ever-wakeful policy for which he was proverbial, made his reconciliation with the mortified Marquis conditional upon his promise of assistance in his two darling projects of obtaining the hand of the heiress of Montpensier for his son the Comte d'Enghien, and of accomplishing the ruin of the Duc de Sully.

At this crisis the finance minister could ill afford to see a new antagonist enter the lists against him, surrounded as he already was by enemies eager for his overthrow. The Prince de Condé had neither forgotten nor forgiven his advice to Henri IV to order his arrest when he fled to Flanders to protect the honour of his wife; the Duc de Bouillon was jealous of his interest with the Huguenot party; while the Chancellor, Villeroy, and Jeannin were leagued against him, in order to support their own authority. To Concini, moreover, his very name was odious, and consequently the new adversary who had thus been evoked against him was the most dangerous of all, inasmuch as he was the most subtle and vindictive, and also because he possessed the ear of the Queen, who had so long accustomed herself to support him against what he saw fit to entitle the oppression of the French nobles, that she had ceased to question the validity of his accusations. The religion of Sully also tended to indispose the Queen towards him. Herself a firm adherent of the Church of Rome, she looked with an eye of suspicion upon a minister whose faith differed from her own; and this circumstance operated powerfully in adding weight to the accusations of his enemies. The Prince de Condé alone for a time refused to sanction the efforts which were made to ensure his political ruin, but he was in his turn eventually enlisted in the cause by the prospect which was held out to him of sharing in the profits resulting from the confiscation of the minister's public property; his retirement from office necessarily involving his resignation of all the lucrative appointments which he held under the Government. It was at this precise moment that the Huguenots petitioned the

Regent for the general assembly, as advised by the Duc de Bouillon; a circumstance which could not have failed to prove fatal to the interests of Sully had he still desired to retain office, as the comments of the anti-Protestant party by which she was surrounded, seconded by her own personal feelings, tended to exasperate Marie against all who professed the reformed faith. She consequently received the appeal with considerable asperity, declaring that it was impossible to calculate the demands which would be made upon the indulgence of the Crown, although there was no doubt that they would prove both unjust and extravagant; but being unable to refuse to confirm the provisions of the edict, she finally instructed the ministers to suggest delay as the best means of delivering herself for a time from the consequences of compliance.

In this attempt she, however, failed; the Duc de Bouillon being well aware that should the prescribed period be suffered to elapse without some pledge upon the part of the Government, the demand would be evaded by a declaration that the allotted time was past; and accordingly the Protestants persisted in their claim with so much pertinacity that the Regent found herself compelled to authorize their meeting at Saumur in the course of the ensuing year.

Under these circumstances it is scarcely matter of surprise that despite the opposition of the finance minister, M. de Villeroy succeeded in effecting the establishment of a garrison at Lyons; and the misunderstanding was shortly afterwards renewed between the two functionaries by a demand on the part of the State Secretary that the maintenance of the troops should be defrayed from the general receipts of the city. The Orientals have a proverb which says, "it is the last fig that breaks the camel's back," and thus it was with Sully. Exasperated by this new invasion of his authority, he lost his temper; and after declaring that the citizens of Lyons were at that moment as competent to protect themselves as they had ever been, and that it was consequently unreasonable to inflict so useless an outlay upon the King, he accused the Chancellor, who had favoured the pretensions of Villeroy, of leaguings with him to ruin the Crown; a denunciation which, as it equally affected all the other ministers who had espoused the same cause, sealed his own overthrow.

Satisfied of a fact so self-evident, Sully resolved no longer to breast the torrent of jealousy and hatred against which he found himself called upon to contend, but without further delay to resign at once the cares and dignities of office; a design which was vehemently opposed not only by his own family, but also by his co-religionists, the whole of whom, save only such of their leaders as had private reasons for seeking his dismissal, were keenly sensible of the loss which their cause must necessarily sustain from the want of his support. The Duke, however, firmly withstood all their expostulations; wearied and disgusted by the inefficiency of his endeavours to protect the interests of the sovereign against the encroachments of extortionate nobles, and the machinations of interested ministers, he felt no inclination to afford a new triumph to his enemies by awaiting a formal dismissal; and he accordingly took the necessary measures for disposing of his superintendence of the finances, and his government of the Bastille (the most coveted because the most profitable of his public offices), in order that he might be permitted in his retirement to retain the other dignities which he had purchased by a long life of labour and loyalty.

While this important affair was in progress, the Duke paid a visit to M. de Rambure, during which he said with evident uneasiness: "The Bishop of Fenouillet was with me yesterday, and assured me that in the morning a secret council had been held at the residence of the Papal Nuncio, at which were present the Chancellor, the Marquis d'Ancre, Villeroy, the Bishop of Béziers, and the Duc d'Epéron; and that after a great deal of unseemly discourse, in which the memory of the late King was treated with disrespect and derision, it was decided that everything should be changed, that new alliances should be formed, new friendships encouraged, and new opinions promulgated. It was, moreover, arranged that a letter should be forthwith sent to the Pope, informing him that it was the intention of France to be guided in all things by his advice, while every guarantee should be given to the Duke of Savoy until the conclusion of a proposed alliance with Spain; and finally, that all persons adverse to this line of policy should be compelled to resign their places, especially those who professed the

Protestant faith. Thus then, my good De Rambure," he added bitterly, "if I am wise I shall quietly dispose of my places under Government, making as much money of them as I can, purchase a fine estate, and retain the surplus, in order to meet such exigencies as may arise; for I foresee that all the faithful servants of the late King who may refuse to defer to the authority of the Marquis d'Ancre, will have enough upon their hands. As for me," he pursued vehemently, "I would rather die than degrade myself by the slightest concession to this wretched, low-born Italian, who is the greatest rascal of all those concerned in the murder of the King." "Which," adds Rambure for himself, "he truly is."

Every circumstance, moreover, conspired to strengthen the Duc de Sully in his resolution. He had, as we have shown, returned to the capital at the express invitation of the Regent; but he had no sooner arrived there than he discovered how little his tenure of office was really desired. As, however, both his public and private interests required his presence in Paris for a time, he considered it expedient to suppress his indignation, and to hasten his arrangements, in order to be at liberty to withdraw whenever he should be prepared to do so; and he had accordingly no sooner recovered from the fatigue of his journey than he proceeded to pay his respects to the King and his august mother.

On reaching the Louvre he was informed that Louis was at the Tuileries, where he would spend the morning, and that the Regent dined at the Hôtel de Zamet; upon which the Duke determined to proceed thither, where he found her attended by the Duc de Villeroy, Bassompierre, M. and Madame d'Ancre, and the principal members of her household. As Sully was announced Marie uttered a gracious welcome, and ungloving her hand, presented it to him to kiss; which he had no sooner done than she assured him of her continued regard and requested that he would talk no more of retiring from the service of the King, whose youth and helplessness rendered the good offices of those who had enjoyed the confidence of his royal father doubly necessary to himself; and finally, despite all that had previously occurred, the Duke took his leave almost shaken in his belief that Marie had been induced to sanction his dismissal. This illusion was, moreover, encouraged by the conduct of the courtiers, who had no sooner ascertained the nature of his reception by the Queen, than they flocked to the Arsenal to compliment him upon his return to Court; and Zamet took an opportunity of impressing upon him that he was indebted for the undisguised favour of Marie to the influence of the Marquis d'Ancre; who subsequently visited him in his turn, but so visibly with the intention of inducing him to uphold the extravagant pretensions which he was about to advance, that Sully did not disguise his disgust, and they separated mutually dissatisfied.

On the morrow the Duke proceeded, according to appointment, to the Louvre, where he was immediately admitted to the private closet of Marie; but he had scarcely crossed the threshold ere he became aware that his contention with Concini had induced a coldness on the part of the Regent, which she strove in vain to conceal. She, however, made no allusion to their interview, confining her complaints to the extortionate importunities of the great nobles, which she declared her resolution to resist; and, by referring them to the Council, cause them to be subjected to so rigorous an examination as must tend to their diminution. She then placed in the hands of the finance minister a list of the demands which had been made upon her, entreating him to assist her in opposing claims that would end, if satisfied, by ruining the interests alike of the King and of the nation; and she concluded by pledging her royal word that she would uphold the Duke in his opposition, as resolutely as ever he had been supported in his former measures by the deceased monarch. More and more bewildered by this apparent inconsistency, Sully respectfully took possession of the document, declaring his perfect willingness to serve both her Majesty and the state by every means in his power; and he then awaited her pleasure upon other matters of more public importance; but on all else Marie was silent, and the disappointed minister at length withdrew to examine the paper which had been delivered to him, and of which we will transcribe the principal contents as singularly illustrative of the venal state of the Court at that period.

The Prince de Condé demanded the captaincy of the fortress of Château-Trompette, the government of Blaye, and the principality of Orange as far as the bank of the Rhône; the Comte de Soissons solicited the captaincy of the old palace of Rouen, and the fortress of Caen, with

the tax upon cloth, flax, and hemp, which he had previously endeavoured, as elsewhere stated, to obtain from Henri IV; the Duc de Lorraine requested payment in full of the whole sum specified in his treaty, although he had previously consented to accept two-thirds of the amount; the Duc de Guise demanded the royal assent to his marriage with Madame de Montpensier, the revocation of all the patent taxes in Provence and the port of Marseilles, and the liquidation of his debts; the Duc de Mayenne, who had warned the Regent to resist the extravagant pretensions of the Princes, also came forward with a demand for large sums independently of those insured to him by his treaty; the Duc d'Aiguillon sought to obtain a donation of thirty thousand crowns, the governments of Bresse and the city of Bourg, together with the embassy to Spain, and enormous emoluments; the Prince de Joinville, so lately an exile from the Court, requested the government of Auvergne, or failing this, that of the first province which should become vacant; the Duc de Nevers asked for the entire proceeds of the tax upon salt produced in the Réthelois, with the governments of Mézières and Sainte-Menehould; the Duc d'Epéron demanded the command of a corps of infantry, to be constantly kept in an efficient state, the survivorship of his governments for his son, and that fortifications should be formed at Angoulême and Saintes, with three or four other equally important concessions; the Duc de Bouillon sought the liquidation of some alleged debts, the proceeds of the excise, and salt duties, and all other imposts levied in the viscounty of Turenne, the arrears of pay due to his garrisons, the liquidation of all pensions which had been discontinued during his exile, with the royal assent to a general assembly of the Protestants; the Chancellor followed with a demand of all the fees appertaining to the lesser seals, that the salary of his office should be doubled, and that he should have letters of nobility in Normandy. All the officers of the Crown sought an increase of twenty-four thousand livres to their several pensions; members of the Council, augmented emoluments; governors of provinces, the revenues of these provinces which had hitherto reverted to the Crown; municipal companies, exemptions and privileges previously unthought of; and finally, Concini, who had arrived in the French capital only a few years previously comparatively destitute, set forth his requirements to be these—the *bâton* of Marshal of France, the governments of Bourg, Dieppe, and Pont-de-l'Arche, the proceeds of the salt duties of Languedoc, and those of the reduction accorded at Moissets and Feydant.

Such, and much more of the same description, were the contents of the documents upon which the wrath of Sully scarcely permitted him to dwell with patience. It was a chaos whence he dreaded even to attempt to draw the elements of order, feeling as he did that every concession made to one of the parties must necessarily evoke the jealousy and indignation of another, while it was utterly impossible, and would, moreover, be dangerously impolitic in any case, to satisfy the pretensions of all. The enormous sums produced by the imposts, whose transfer from the Crown to individuals was thus unblushingly demanded, would have rendered the Princes to whom they might be granted more wealthy than many of the petty sovereigns of Europe; while the governments and provinces sought to be obtained by others must inevitably make them independent of the King, and thus place the subjects who should have been the support of the throne in direct rivalry with their sovereign. The finance minister was aghast; and the more earnestly he considered the subject, the more he became convinced that there was no alternative save to negate all these egregious claims *en masse*; a conviction which satisfied him that by fearlessly adopting this course, his tenure of office would, had he still desired to contend with the cabal which had already been formed against him, become utterly impossible.

Nevertheless Sully did not shrink from what he considered an imperative duty; and accordingly he resolved no longer to trust the lip-deep assurances by which he had been beguiled since his return to Court, but immediately to declare his resignation of office, and to follow it up by the most resolute and determined opposition.

He had no sooner, therefore, irrevocably arrived at this decision, than he addressed a letter to the Regent, in which he requested her permission to retire from the Government; and, satisfied that his suit must prove successful, he calmly awaited her reply. Meanwhile, resolved that no reproach should be cast upon him after his departure, he demanded an audience of the King, in order to explain to him the exact state of the royal treasury, and the manner in which

its contents had been diminished since the demise of his royal father; but as a private interview with a mere child would not have satisfactorily sufficed to accomplish this object, Sully produced his papers before all the members of the royal household; and while engaged in the necessary explanation, he remarked that the antiquated fashion of his costume, which he had not changed for years, had excited the hilarity of the younger courtiers. He suddenly paused, and after glancing coldly round the giddy circle, looked fixedly at the young monarch, and said with a dignity which chased in an instant every inclination to mirth in the bystanders: "Sire, I am too old to change my habits with every passing wind. When the late King, your father of glorious memory, did me the honour of conferring with me upon state affairs, he was in the habit of previously clearing the apartment of all buffoons and mountebanks."

To the Princes of the Blood, the ministers of state, and the nobles of the Court, Sully that day added to the list of his enemies the boy-courtiers of the royal circle.

Thus in heart-burning and uncertainty closed the year which had commenced with the assassination of the King. An arrogant and unruly aristocracy, a divided and jealous ministry, and a harassed and discontented population were its bitter fruits.

CHAPTER III

1611

The first political event worthy of record which occurred in France at the commencement of the year 1611 was the retirement of the Duc de Sully; who, on the 24th of January, received the reply of the Regent to the letter in which he had solicited her permission to withdraw from the Government. It contained a faintly-expressed regret at the resolution he had taken; "but that," as he himself says, "was merely for form's sake;" and the accuracy of his judgment is evidenced by the fact that only two days after he had again written to declare that his determination was unalterable, the Duc de Bouillon delivered to him the official warrants by which he was discharged from his duties of Superintendent of Finance, and Captain of the Bastille. These were worded in the most flattering terms; and he was guaranteed against all inquiry or annoyance upon either subject from the day in which he resigned his tenure of office. A third warrant was, moreover, added, by which, in consideration of his past services, the Queen bestowed upon him the sum of three hundred thousand livres; and a few days subsequently he received letters from the King and the Regent authorizing him to transfer the command of the Bastille to M. de Châteauneuf; which he had no sooner done than he turned all his attention to the final arrangement of his public accounts, in order that he might, with as little delay as possible, be enabled to quit the capital.

The transfer of the Bastille was shortly afterwards followed by that of the ministry of finance, which was placed under the joint direction of M. de Châteauneuf and the Presidents de Thou and de Jeannin; the latter of whom was, however, invested with the rank of Comptroller-General, which gave him the entire management of the public funds, to the exclusion of his colleagues, who were in consequence only eligible to assist in the official distribution of the public monies. The charge of Grand Master of the Artillery, which was resigned with the command of the Bastille by Sully, the Regent retained in her own hands.

From that time the Marquis d'Ancre became pre-eminent at Court; and not only the ministers, but even the Princes of the Blood themselves, looked with distrust upon his power over the Queen. Between the Italian favourite and the Duc d'Epemon especially, a feeling of hatred had grown up, which, although as yet veiled by the policy for which each was so distinguished, only awaited a fitting opportunity to reveal itself on both sides; and the struggle for power was not the less resolute because it was carried on amid smiles and courtesies. Meanwhile, also, the Princes de Guise and de Lorraine evinced symptoms of disunion, which threatened the most serious consequences; and amid all this chaos of conflicting interests and passions the royal authority was treated with contempt, and Marie began to tremble for the stability of her regency.

Early in the month Concini entered upon his duties as First Lord of the Bedchamber, and had a serious misunderstanding with the Duc de Bellegarde, who refused to allow him to take possession of the apartments in the Louvre set aside for the person holding that rank during the year in which he was on duty, on the pretext that the Marquise his wife being already lodged in the palace, he had no right to claim any further accommodation. Concini insisted on the privilege of his office, upon which M. le Grand, to whom he had become hateful from his arrogance and pretension, retorted in a manner which excited his temper; and high and bitter words were exchanged that threatened the most serious results, when the Italian, suddenly recollecting that he was exasperating by his violence an enemy too powerful for him

to contend against without support, declared that he would pursue the quarrel no further in person, but would place his honour in the hands of the Comte de Soissons, and abide by his decision. Against such a determination M. de Bellegarde had, of course, nothing to urge; and the Italian forthwith requested the Marquis de Coeuvres, in whom M. de Soissons had great confidence, to represent the affair to that Prince, and to assure him that he would be entirely governed by his advice.

The Duc d'Epéron, delighted to find that Concini had made a new enemy, strenuously exerted himself to induce M. le Grand to maintain his ground, a counsel which the latter was well disposed to follow; but the Comte de Soissons, who was anxious to secure the influence of the Italian Marquis that he might the more readily effect the marriage of his son, eagerly embraced so favourable an opportunity of purchasing his good offices; and consequently represented in stringent terms to his opponent the utter impracticability of refusing to concede to M. d'Ancre the same consideration and indulgence which had been enjoyed by his predecessors in office, together with the danger that he personally incurred by so gratuitously offending an individual protected by the Regent. Whatever additional arguments he may have advanced, it is impossible to decide; suffice it that the Duke yielded, the quarrel was terminated, and Concini established in the coveted apartments; at which his gratification was so unmeasured that he pledged himself to M. de Soissons to induce the ministers to consent to the union of the Comte d'Enghien with the heiress of Montpensier, as well as to exert himself in preventing the marriage of the Duc de Guise and the Duchess her mother.

On the 5th of January the marriage of the Duc de Guise and the Duchesse de Montpensier was, however, celebrated by the Cardinal de Joyeuse at the early hour of four in the morning, in the chapel attached to the hôtel of the lady; an arrangement which was in all probability caused by the opposition made to this alliance by the Comte de Soissons, who, still anticipating a union between his son and the daughter of the Duchess, was apprehensive that Madame de Montpensier might be induced to enrich the family of which she thus became a member with no inconsiderable portion of the wealth which must otherwise form part of the property of the young heiress.

Only three days subsequently, while the Court were still occupied with the festivities which took place on the occasion, the Prince de Conti and his brother M. de Soissons, who was on his way to the Louvre, unfortunately met in a narrow street leading to the Cross of Trahoir, when it had become so dark that it was impossible to distinguish the appointments or liveries of either equipage; and the carriages were no sooner entangled than the coachman of the Comte, ignorant of the rank of his opponent, compelled the servants of the Prince to make way, an insult which he resented with a bitterness that induced him to refuse the apology subsequently proffered by his brother.

Alarmed by this new feud, the Queen requested the Duc de Guise to see the Prince de Conti, and to beseech him to effect a reconciliation with his turbulent brother, a mission which the young Duke cheerfully undertook; but it unfortunately happened that in order to reach the Abbey of St. Germain, where M. de Conti was then residing, it was necessary for him to pass beside the Hôtel de Soissons, which he accordingly did, followed by a retinue of thirty horsemen. This circumstance was construed into a premeditated insult by the Count, who immediately assembled his friends, and informed them that he had been braved in his own house by the Duc de Guise; whose adherents had no sooner ascertained that there was an assemblage hostile to his interests forming at the Hôtel de Soissons, than they in their turn flocked in such numbers to afford him their support that in a short time more than a thousand nobles were collected under his roof.

When this fact was communicated to M. de Soissons he sent to request that the Prince de Condé would accompany him to the Louvre, to demand from the Regent that she should afford them satisfaction for the insolence of the Duc de Guise; who, when summoned to explain his motives for inflicting an affront upon the Count, simply and calmly replied that he had never sought to insult M. de Soissons; but had, in obedience to the command of her Majesty, been compelled to pass an angle of his hôtel, which he had moreover done without a

demonstration of any description, and accompanied only by the escort suitable to his rank. That his sincere anxiety had been to second the wishes of her Majesty; and that so far from seeking to envenom an unfortunate misunderstanding which could only tend to involve the Court in new disorder, he had from the first moment resolved not to offer an opinion upon the merits of the feud; a determination to which he still meant to adhere.

This manly declaration in no degree softened the ire of the Count; who, enchanted at having discovered an opportunity of annoying and harassing M. de Guise during the first week of his marriage, retorted in a manner which impelled the Queen to request that each would retire to his hôtel; and to express at the same time her earnest hope that a little calm reflection would induce the disputants to become reconciled.

The quarrel was nevertheless sustained throughout the whole of that and the following day; and so great was the commotion which it excited in the capital that the Regent, apprehending its result, considered it necessary to order that chains should be in readiness to be stretched across the streets, and that the citizens should be prepared to take up arms at a moment's notice. On the morrow new efforts were made to pacify the irritated parties, but all having alike failed, a detachment of the royal guard was stationed near the person of each of the Princes in order to ensure his safety.

Meanwhile the Queen requested of M. de Guise, by a confidential messenger, that he would wait upon the Comte de Soissons, and apologize for having inadvertently given him offence; a proposition to which he readily consented; feeling that such was in reality the case, and that the rank of the Count as a Prince of the Blood demanded this concession. Previously, however, to putting his design into execution, he informed the Duc de Mayenne of the promise which he had made to comply with the desire of the Regent, when he was instantly and vehemently dissuaded from his purpose; M. de Mayenne representing that being himself the party aggrieved by the groundless accusation brought against him, he could not, without impairing the dignity due to his position, personally declare his regret for an act which he had never committed. He then counselled the Duke to place the affair in his hands, alleging with a sophistry which it is difficult to reconcile with reason that an apology made for him, instead of by him, would at once answer every purpose, and spare his own pride.

M. de Guise, who throughout the whole transaction would appear to have been impatient to rid himself of all trouble and annoyance, and consequently careless by what means it was terminated, readily accepted the offer; and the Duc de Mayenne accordingly repaired to the palace, where he informed the Queen that he was authorized by his nephew to offer his excuses for the displeasure which he had unconsciously given to his Highness the Comte de Soissons; to which he begged to add the assurance that the House of Guise, individually and collectively, were desirous to live upon terms of friendship and courtesy with the Count, if he would accept their advances in the same spirit.

Delighted by the prospect of restored peace, Marie made no comment upon the fact that the Duc de Guise had failed to fulfil the promise which he had made of offering his own apology to the Prince. She was terrified by the anarchy that had grown up about her, and by the facility with which those who should have been the most earnest supporters of the dignity and safety of the Crown found means to involve the Court in confusion and cabals; a fact which moreover tended to place her more completely in the power of Concini and his wife than would probably ever have been the case under other circumstances.

On the 14th of January in the present year the Regent, through the active agency of Concini, gave her solemn consent to the marriage of the Comte d'Enghien with Mademoiselle de Montpensier, despite the opposition of the Cardinal de Joyeuse, the Duc d'Epemon, and a number of the Court nobles, who were alarmed at the prospect of so close an alliance between M. de Soissons and the Duc de Guise.

The next event of interest was the final departure of M. de Sully from the capital, who, previously to quitting Paris, returned to the Regent the warrant for three hundred thousand livres with which she had, as she declared, sought to repay his past services. The letter by

which the deed was accompanied was, although perfectly respectful, haughty, cold, and resolute: nor did the Duke make an effort to disguise from her that the onerous duties which he had performed to the late monarch, to the nation, and to herself, could not be repaid by an order upon the royal treasury; while his retirement was voluntary, and not intended to be contingent on any such arrangement. The Court gossips made merry over an altercation which they declared to have taken place between the Duke and Duchess on the occasion of this transaction; Madame de Sully, whose vanity was wounded by the loss of dignity and influence consequent on the retirement of her husband, considering this additional pecuniary sacrifice alike idle and uncalled-for, and reproaching him with undue haughtiness in thus refusing the last favour which the Regent had desired to confer upon him; and the ex-minister retorting by reminding her that she, at least, had no cause for complaint, since from the obscure condition of the daughter of a petty lawyer he had elevated her to the rank of a Duchess, and made her the companion of Princes.

When the dismissal of Sully had been decided, it will be remembered that De Thou was one of those appointed to succeed him in his office as a director of finance. The appointment was not, however, accepted; M. de Harlay, fatigued and disgusted by the intrigues which daily grew up about him, being anxious to resign his office of First President of the Parliament, which had previously been held by Christophe de Thou, to a son so worthy of inheriting his honours. The younger De Thou was, moreover, his brother-in-law, and he anticipated no difficulty in transferring his charge to that minister. Even to the last he was, however, fated to disappointment; for not only was this nomination opposed by the Pope, but Villeroy, who desired to see the place bestowed upon one of his own adherents, had sufficient influence with the Regent to induce her to confer it upon M. de Verdun, over whom he possessed an unlimited control.

This affront so deeply wounded M. de Thou that he resigned the office which he had previously held, and even refused to obey the summons of the Regent, conveyed to him through the Marquis d'Ancre; alleging that she had treated him with so much disrespect, and had subjected him to mortification so severe, that he must decline an interview. In vain did Concini impress upon him that the Queen was willing to allow him to name his own successor, and to indemnify himself as he considered just; he would listen to no conditions. To every argument he coldly replied: "She has treated me ill, and I will not go."

"You are a philosopher," said the Italian sarcastically.

"I had need be one," was the calm retort; "when I consider how I have been used."

Concini reported the ill-success of his mission, but Marie, unfortunately blinded by those about her to her real interests, was indifferent to the just resentment of an able and faithful servant. "*Non lo farò mai*," was her only remark; and one of the most efficient and zealous of her ministers was carelessly cast off.

Meanwhile the jealous dissensions of the nobles continued to increase, and constant quarrels took place between the Cardinal de Joyeuse, the Comte de Soissons, and the Duc d'Epemon. The latter was, at this period, detested by all other aspirants to royal favour; his rapid success at Court had made him insolent; and he advanced such preposterous claims, and arrogated to himself such an indefeasible right to the gratitude and indulgence of the Regent, that the Princes of the Blood took the alarm, and the Prince de Condé and the Comte de Soissons resolved to effect his disgrace. Concini, as we have already shown, had long nourished the most bitter resentment against one whom he considered as a formidable rival in the good graces of the Queen, and he was consequently induced without difficulty to join in the conspiracy; his vanity suffering bitterly from the contempt with which he was ostentatiously treated by the Duke, who was, as the Italian asserted, a mere gentleman of fortune like himself, until raised to his present rank by the favour of Henri III, a favour as ill-gained as it was unbecomingly exhibited. M. d'Epemon, with an absence of tact as astonishing as it was lamentable in a man whose ambition was unbounded, and who had no party to support his pretensions against the Princes of the Blood, lent himself meanwhile by his puerile and headstrong folly to their enmity, by affecting to brave it; and after a sharp altercation with M.

Marie de Medicis

de Soissons, who did not conceal his intention of insulting him whenever and wherever they might meet, the infatuated Duke, on the pretext that he considered his personal safety endangered by the menaces of the Prince, paraded the streets of Paris with a retinue of seven or eight hundred mounted followers; and occasionally proceeded on foot to the Louvre, with his guards ranged in order of battle, and in such force that the van had frequently reached the gates of the palace before the rear had quitted those of the Hôtel d'Épernon, a distance of two thousand paces.

This external affectation of almost regal state did not, however, prevent him from experiencing the most bitter mortification at his exclusion from all public affairs. He still considered that as he had been the first to swear fealty, and to place his services at the command of the Regent, he had a right to retain the supremacy which he had then assumed; and this arrogant pretension enabled him for a time to support the daily affronts to which he was subjected; but it soon became apparent that his position must ere long prove untenable.

The Cardinal de Joyeuse, whose favour depended upon that of the Duc d'Épernon, having perceived that his credit with the Regent was on the decline, determined to proceed to Rome. He accordingly took leave of the King and his mother, and left France; while M. d'Épernon endeavoured to effect a reconciliation with the Comte de Soissons, an attempt which was repulsed with resolute coldness on the part of the Prince, who was daily attaching himself more and more to the interests of Concini.

Early in the spring the Court left Paris for Fontainebleau, accompanied by all the Princes of the Blood; and during their sojourn in that palace Marie de Medicis constantly caused M. de Soissons and the Ducs de Guise and d'Épernon to form her party at *prime*, trusting that constant companionship, and the equal favour which she was cautious to show to all, might tend to a general reconciliation.

These efforts on the part of the Regent, however, were of little avail; individual jealousies and individual interests absorbed all the great nobles of the Court; and every concession to which they were induced was purchased at a price, and even then ungraciously yielded. Marie de Medicis at times lost alike courage and temper under the difficulties by which she was beset; and on one occasion, when she had retired to her closet, after having occupied herself for a time with the transaction of public business, she gave way to a train of thought so agitating and so painful that she suddenly rose and summoned the ladies of her suite to her presence. Mesdames de Conti, du Fargis, and de Fervaques hastened to obey her commands; and as the tapestry fell behind them, the Queen-mother silently, but with an imperious gesture, motioned them to be seated. A deep spot of crimson burned on the cheek of Marie, and there was a harsh glitter in her eye which betrayed the coming storm; nor was it long ere it burst forth.

"I have asked your presence, Mesdames," she said, fixing a stern look upon the Princesse de Conti, "when you were each, in all probability, more pleasantly engaged than in sharing the disquiet and *ennui* of your harassed mistress; but, *per Dio!* the present position of affairs leaves me no alternative, my own thoughts having become—thanks to those who should lend their assistance in bearing the grievous burthen which has been thrust upon me—but sorry companions. The Princes are still conspiring against my authority, and questioning my acts, as though I were responsible to each and all of them for the measures which I consider it expedient to adopt. According to the creed of these gentlemen, the Regent of France should be but a mere puppet, of which they, at their good pleasure, may pull the strings. Scarcely have I recalled them to Court, scarcely have I restored them to favour, than they organize new cabals excite the nobles to discontent, and breed discord, alike in the Parliament and among the people. What more can they require at my hands than what I have already bestowed? The national treasury is well-nigh exhausted in meeting their demands. Look back an instant: M. de Condé has, within the last two years, received more than nine hundred thousand crowns—the Comte de Soissons six hundred thousand—and MM. de Longueville, d'Épernon, and de Vendôme, two millions among them! Nor is this all: in contenting them I have been compelled to lavish enormous sums upon others, who would have considered themselves aggrieved had

they not also shared in my munificence. But let these proud spirits—who, despite their noble blood and their princely quality, do not disdain to barter their loyalty for gold—let them beware lest they urge me beyond my patience. Your brothers and brothers-in-law, Madame la Princesse, will do well to be warned in time. They are playing a hazardous game. If they believe that by exhausting the royal treasury they will succeed in rendering themselves masters of the kingdom, they are deceived; the Queen-mother watches alike over the life and the crown of her son. Once more I say, let them be warned in time; not a plot, not a cabal shall escape my knowledge; and should they disregard the caution which I now condescend to give them through yourself, they will learn too late what it is to incur the vengeance of Marie de Medicis."

The silence of a moment succeeded to this outbreak of impassioned eloquence; for Madame de Conti, fearful of augmenting the anger of her royal mistress, ventured no reply; and after a brief struggle with herself the Queen-mother smoothed her ruffled brow, and forcing a smile to her still quivering lips, she resumed in an altered tone: "Enough of this, however; tell me now somewhat of your ballet of last night, Princesse: you have as yet made no mention of its success."

"I awaited the commands of your Majesty ere I intruded the subject," replied Madame de Conti coldly; "its success was all that I could desire."

"Did the Duc de Guise honour your festival with his presence? He seldom, as I am aware, encourages our Court frivolities."

"MM. de Condé and de Guise were both among my guests, Madame; and I could have ill brooked the absence of either."

"Ay, ever together, in feast and feud," murmured Marie bitterly to herself. "And Bassompierre?" she pursued aloud—"the gallant courtier who has as many mistresses as I have halberdiers in my bodyguard, and who creates an atmosphere of gladness about him, be he where he may; was he as gay and gorgeous as his wont?"

"Your Majesty is probably not aware," replied Madame de Conti with increased formality, "that M. de Bassompierre has quarrelled with one of my relatives; a circumstance which deprived me of the honour of his presence."

"And the Marquis d'Ancre?" demanded the Queen-mother abruptly; "did he at least partake of your splendid hospitality?"

The cheek of the Princess blanched, and her voice slightly trembled as she said hurriedly: "M. d'Ancre was on duty, Madame, about the person of your Majesty, and I did not presume to ask for his absence from the palace."

"*Veramente, principessa*" exclaimed Marie de Medicis with sudden vehemence, "you excel yourself to-day! But have a care! My faithful servants were no meet guests, as it would seem, at a festival in honour of the House of Guise. Truly your energetic kinsmen are goodly diplomatists. Not content with conspiring in the Louvre—under the very roof which shelters their sovereign—they conspire also in their own palaces, by the glare of tapers as busily as in the shade. Even to the measure of soft music they can adapt their treasonable practices; and amid the murmurs of flattery can breathe the whispers of disaffection as glibly as when closeted together secure from all intrusion. So be it then; exclude from your glittering *salons* all those who are the known adherents of the sovereign and his mother; they will be careful for the future to repay the courtesy in kind. I have as great a dread of spies as yourself, Madame de Conti, and henceforward I will profit by the lesson which you have taught me."

"I can assure your Majesty—" faltered the lady of honour.

"Nay, Princesse," interposed the Queen-mother bitterly, "do not wrong yourself. Have at least the courage necessary for the personage which you have seen fit to enact, and believe me that you will need it when you venture to cope with a Medicis. Florence can also boast of her diplomatists, and they may chance to prove even more subtle than those of our good city of Paris. There is a stern and a profitable lesson in the past should you read it aright."

Marie de Medicis

So saying Marie de Medicis rose from her seat, and with a stately step walked to a window overlooking the river, where she remained for a considerable time apparently absorbed by the busy scene beneath her; but at length she turned slowly towards the three ladies, who had also risen, and said calmly: "His Majesty is about to visit me. Mesdames du Fargis and de Fervaques will assist me to receive him. I excuse Madame de Conti; after the manifold exertions of the past night she must need repose."

The Princess made the three low curtsies customary on such occasions, and disappeared behind the tapestried hangings which were held back by the usher on duty; while the Queen-mother threw herself once more upon her seat, and burying her face in her hand, again fell into a deep and bitter reverie.

Meanwhile the Protestants were preparing for the General Assembly, and the Maréchal de Bouillon proceeded to Sedan, in order to assist at their deliberations. He had no sooner done this than the Prince de Condé requested permission to go and take possession of his government of Guienne, a project which at that particular moment created universal suspicion, and excited the alarm of Marie, who was apprehensive that he was about to solicit the support of the reformed party. Under this impression she exerted all her ingenuity to invent pretexts for delaying his purpose without awakening his distrust; but they ultimately proved unavailing, and she found herself compelled to allow him to depart.

At this particular juncture the Duc d'Epéron, irritated by the persevering avoidance of M. de Soissons, and the covert sarcasms of Concini, resolved in his turn to absent himself, and to proceed to his estate at Angoulême, flattering himself that the Regent would be but too happy to recall him when she discovered how great a blank his departure must cause at Court. It is moreover probable that he anticipated the same gratifying impediments which had delayed the journey of the Prince de Condé; and consequently his disappointment was extreme as he perceived the pleasure which Marie could not conceal when he mentioned his wish to retire for a brief interval from the capital. The wound thus inflicted upon his vanity was, however, soon healed, when, with a renewal of all her former confidence and condescension, she confessed to him that no proposition could have been more agreeable to her at that moment, from her anxiety to secure the services of a friend upon whom she could rely to keep a zealous watch over the movements of the Prince de Condé, whose departure had awakened her fears. She then explained the suspicions she had formed, and gave M. d'Epéron full and ample instructions for his future guidance, accompanying them with assurances of her firm reliance upon his attachment and fidelity; thus enabling the crestfallen courtier, who must otherwise have withdrawn in partial disgrace, to leave the palace with every mark of favour and distinction.

The precaution thus taken with regard to M. de Condé proved, however, supererogatory, the Prince having no further object in view in absenting himself from the capital than the gratification of that love of personal splendour and amusement in which he had always indulged whenever an opportunity presented itself; and thus while the Duc d'Epéron was watching all his movements with eager and anxious suspicion, M. de Condé was simply enacting the quasi-sovereign at Bordeaux and the adjacent cities where he was received with great ceremony, harangued by the municipal bodies, and surrounded by a petty court composed of all the nobles of the province.

Concini had watched the departure of the exulting Duc d'Epéron with a delight as great as his own; the only rival who threatened to counterbalance his influence was now removed from the immediate sphere in which he could prove obnoxious to his fortunes, and he soon felt the effect of his absence in the increased dependence of the Regent upon himself and his wife. Nor was the result less obvious to all the members of the Court, who, as their several interests prompted, were either overjoyed or dismayed at the unconcealed supremacy of the vainglorious Marquis, whose bearing became more arrogant than ever, and who appeared at each moment ready to dispute precedency even with the Princes of the Blood themselves. All bowed before him. He was the only certain channel of favour and preferment; and whenever, as frequently occurred, some act of presumption more glaring than usual aroused against him

the ire of the great nobles, the tears and entreaties of his wife always sufficed to induce the Regent to make new sacrifices for the purpose of ensuring his impunity.

This imprudence on the part of Marie, although originating, as it obviously did, in an inclination to maintain that peace at Court of which she had now learned by bitter experience to appreciate all the value, increased the evil which it was intended to obviate, the Italian only seeing in her indulgence a new motive for continuing his moral aggressions; and thus the evil increased slowly but surely, and the hatred engendered by the preposterous pretensions of the Marquis acquired new force, even when all around him appeared to admit his supremacy, and to bend before his will.

One of the most striking proofs of the power to which he had at this period attained is afforded by the fact that a nobleman known as a firm adherent of M. de Soissons, while conversing with the Marquis de Coeuvres on the subject of the increasing feud between the Princes of the Blood, suggested that he could perceive no more certain method for the Count to maintain himself in favour at Court than that he should effect the marriage of one of his daughters with the son of the Italian favourite. This project startled the Marquis, who never for an instant suspected that the proposition could have originated with M. de Soissons himself; and whose proud ancestral blood boiled within him at the idea of so close an alliance between one of the first subjects of France and an adventurer of obscure birth, whose very claim to respectability was even yet disputed. He was, however, fated to feel even greater surprise when, a short time subsequently, as both parties were conversing with the Marquis in the Queen's gallery at Fontainebleau, he heard a third person openly, and without the slightest hesitation, enter upon the subject with Concini himself; who, with evident gratification but affected humility, immediately replied that such an alliance was an honour to which he could not pretend, but that were it ever to be seriously proposed to him, he could only reply in the words of Cardinal Farnese to an individual who suggested to him an arrangement which at once flattered his self-love and appeared impossible of completion, "*Tu m'aduli, ma tu mi piaci.*" The subject was not pursued, but it was one not readily to be forgotten by those who were aware that it had been mooted; and there can be little doubt that the self-esteem of the Marquis d'Ancre gained fresh force, even from a passing allusion to the possibility of such an event.

Encouraged, as it would appear, by the brilliant prospect thus opened up for his son, Concini soon began to think no aggrandizement beyond the reach of his ambition; and readily overlooking both personal hatred and political good-faith in the pursuance of his darling passion, it was not long ere he argued that since a Prince of the Blood had seen fit to solicit an alliance with himself, he might readily infer that a noble of inferior rank could not but esteem it as an honour; and accordingly he commenced a negotiation with the Duc d'Epemon, between whose second son, the Marquis de la Valette, and his own daughter he desired to effect a marriage. This proposal was, however, resented as an insult by the Duke, who was not sparing in his comments upon the insolence of the Italian adventurer; and so unmeasured were his expressions that his ruin must have been ensured from that moment, had not a circumstance shortly afterwards occurred which rendered his services necessary to the Regent.

Before the end of April the Duc de Bouillon returned from Sedan, and manifested an earnest inclination to devote himself, in so far as his honour and religious principles would permit him to do so, to the interests of the Regent during the approaching assembly at Saumur; adding, moreover, that should the Queen deem his absence from the meeting desirable, he would remain at Court until it had terminated. So unexpected a concession highly gratified Marie, who, with many acknowledgments for his devotion to her cause, referred him to M. de Villeroy, by whom, his proposal having been demurely considered, it was declined; the minister being aware that the influence of M. de Bouillon would be alone able to counteract that of Sully, who, having left the Court disappointed and dissatisfied, would not fail to profit by so favourable an opportunity of asserting his power over his co-religionists. He, moreover, while thanking the Prince for a proof of loyalty so welcome to the Government, and so important to the sovereign, hinted that should he succeed in weakening the power of Sully, and in inducing the Assembly to consent to such terms as could prudently be conceded, he

would confer upon him the government of Poitou, of which it had been decided to deprive the ex-finance-minister.

This new impulse added fresh energy to the sudden loyalty of M. de Bouillon, who at once proceeded to Saumur in order to secure his election as President of the Assembly, a distinction which he declared to be due to his long services. The Protestant deputies were, however, by no means inclined to admit his claim, and more than suspicious of his intentions; and they consequently, despite his undisguised annoyance, selected for that dignity M. du Plessis-Mornay, the governor of the city; a circumstance which did not fail to increase the hatred felt by the Maréchal towards Sully, to whom he immediately attributed the mortification. Soon made conscious, by the coldness with which his invectives and threats were received by the principal Huguenot nobles, that he was only injuring by his unseemly violence the cause he sought to serve, M. de Bouillon nevertheless resolved to restrain himself, and to endeavour to effect a good understanding with Sully, whose personal importance on this occasion was powerfully increased by the influence of his son-in-law the Duc de Rohan. The Assembly met for the first time in May, and continued their sittings until September, at which period their demands and grievances were despatched to the Court, the dismissal of Sully being indicated as one of the latter.

This fact alarmed the Council, who moreover could not contemplate without great apprehension the union and perfect understanding which had, throughout the whole proceedings, characterized the Protestant leaders, who had taken their usual oath to uphold each other and the faith which they professed; and who were, as the ministers well knew, able to redeem their pledge so effectively should they see fit to exert their power, that any demonstration on their part could not fail to convulse the nation from one extremity to the other. After considerable deliberation it was agreed that the only method by which the impending evil could be averted was to dissolve the Assembly before it could proceed from words to acts; and accordingly a pretext for this breach of faith was at once found in the declaration that the King had permitted the assembling of the reformed party to enable them to select six individuals, from among whom he might himself nominate two as general deputies; while at the same time the documents forwarded to the Court were returned, with an emphatic refusal to make any reply to their contents until such time as the required nomination had been made. All opposition, save what must have assumed a decidedly hostile character, was of course impossible on the part of the Protestants, whose indignation, loud as it naturally became for a time, was finally silenced, even if not extinguished, by the calm and dignified eloquence of the Comte du Plessis-Mornay, who reminded the Assembly that their first duty as Christians was obedience to the ruling powers.

"Let us separate," said this prudent and right-minded man, as exclamations of anger and violence resounded on all sides. "Let each, on leaving this spot, leave also all animosity behind him. We should only heighten the evil by spreading it through the provinces. Each has failed, yet each has done well. Let us now endeavour to obtain by respectful silence and Christian patience what has been refused to our remonstrances and requests."

A short time subsequently, the death of M. de Créquy, governor of the town and citadel of Amiens, having taken place, a great number of the nobles were ambitious to succeed to the vacant dignity, among whom was the Marquis d'Ancre, whose insatiable ambition grasped at every opportunity of acquiring honour and advancement. Having confided his wish upon this subject to M. de Soissons, he was encouraged in his pretensions by that Prince; and having obtained the royal permission to absent himself for a time from the Court, he hastened to Picardy, attended by a hundred horsemen, in order to negotiate the affair with the entire sanction of the Queen; where, although opposed by the ministers who were anxious to curb his daily increasing power, he ultimately succeeded in his attempt.

Nevertheless the objections raised by the Council, not only to his acquirement of the government, but also to the marriage of his son with the daughter of M. de Soissons, which had been communicated to them by the Marquis de Rambouillet, embittered his temper, and determined him to discover some means of revenging what he considered as an undue

interference with his personal affairs. The extraordinary imprudence of which he was soon afterwards guilty rendered him, however, for a time unable to indulge his vindictiveness, and even threatened to involve him in the disgrace which he was so anxious to see visited upon his adversaries. In the first place, intoxicated by his newly acquired dignities, he affected the utmost attachment for M. de Soissons, who had exerted all his influence in his behalf; and remarked that the proposition lately made to him by the Prince for an alliance between their families was no longer so unequal as it had then appeared, although he was still aware that it would be a great honour conferred upon himself; but that as the Duc de Longueville was about to marry another daughter of the Prince, and that their governments were contiguous, the union of his own son with the sister of the bride might prove a mutual advantage, and of considerable service to M. de Soissons himself. This unseemly boast he followed up by a still more flagrant proof of presumption; for, being anxious to assert his entire authority over the citadel of Amiens, he entered into a financial treaty with M. de Rouillac the lieutenant, and M. de Fleury the ensign of the fortress, and replaced them by adherents of his own, without the sanction of the Regent; after which he borrowed, on his own responsibility, twelve thousand livres from the receiver-general of the province for the payment of his garrison.

Such an unprecedented disregard of the royal prerogative had never before occurred in France; and it no sooner became known to the ministers than they hastened to represent it in its most heinous aspect to the Queen, impressing upon her in no measured terms the danger of such a precedent, which could not fail to bring contempt upon her authority, and to introduce disorder into the finances of the nation; and entreating her to remember that should she sanction an alliance between the imprudent favourite and a Prince of the Blood, she could no longer hope to restrain his extravagances. Marie de Medicis was jealous of her dignity, and moreover fully conscious of the fault which had been committed by Concini, and her anger was consequently unbounded. In the first burst of her indignation she refused to see Madame d'Ancre, whom she accused of having incited her husband to these demonstrations of disrespect towards herself; and her wrath was skilfully increased by the Princesse de Conti, who looked upon the favour of the low-born Leonora with impatience and disgust, and could not desire a more ready means of ensuring her discredit than that of following up the arguments of the ministers, of dwelling upon the little respect which had been shown to the person and privileges of her royal mistress, and of expatiating on the ruinous effect of so pernicious an example upon the discontented nobility.

The effect of these frequent and confidential conversations may be imagined; the mind of the Queen became more and more excited against her former favourites, while she clung with the tenacity of helplessness to Madame de Conti, through whose medium the Princes began to hope that they should at length triumph over the detested Italian. But the sun of Concini was not destined to set so soon; and although he had fierce enemies, he still possessed zealous friends; the more zealous, perhaps, because they had accurately read the character of the Tuscan Princess, and were well aware that she had so long leant upon others that she had at last become incapable of perfect self-reliance. Through the medium of those friends, but undoubtedly still more from the daily and hourly *ennui* experienced by Marie herself while thus deprived of the society of her foster-sister, the pardon of Concini was finally obtained. He was declared to have erred through ignorance; and a perfect reconciliation took place which overthrew all the half-fledged projects of the disappointed courtiers.

Two circumstances alone tended to mitigate the satisfaction of the Marquis d'Ancre. The representations of the ministers had succeeded in so thoroughly awakening the apprehensions of the Regent, that she had, at their first interview, strictly forbidden him thenceforward to attempt the accomplishment of his anticipated alliance with the House of Bourbon; while he had found himself compelled to apologize to the Comte de Soissons for the excesses in which he had indulged in Picardy, and which had drawn down upon the Prince the resentment, not only of the Queen herself, but of the whole Council, by whom he was accused of having upheld the pretensions of the Italian in order to aggrandize his own daughter.

In the month of July Marie de Medicis bestowed great happiness upon the whole nation by remitting the arrears of taxes which had remained unpaid from the year 1597, until that of

1603; while she also, at the same period, decreed the abolition of the gaming academies to which allusion was made in the preceding volume; and, finally, ascertaining that the edict against duelling issued by the late King had been evaded by certain sophistical observances, she published a declaration setting forth that all hostile meetings, however arranged, would not only entail the penalties already denounced against them, but henceforward be regarded as acts of assassination. This wholesome and well-timed declaration was verified by the Parliament on the 11th of July, and great hopes were entertained that so stringent a measure would effectually terminate an abuse which, during the reign of the late King, had deprived France of several thousand of her best chivalry.

Throughout the autumn, notwithstanding the gravity of the affairs then pending, the Court at Fontainebleau was one ceaseless scene of dissipation. High play still formed a prominent feature in the amusements of the palace, and the extent to which it was carried may be estimated by the fact that Concini, before his return to the capital, had lost at cards and dice the enormous sum of twenty-six thousand pistoles; and while the *branle* and the gaming-table occupied the night, the day was devoted to hunting, a diversion in which the Queen constantly participated, accompanied by the Princesses and ladies of the Court, and attended by a suite of between four and five hundred of the principal nobles. The arrival of the Duchesse de Lorraine and the Cardinal de Gonzaga gave a new impetus to the gaiety of the royal circle, while their sumptuous reception at the palace induced new outlay and new rivalry among the courtiers.

It was in the midst of this splendid dissipation that the Regent received tidings of the death of the Duc de Mayenne, a loss which, from the good understanding recently established between herself and that Prince, was of serious importance to her authority; while the event produced a still more painful impression from the fact that his wife, Henrietta of Savoy, had died of grief a few days subsequently, and that they had been carried to the grave together.

The next news which reached the Court was that of the demise of Marguerite of Austria, Queen of Spain; an event which, from the recent treaty concluded between the two countries, had become doubly interesting to France. This Princess, who was the daughter of Charles, Archduke of Gratz, Duke of Styria and Carinthia, and of Marie of Bavaria, had become the wife of Philip III in November 1599; and had left four sons, viz. Philip, Charles, Ferdinand, and Alfonso; and two daughters, Anne and Marguerite, the former of whom was promised to Louis XIII.

Other and more personal interests sufficed, nevertheless, to dry the tears of the Queen-mother, as at this period the Duchesse de Lorraine explained the purport of her visit; which, it is asserted, was to induce her royal niece to redeem the pledge given by her deceased husband that the Dauphin should espouse the Princesse de Lorraine, who would bring as her dowry to the young King the duchies of Lorraine and Bar. Marie was, however, too deeply compromised with Spain as well as with the Pope and the Grand Duke of Tuscany, both of whom were earnest to effect the completion of that alliance, to follow up a policy which could not but have proved much more beneficial to the French nation; while the Condé de Fuentes, who immediately suspected the purpose of Madame de Lorraine, loudly and arrogantly asserted that the French King could not have two wives; that his marriage with the Infanta was concluded; and that his sovereign was not to be cheated with impunity.

Oppressed by this double weight of regret and anxiety, Marie and her Court returned to the Louvre; but her grief was still fated to be fearfully increased, for she had scarcely established herself in the palace when her maternal terrors were suddenly awakened by intelligence of the dangerous illness of her second son, the Duc d'Orléans, upon which she hastened to St. Germain. The fiat had, however, gone forth, and two days subsequently the little Prince, upon whose precocious intellect and sweetness of disposition so many hopes had been built up, was a corpse in his mother's arms; and within a few hours Madame de Lorraine and her brother had taken leave of their illustrious relative, while the Court of the Louvre, so lately giddy with gaiety, was once more draped in sables.

Devotedly attached to her children, the Queen was for a time inconsolable; her greatness was embittered by private suffering, and her authority was endangered by intestine broils; she

looked around her, and scarcely knew upon whom to depend, or upon what to lean. The constant exactions of the Princes convinced her of the utter hopelessness of satisfying their venality, and securing their allegiance, save by sacrifices which gradually tended to diminish her own power, and to compromise the interests of the Crown, while the people murmured at the burthens inflicted upon them in order to gratify the greed of the nobility.

To increase her anxiety, the death of her second son was destined to add to the number of malcontents by whom the Queen was surrounded, all the principal officers of his household advancing their claim to be transferred to that of the infant Duc d'Anjou, who, on the demise of the Duc d'Orléans, assumed the title of Monsieur, as only brother of the King. It was, however, impossible to place all these candidates about the person of the young Prince, and it was ultimately decided that M. de Brèves, a relative of M. de Villeroy, to whom the appointment had already been promised by Henri IV, should be selected as the preceptor of Monsieur, to the exclusion of M. de Béthune, who had held the same post about the Duc d'Orléans, and who consequently demanded to be transferred to the service of his brother. But the relative of Sully was little likely to prove a successful candidate; he had owed his previous appointment to the influence of the powerful kinsman whose counsels swayed the actions of a great monarch; that monarch was now in his grave, and that kinsman in honourable exile; and his claim was no longer admitted. The Marquis de Coeuvres, who had been master of the wardrobe to the deceased Prince, was fated to be equally disappointed. The ministers had not forgotten that he had been an active agent in the proposed alliance between the Comte de Soissons and Concini, and they did not fail to impress upon the Queen the extreme danger of placing an individual of so resolute and enterprising a character about the person of the heir presumptive. As he could obtain no decided reply to his application, M. de Coeuvres solicited the assistance of the Marquis d'Ancre, who met his request with civil professions of regard, but declined to oppose the will of the ministers; an exhibition of ingratitude which so enraged the applicant that he forthwith declined all further interference in the affairs or claim upon the friendship of the fickle Italian, and attached himself exclusively to the interests of M. de Soissons.

This Prince was also destined, at this particular period, to augment the difficulties of the Regent. The duchy of Alençon had been mortgaged by the French Crown to the Duke of Würtemberg; and hopes had, some months previously, been held out to the Prince that, should he ever be in a position to redeem the debt, he might avail himself of the opportunity, and become its possessor. This time had now come; the Princess his wife had recovered from the Duke of Savoy a large amount for her estates in Piedmont, which he resolved to devote to the acquisition of the coveted duchy, and he accordingly applied for the sanction of the King, without whose consent the transfer could not be legally executed.

It is probable that, having already received a partial consent to his wishes, M. de Soissons was far from apprehending any serious impediment to their realization; but the jealousy of Marie had been aroused, and she did not fail to perceive that such a concession must be dangerous to the interests of the younger Children of France. The Prince had therefore no sooner made his request than she assumed an attitude of offended dignity and cold rebuke; and while he awaited her reply with a smile of anticipatory success, she said drily, "Do you wish, Monsieur, to acquire a duchy which has constantly been set apart as the appanage of one of the sons of the sovereign? I begin to perceive that your designs are somewhat lofty."

Thus repulsed, M. de Soissons withdrew, but with a demeanour which convinced the Regent that she had made a new enemy, whom she must consequently prepare herself to resist; a conclusion at which she had no sooner arrived than she summoned the Prince de Condé and the Duc d'Épernon to her assistance.

This measure was not, however, destined to prove entirely successful. The Marquis de Coeuvres, who at once felt that M. de Soissons was in no position to maintain single-handed any effectual opposition to the host of adversaries about to be marshalled against him, lost not a moment in seeking to convince him that he had but one prospect of avoiding the disgrace by which he was threatened. The impetuous Count poured forth all his wrath in invectives, and declared his readiness to endure any mortification rather than not enforce what he persisted in

Marie de Medicis

designating as his legitimate claims as a Prince of the Blood, but his zealous adviser was not to be thus silenced.

"Remember, Sir," was the rejoinder of the Marquis, "that you are now embroiled with both the Regent and her ministers; that the momentary truce between yourself and Concini is merely lip-deep, and may be broken by a breath; that you are the open and declared enemy of the Guises and the Duc d'Epemon; and that each and all of these are interested in your ruin. I do not attempt to deny that your quality as a Prince of the Blood must, as a natural consequence, avail you much; and it is this very conviction that encourages me to persist in counselling you to place no reliance upon minor friendships, but at once to ally yourself closely with your nephew the Prince de Condé, and thus strengthen the very rights upon which you presume. During a minority the Princes of the Blood have an influence in France, which once earnestly and truthfully united and exerted, must eventually prove irresistible."

After some further difficulty M. de Soissons suffered himself to be convinced by the arguments of the Marquis, and it was ultimately resolved that overtures should be made to this effect on the part of the Count through the medium of M. de Beaumont, the son of the President de Harlay, who was at that period expected in the capital, and who was in the confidence of the Prince de Condé. Beaumont had accordingly no sooner arrived than the Marquis de Coeuvres made him acquainted with the desire of the Count, and it was finally agreed that, upon the pretext of a hunt, the two Princes should meet at the residence of the former. As, however, it was immediately ascertained that the Regent had expressed some suspicions of this interview, and declared the reconciliation which had taken place to be too sudden not to involve some occult purpose, M. de Soissons deemed it expedient to silence her fears by inviting Concini to join the party.

The invitation was accepted; the hunt took place, and was succeeded by high play, after which the different personages apparently separated for the night; but within half an hour the two royal kinsmen and their confidential friends were closeted together, and before dawn an alliance offensive and defensive was concluded between the Princes, who each pledged himself to receive no favour or benefit from the Government to the exclusion or loss of the other; and that, moreover, in the event of the disgrace or disgust of either, the other should withdraw from the Court at the same time, whither neither was to be at liberty to return alone; and this compact, which, as will immediately be seen, could not fail to prove dangerous to the interests of Marie, was religiously observed until the death of M. de Soissons.

The credit of the ministers was greatly increased by this new cabal, as the Regent instantly perceived the necessity of opposing their authority to the probable pretensions of the Princes, neither of whom attempted to disguise their discontent at the insignificant position to which they had been reduced at Court. To Jeannin, in particular, the Queen expressed in unmeasured terms the confidence which she placed in his zeal and loyalty; she called him her *friend*, her *arm*, and her *head*, and assured him that she would be guided entirely by his counsels.

Anxious to respond to these flattering demonstrations, and to justify the trust reposed in them, the ministers resolved, in order still further to protect the Crown against any aggression on the part of the Princes, to recall to Court the Maréchal de Lesdiguières, who was easily induced to resign his command of the army in Champagne by the prospect which they held out to him, of verifying and confirming the ducal patent which he had obtained from Henri IV. They, however, subsequently failed to keep this promise, and the disappointment so irritated the Maréchal that he resolved to revenge himself by joining the party of the Princes, and otherwise harassing the Council; a determination which was unfortunately too easily realized at a period of such internal convulsion.

The last event worthy of record which took place in the present year was the purchase towards the close of September of the Hôtel de Luxembourg by the Queen-Regent, for the sum of thirty thousand crowns, in order to erect upon its site the celebrated Palais d'Orléans, now once more known by its original name of the Luxembourg. The construction of this splendid edifice was entrusted to Jacques de Brosse, who immediately commenced removing the ruins

Marie de Medicis

of the dilapidated hôtel which encumbered the space destined for the new elevation; and four years subsequently the first stone was laid of the regal pile which transmitted his own name to posterity, linked with those of Marie de Medicis and Peter Paul Rubens.

CHAPTER IV

1612

The Prince de Condé and the Comte de Soissons having withdrawn from the capital, MM. de Guise and d'Epéron found themselves once more the principal personages of the Court, but their triumph was nevertheless greatly moderated by the jealousy of Concini, who began to apprehend that their ceaseless efforts to gratify the wishes of the Queen, and to flatter her love of splendour and dissipation, might ultimately tend to weaken his own influence; while the ministers, on their side, aware that the negotiations then pending with Spain for the marriage of the King could not be readily concluded without their aid and concurrence, however they might deprecate their return from other causes, also felt the necessity of securing their co-operation, for which purpose it was essential that such measures should be adopted as might render this concession acceptable to the royal malcontents. While this subject was under consideration, and Lent rapidly approaching, the Queen, who, being still in slight mourning, could not, according to the established etiquette, hold any assemblies in her own apartments, but who was unwilling to forego the customary amusements of the Carnival, desired the Duc de Guise, the Prince de Joinville, and M. de Bassompierre to perform a ballet every Sunday, which they accordingly did, "dividing," says the latter, "the expense between us."

The first of these allegorical dances was executed in the apartments of the Princesse de Conti, where a supper was prepared for her Majesty with an exclusiveness uncommon at the time, and which created considerable disappointment in the Court circle. None but the Princes then resident in the capital, namely MM. de Guise, de Nevers, and de Reims, with a few chosen courtiers, were permitted to attend, while the number of ladies was equally limited.

The second took place in the apartments of the Duchesse de Vendôme, upon which occasion the banquet was offered to the Queen by Madame de Mercoeur; the third at the Hôtel de Guise, where the Regent was entertained in the private *salon* of the Duchess; and the fourth and last in the suite of rooms appropriated to Madame de Guercheville in the Louvre.

"I took the liberty," says Rambure, with his usual quaintness, "of representing to the Regent that the people would murmur on witnessing balls at Court while she was still in mourning, but she only laughed at me, and bade me dismiss such an idea from my thoughts; at which I was not at all pleased, from the respect that I entertained for the memory of his late Majesty."

These gaieties did not, however, serve to divert the thoughts of the ministers from their desire to recall the absent Princes of the Blood; and it was finally arranged that as M. de Soissons had been the original cause of their absence, owing to his indignation at the ill-success of his attempt to purchase the duchy of Alençon, it would be expedient to hold out to him a prospect of obtaining the government of Quilleboeuf. It was accordingly decided that the Marquis d'Ancre, on the part of their Majesties, and M. de Villeroy on that of the ministers, should proceed to Nogent, where the Princes were then residing, and invite them to return to Court, with a full assurance from all parties that they would there occupy the station befitting their exalted rank, and be received with the dignities and honours which were due to them as Princes of the Blood.

The mission of the two envoys proved successful; and on their arrival at Fontainebleau the uncle and nephew were welcomed with a warmth and magnificence which alike flattered their self-love and tended to inspire them with confidence. Nevertheless, M. de Soissons had no sooner discovered that Marquis d'Ancre, who, when he had himself retired from the Court, had lost the favour of the Queen, was now the firm ally of the ministers, through whose good

offices he had regained his former position, than he exhibited towards the Italian a haughtiness and avoidance which ere long terminated in an open rupture.

Fearful of incurring through the means of the Count the additional enmity of M. de Condé, Concini endeavoured to win over the Marquis de Coeuvres, and to effect through his interposition a reconciliation with the indignant Prince. To this solicitation M. de Coeuvres replied that in order to establish a good understanding between two persons whom he had already so strenuously sought to serve, he was willing and ready to forget his private wrongs; but when it was suggested to him that he should exert his influence to renew the proposed marriage without reference to the Queen-Regent, he declined to make any effort to induce M. de Soissons to adopt so onerous a course, alleging that he had already suffered sufficiently by his interference in a matter which had been productive of great annoyance and injury to the Prince, and that he would not again lend his assistance to the project until the Marquis d'Ancre and his wife pledged themselves to reconcile M. de Soissons with the ministers, to restore him to the favour of the Regent, and to obtain her sanction to the proposed alliance.

The firmness of this refusal staggered Concini, who, only recently reinstated in the good graces of the Queen, was for once apprehensive of the failure of his influence. He consequently confined his reply to a simple acknowledgment of the courtesy with which his proposal had been met by the Marquis, and then endeavoured personally to regain the confidence of the Prince by assurances of the sincere inclination of the Queen to meet his wishes upon every point within her power. As a natural consequence M. de Soissons listened willingly to these flattering declarations, uttered as they were by an individual well known to be in the entire confidence of his royal mistress; but they soon became blended with the regrets of the Marquis that his listener should have formed so close an alliance with his nephew as to have drawn down upon him the suspicion of the Court; and plausibly as these regrets were expressed, M. de Soissons was soon enabled to discover that the wily Italian had been instructed to detach him from Condé.

A similar endeavour was made with the Prince de Condé, but both were ineffectual. The two royal kinsmen had become fully aware that mutual support was their only safeguard against the party opposed to them; and they had no sooner detected the symptoms of coldness which supervened upon the ill-success of their advisers, than they resolved once more to leave the Court; and accordingly having taken leave of their Majesties, and resisted the pressing solicitations poured forth on all sides, they again retired; the Prince to St. Valery, and the Count to Dreux. This renewed opposition to her wishes roused the spirit of the Regent. She saw, as she asserted, that there no longer remained a hope of restraining the haughtiness, or of satisfying the pretensions, of the great vassals of the Crown; and she accordingly declared that in order to maintain her authority, and to secure the throne of her son, she would not allow the absence of the two Princes of the Blood to delay the publication of the King's marriage. Immediate measures were consequently taken for concluding the necessary arrangements; and this was done with the less hesitation that the Maréchal de Lesdiguières (who for some time after his arrival at Court had continued to anticipate that the pledge given to him by the ministers would shortly be redeemed) had induced both the one and the other to state that they would offer no opposition to the alliance which had been determined.

But this concession, which they were destined subsequently to deplore, was all that could be extorted from the Princes, who considered themselves aggrieved by the fact that so important a negotiation should have been carried on without their participation, when special couriers had been despatched to acquaint both the Cardinal de Joyeuse and the Due d'Epemon with the pending treaty. The Comte de Soissons, moreover, complained loudly and bitterly of the undue power of the ministers, and especially inveighed against the Chancellor Sillery, whom he unhesitatingly accused of extortion and avarice, of publicly making a trade of justice to the dishonour of the nation, and of ruining those who were compelled to solicit his protection. On this point alone he was in accord with Concini; and it was to this mutual hatred of the ministers that their partial good understanding must be attributed. The reasons which induced the Maréchal de Lesdiguières to approve the alliance we have already stated: the ducal crown which he was so anxious to secure must have been irretrievably lost by any opposition

on his part to the proposed alliance, and this vision was for ever before his eyes. The approbation of the Connétable de Montmorency, who had originally declared his objection to so close a union between the two countries, was purchased by a promise that the hand of one of the Princesses of Mantua, niece to the Regent, should be conferred upon his son; and the brilliant promise of the one marriage caused him to overlook the probable perils of the other; while the Duc de Bouillon, although he occasionally declared in the Council that he seriously apprehended the result of so intimate a connection with Spain, never remonstrated with any energy against the measure, and was believed by those who knew him best to have already made his conditions with Philip. On the departure of the two Princes, Marie urged the Duc de Guise to afford her his support, together with that of his house, which he did with a frankness worthy of record, concluding, however, with these emphatic words: "I have but one favour to request of you, Madame; and that is, that after this important service your Majesty will not abandon us, as you have already once done, to the resentment of the Princes of the Blood."

The Duc d'Epéron, who had left the Court, as elsewhere stated, if not in actual disgrace, at least mortified and disappointed, was now recalled; and as his failing was well known, he was received on his arrival at Fontainebleau with such extraordinary distinction that all his past grievances were at once forgotten. Sillery, Villeroy, and Concini overwhelmed him with respect and adulation, and his adherence to the party of the Regent was consequently purchased before the question had been mooted in his presence.

Meanwhile the English Ambassador declaimed loudly against the contemplated alliance, which he declared to be unequivocally antagonistic to the interests of his sovereign; and his undisguised indignation so alarmed the Council that it was immediately resolved to despatch the Duc de Bouillon on an extraordinary embassy to the Court of London in order to appease the displeasure of James. The minister of the United Provinces was equally violent in his opposition, and exerted all his energies to prevent the conclusion of a treaty which he regarded as fatal to the interests of the republic that he represented, but his expostulations were disregarded. An envoy was sent to the Hague with assurances of amity to Prince Maurice and the States-General; and finally, the Maréchal de Schomberg was instructed to visit the several Protestant Princes of Germany in order to dispel any distrust which they might feel at the probable results of an alliance so threatening to their interests.

These important measures concluded, the double marriage was proposed to the Council, where the Prince de Condé and the Comte de Soissons, who had recently returned to the capital, occupied their appointed seats; and at the commencement of the proceedings, when the question of the projected alliance had been submitted to the Assembly, M. de Condé demanded that each should deliver his opinion according to his rank. The Chancellor then opened the subject by a warm panegyric on the prudent administration of the Queen-Regent, dwelling at great length upon the extraordinary benefit which must accrue to the French nation from the contemplated alliance with Spain; and he was followed by the Duc de Guise, who, with more brevity but equal force, maintained the same argument. "No deliberation," concluded the Duke, "can be required upon so advantageous a proposal. We have only to thank God that her Majesty has so happily accomplished the noble purpose with which heaven had inspired her." As he resumed his seat the Connétable de Montmorency and the Ducs de Nevers and d'Epéron warmly applauded his words; after which the Maréchaux de Bouillon and de Lesdiguières declared their approval of the alliance, simply expressing a hope that proper precautions would be taken to prevent the treaty with Spain from proving prejudicial to the interests of France in her more ancient alliances with other foreign powers; and finally it became the turn of M. de Condé to declare his sentiments. The young Prince had, however, been so astonished by the fearless address of the Duc de Guise that he had entirely lost his self-possession, and merely said with great coldness: "Since the affair is decided, it was unnecessary to ask our advice."

The surprise was universal, as the general impression throughout the Council had been that the two Princes had determined to attend the meeting in order to oppose the projected marriages; a supposition which the words immediately afterwards addressed to M. de Condé

by his uncle served to confirm. "You see, sir," said the Count, turning towards him with an impatient gesture, "that we are treated here like valets."

The Regent, irritated by this remark, which was uttered so audibly as to be generally overheard, was about to make some bitter rejoinder, when Sillery, perceiving her intention, again possessed himself of the ear of the Assembly; and it was ultimately concluded that the double marriage should be proclaimed on the 25th of March, and that the young Duc de Mayenne should proceed to Spain as Ambassador-Extraordinary to demand the hand of the Infanta.

At the close of the Council the general topic of discourse was the extraordinary part played by the two Princes. It is well known that they were both strongly opposed to the measure which had just been carried, and their conduct was severally judged according to the particular feeling of those by whom it was discussed; some asserting that it was from a fear of the consequences of resistance, and others declaring that they indulged a hope of profiting largely by so unexpected a neutrality. The Duc de Montmorency was meanwhile furious at the contempt incurred by the unmanly bearing of his son-in-law, M. de Condé. "Sir," he said, as the Prince shortly afterwards approached him, "you neither know how to resist with courage, or to yield with prudence."

An unforeseen difficulty, however, now presented itself. The Spanish Cabinet no longer entertained the same apprehensions of the power of France that it had felt during the preceding year. The supremacy which it had so reluctantly recognized had ceased to exist, and the arrogance of Philip grew with this conviction; thus, where he had only a few months previously condescended to solicit, he now prepared to impose conditions, and the renewed negotiations were haughtily met by fresh proposals. Upon the pretext that the Princesses of France brought with them no right of succession to the crown, he declared his disinclination to give the hand of the elder Infanta to the young King, upon which Marie de Medicis replied that she was willing to accept his younger daughter as the bride of Louis XIII, provided that he, in his turn, were prepared to receive the Princesse Christine instead of Madame, as by this arrangement she should be enabled to fulfil the pledge given by the late King to the Duke of Savoy, that the eldest Daughter of France should be united to the Prince of Piedmont.

This explicit declaration at once silenced Philip, who was by no means desirous that Charles Emmanuel, whom he was anxious to crush, should by so close a connexion with France secure an ally through whose support he could not fail to protect himself against all aggression; and he accordingly signified with somewhat less arrogance than before that he was ready to ratify the original treaty, provided that Anne of Austria were permitted to renounce, both for herself and her children, all claim to the sovereignty of Spain.

This point having been conceded, immediate preparations were made for the proclamation of the royal marriages; but the ceremony was unavoidably delayed by the death of the Duke of Mantua, the brother-in-law of the Regent, and did not take place until the 5th of the following month, on which day it was solemnly announced by the Chancellor, in the presence of the Prince de Conti, the peers and officers of the Crown, and the Spanish Ambassador, who gave his assent to the duplicate alliance in the name of the King his master, and from that period treated the little Princess with all the honours due to a Queen of Spain; never addressing her save on his bended knee, and observing many still more exaggerated ceremonies which excited at once surprise and amusement at the French Court.

It will have been remarked that neither M. de Condé nor the Comte de Soissons were present at the formal announcement, both having once more withdrawn from the capital with the determination of continuing absent until the majority of the King, in order to avoid signing the marriage contract.

"The Queen," said M. de Soissons, when one of his friends would have dissuaded him from so extreme a course, "is quite able to conclude without our assistance the negotiation into which she has entered. God grant that we at least may be spared all participation in the slight

Marie de Medicis

offered to the memory of the late King, by refusing to falsify the pledge which he gave to the Duke of Savoy, whose house has so long been the firm ally of France."

Pity it is that this generous burst of high-mindedness and loyalty will not bear analysis. Both the Princes had discovered that the professions to which they had so complacently listened, and which had induced their recent return to Court, had merely been intended to lure them thither at a period when their presence was more than ever essential to the interests of the Regency; and while M. de Condé found his position in the Government as undefined and unsatisfactory as ever, and that his vanity had been flattered at the expense of his interests, the Count on his side saw the possession of Quilleboeuf more remote than ever, and openly declared that they had both been duped.

This undisguised admission at once revealed the selfishness of the views with which the malcontent Princes had lent themselves to the wishes of Marie and her ministers; and assuredly no worse policy could have been adopted than that by which they were again induced to exile themselves from their proper sphere of action. Too many interests were, however, served by their absence for either counsellor or courtier to point out to the Queen the extreme danger of driving them to extremities, save in the instance of the Connétable, who, more and more chagrined by the pitiful and even precarious position occupied by his son-in-law, remonstrated earnestly with the Regent upon the peril of the course which she had been induced to pursue.

"Remember, Madame," he said, "that the civil wars and wretchedness of which this nation has been the prey during the last few reigns all owed their origin to the fatal advice given to Catherine de Medicis to disregard the legitimate claims of the Princes of the Blood; and those who would induce your Majesty to follow her example are more bent upon the furtherance of their own fortunes, and the increase of their own power, than anxious for the welfare of the state. Should your Majesty, therefore, suffer yourself to be influenced by their counsels, I foresee nothing in the future but anarchy and confusion."

Unfortunately, however, the close alliance of the veteran Duke with one of those very Princes whose cause he thus warmly advocated, and his enmity towards the Guises, deprived his remonstrances of the force which they might otherwise have possessed, and Marie de Medicis consequently disregarded the warning until after-events caused her to feel and acknowledge its value. Supported by the House of Guise and the Duc d'Epéron, assured of the good faith of the Connétable and the Maréchaux de Bouillon and de Lesdiguières, as well as deeply incensed by the bearing of the two Princes in the Council; and, moreover, urged by her more immediate favourites to assert her dignity, and to display towards the malcontents a coldness and indifference as marked as that which they exhibited towards herself, she dismissed the subject from her thoughts as one of slight importance, and turned all her attention to the brilliant festivities by which the declaration of the royal marriages was to be celebrated.

The besetting sin of Marie de Medicis was a love of magnificence and display, and one of her greatest errors a wilful disregard of the financial exigencies which her profuse liberality had induced. Thus the splendour of the preparations which were exciting the wonder and curiosity of all Paris engrossed her so wholly that she had little time for dwelling on contingent evils. The departure of the Princes had, moreover, relieved her from the annoyance of encountering discontented countenances and repellent frowns; and as she saw herself surrounded only by beaming looks and complacent smiles, her spirits rose, and she began to believe that her long-indulged vision of undisputed supremacy was about to be realized.

It was a pleasant dream, and one in which the self-deceived Regent was eagerly encouraged by those around her. The halls and galleries of the Louvre were crowded with animated and obsequious courtiers, and the apartments of Marie herself thronged by the greatest and proudest in the land; all of whom appeared, upon so joyous an occasion, to have laid aside their personal animosities and to live only to obey her behests. Madame had also formed her separate Court, in the midst of which she received, with the grace of a girl and the premature dignity of a Queen, the elaborate homage of her future subjects; and meanwhile the

Marie de Medicis

young Louis, delighted by a partial emancipation from ceremony and etiquette for which he was indebted to the unusual movement about him, pursued his favourite sport of bird-hunting in the gardens of the Tuileries, and attached more importance to the feats of a well-trained sparrow-hawk than to the probable qualities of the bride provided for him by the policy of his royal mother.

And amid all this splendid excitement, gliding from one glittering group to another with a quiet self-possession and a calm composure strangely at variance with the scene around her, moved a lady whose remarkable appearance must have challenged attention, even had her singular career not already tended to make her an object of universal curiosity and speculation. Short of stature and slender of form, with a step as light and noiseless as that of an aerial being; her exquisitely-moulded although diminutive figure draped in a robe of black velvet, made after a fashion of which the severe propriety contrasted forcibly with the somewhat too liberal exposure of the period; with a countenance pale almost to sallowness; delicately chiselled features; and large eyes, encircled by a dark ring, only a few shades less black than the long lashes by which they were occasionally concealed; a mass of rich and glossy hair, tightly banded upon her forehead, and gathered together in a heavy knot, supported by long bodkins tipped with jewels, low in her neck behind; and above all, with that peculiar expression spread over her whole person which is occasionally to be remarked in individuals of that exceptional organization which appears to be the lot of such as are predestined to misery.

Not a Princess of the Blood, not a Duchess of the realm, but had a smile and a courteous and eager word to bestow upon this apparently insignificant personage, at whose signal even the door of the Queen's private closet, closed against other intruders, opened upon the instant, as though she alone of all that brilliant galaxy of rank and wealth were to know no impediment, and to be subjected to no delay.

We have been somewhat prolix in our description of this extraordinary woman, but we shall be pardoned when we explain that we here give the portrait of Leonora Galigai, Marquise d'Ancre, the friend, confidante, and foster-sister of Marie de Medicis.

It is, however, time to return to the festivities to which allusion has already been made. Among these the most remarkable was a splendid carousal which took place in the Place Royale, and which is elaborately described by Bassompierre. The French Kings had originally held their tourneys, tilts, and passages-at-arms in the Rue St. Antoine, opposite the palace of the Tournelles; but the unfortunate death of Henri II, who was killed there by the lance of the Duc de Montgomery, caused the spot to be abandoned, and they were subsequently transferred to the Place Royale, which had been built in the ancient park of the same palace.

The lists on the present occasion were two hundred and forty feet in length, and were surrounded by barriers and platforms arranged in tiers, and reaching to the first stories of the houses. Facing the lists was erected the magnificent pavilion destined for their Majesties, which was richly draped with blue and gold, and surmounted by the great national standard, upon which the eagles of Austria and the arms of the Medici were proudly quartered with the *fleurs-de-lis* of France.

By command of the Queen the lists were held by the Ducs de Guise and de Nevers and the Marquis de Bassompierre, an honour which cost each of the individuals thus favoured the enormous sum of fifty thousand crowns; a fact which is easily understood when it is considered that their retinue consisted of five hundred persons and two hundred horses, the whole of whom, men and animals, were clad and caparisoned in scarlet velvet and cloth of silver. The number of spectators, exclusive of the Court and the armed guards, was estimated at ten thousand; and from nine in the morning until six in the evening the lists were constantly occupied. Salvos of artillery, fireworks, and allegorical processions succeeded; and the populace, delighted by "the glorious three days" of revel and relaxation thus provided for them, forgot for the time to murmur at an outlay which threatened them with increased exactions.

At the termination of this carousal, which was followed by balls, banquets, and tiltings at the ring, the Court removed to Fontainebleau; where their Majesties shortly afterwards

Marie de Medicis

received the Marquis de Spinola, the Comte de Buquoy, and Don Rodrigo Calderon, who were entertained with great magnificence, and lodged in the house of Bassompierre. At this period, indeed, everything sufficed as a pretext for splendour and display; as Marie de Medicis especially delighted to exhibit the brilliancy of her Court to the subjects of the nation with which she was about to become so intimately allied. In this endeavour she was ably seconded by the Guises and the Duc d'Epemon, who, since the departure of the two Princes, had shared her intimacy with the Marquis d'Ancre and his wife; while a new candidate for her favour had moreover presented himself in the person of the young and handsome Chevalier de Guise, the brother of the Duke, who at this time first appeared at Court, where he had the honour of waiting upon her Majesty at table whenever she was the guest of the Duchess his mother, or the Princesse de Conti his sister. His youth, high spirit, inexhaustible gaiety, and extraordinary personal beauty rendered him peculiarly agreeable to Marie, who displayed towards him a condescending kindness which was soon construed by the Court gossips into a warmer feeling.

Concini immediately took the alarm, and hastened to confide his apprehensions to the ministers, whom he knew to be as anxious as himself to undermine the influence of the Duc d'Epemon and the formidable family to which he had allied his interests. In ridding themselves, by neglect and disrespect, of the Princes of the Blood, the discomfited confederates had anticipated undivided sway over the mind and measures of the Regent; and their mortification was consequently intense when they discovered that she had unreservedly flung herself into the party of their enemies.

The annoyance of the ministers was, however, based rather on public grounds than on personal feeling; but the case was far different with the Marquis, who had been reluctantly compelled to acknowledge to himself that he was indebted for his extraordinary fortune entirely to the influence of his wife, and that he was individually of small importance in the eyes of her royal mistress. This conviction had soured his temper; and instead of responding to the ardent affection of Leonora, he had recently revenged his outraged vanity upon the woman to whom he owed all the distinction he had acquired. The high spirit of the Marquise revolted at this ingratitude, and scenes of violence had consequently occurred between them which tended to increase the schism, and to render his position still more precarious. The tears of Leonora were universally all-powerful with the Queen, who did not hesitate to express her indignation at the unbecoming deportment of the aggrandized parvenu; upon which, unaccustomed to rebuke, he threatened to withdraw entirely from the Court and to reside at Amiens, a design which he, however, abandoned when he discovered that it met with no opposition.

The Duc de Guise and the other members of his family, rejoicing in these domestic discords, which they trusted would ultimately tend to the disgrace of the arrogant Italian whose undue elevation had inspired them with jealousy and disgust, warmly espoused the cause of Leonora, and exerted all their power to irritate the mind of the Queen against the offending Marquis. Nor was it long ere the ministers adopted the same line of policy; and finally, Concini found himself so harassed and contemned that he resolved to attach himself to the party of the Princes, and to aid them in their attempt to overturn the Government.

The Maréchal de Bouillon had, as already stated, been despatched to England, in order to render James I. favourable to the alliance with Spain; and at the same time with strict instructions to induce him, should it be possible, to declare his displeasure at the recent conduct of the Protestants at Saumur, and especially at that of the Duc de Rohan. This was a mission which Bouillon joyfully undertook, his personal hatred and jealousy of the young Duke warmly seconding the instructions of the ministers. Rohan had, however, been warned in time of the intention of his enemies; and being in constant correspondence with Prince Henry, he hastened to entreat his interest with his royal father to avert the impending danger. Unaware of this fact, the Maréchal commenced his harangue by assuring the English monarch of the respect and attachment felt for his person by his own sovereign and his august mother, and their decided resolution that the alliance with Spain should in no way interfere with the good understanding which they were anxious to maintain with the Protestant Princes. To this assurance James listened complacently; and encouraged by his evident satisfaction, the envoy

proceeded to inform him that he was moreover authorized to state that the Pope had no intention of exercising any severity against the reformed party in France, but would confine himself to attempting their conversion by means of the pulpit eloquence and good example of the Roman priesthood. The satisfaction of James increased as he listened, and when he had warmly expressed his gratification at the intelligence, Bouillon ventured to insinuate that the Regent had been deeply wounded by the fact of his having entered into the Protestant League of Germany; and besought him, in her name, to be favourable to his Catholic subjects.

At this point of the discourse James cautiously replied that the League involved no question of religion, but was purely a measure adopted for the reciprocal security of the confederated states; and that, as regarded the English Catholics, he would willingly permit the peaceable exercise of their faith in his dominions, so soon as they should have given pledges of their fidelity and obedience. Still undismayed, Bouillon then exposed what was to himself personally the most important feature of his mission, and urged his Britannic Majesty to express his disapproval of the proceedings of the Assembly at Saumur, and especially of the attitude assumed by the Duc de Rohan. Here, however, he was fated to discover that James had not for a moment been the dupe of his sophistical eloquence, ably as it had been exerted. A cloud gathered upon the brow of the English monarch, and as the Maréchal paused for a reply, he was startled by the coldness and decision with which it was delivered.

"If the Queen your mistress," said James with marked emphasis, "sees fit to infringe the edicts accorded to the Protestants of her kingdom, I shall not consider that the alliance into which I have entered with France ought to prevent me from assisting and protecting them. When my neighbours are endangered from a cause in which I am personally involved, I am naturally called upon to avert an evil that may extend to myself. Believe me, moreover, Marshal, when I say that you will be wise to effect a reconciliation with the Duc de Rohan; and I shall cause him to understand that such is my wish."

The ill-success of his mission was a bitter mortification to M. de Bouillon, who, dispirited and crestfallen, returned to Paris to report his failure. He, however, met with no sympathy, the ministers declaring that he had failed through his neglect of their instructions, and of the express orders of the Regent; while the Maréchal complained on his side that he had been selected for this delicate embassy from the express intention, on the part of those who inveighed against him, of accomplishing his disgrace.

M. de Lesdiguières also, at this period, discovered that he had been the dupe of his own ambition, and the tool of that of others. The ducal brevet of which he had considered himself secure was refused to him upon the plea that MM. de Brissac and de Fervaques were both senior marshals to himself, and that such a favour could not be conferred upon him without exciting their indignation. Vainly did he urge the promise made to him by Henri IV; neither the Regent nor her ministers would yield; when, irritated by the part which he had been made to play while his co-operation was necessary to the accomplishment of their measures, and the after-affront to which he was thus subjected, he retired from the Court in disgust, and transferred his services to the Princes of the Blood.

As we have already stated, Concini had, although less openly, followed the same course; but, in the first instance, he had skilfully effected a reconciliation with his wife, and induced her to assist him in his endeavour to weaken the extraordinary influence which the Duc d'Epéron and the Guises were rapidly acquiring over the Regent, who willingly forgot, amid the constant amusement and adulation with which they surrounded her, the cares and anxieties of government. The Duc de Vendôme had also attached himself to the Court party, and this domestic league had consequently become more formidable than ever in the eyes of those who saw their interests compromised by its continuance.

Marie could not, however, conceal from herself the absolute necessity of conciliating the disaffected Princes before the arrival of the ambassador of Philip, who was shortly expected to claim the hand of Madame for the Prince of Spain; and she accordingly determined to pave the way towards a reconciliation by thwarting the ambition of the great nobles who were obnoxious to the Princes. The first opportunity that presented itself of adopting this somewhat

ungenerous policy was afforded by the Duc de Vendôme, who demanded the royal sanction to preside over the States of Brittany, of which province he was governor; but his intention having been discovered by the Comte de Soissons and M. de Condé, they lost no time in warning their friends at Court against such a concession, and in reminding them that he had allied himself with the enemies of his royal father and the House of Bourbon; and that his influence might prove fatal to the tranquillity of the nation should he be permitted to exert it in a distant province, where his personal consideration and the enormous wealth of his wife must conduce to render him all-powerful. These arguments were impressed upon the Regent alike by the ministers and by the Marquis d'Ancre, who no sooner saw himself once more in favour than he exerted all his influence to undermine the power of the rival faction; and as her private views warmly seconded their representations, Marie instantly resolved to refuse the coveted favour.

When, therefore, the Duc de Vendôme proffered his request, the Queen met it with a cold denial, and instructed M. de Brissac to proceed at once to Brittany as his substitute; an affront which so stung the Duke that he immediately challenged De Brissac; but before the meeting could take place it was betrayed to the Queen, who, irritated by this disregard of her authority, would not be induced to wait until a reconciliation could be effected between them, but issued a peremptory order that M. de Vendôme should leave the Court on the instant, and retire to his estate of Anet, and that the Maréchal de Brissac should forthwith proceed to Brittany. In vain did the fiery young Prince explain and expostulate; Marie was inexorable; and although the Ducs de Guise and d'Epemon interceded in his behalf, they were equally unsuccessful; nor did they discontinue their entreaties until the Queen bade them rather look to the stability of their own favour than hasten its termination by upholding the cause of those who rebelled against her pleasure.

This incident afforded unmitigated satisfaction to the absent Princes; but to the Comte de Soissons it was nevertheless only the herald of more important concessions on the part of the Regent. In his temporary retirement he had dwelt at leisure on his imaginary wrongs; his hatred of the ministers had increased; and, above all, he had vowed the ruin of the Chancellor. In his nephew the Prince de Condé he found a willing listener and an earnest coadjutor; but from a very different impulse. M. de Soissons panted for power, and loathed every impediment to the gratification of his ambition; while the young Prince, less firm of purpose, and more greedy of pleasure and ostentation, was wearied by the obscurity of his existence, and the tedium of his self-imposed exile.

Concini, with admirable tact, played upon the weaknesses of both Princes, and augmented their discontent; while he was at the same time careful to exonerate the Regent from all blame. Conscious that without her support he could not sustain for an hour the factitious power to which he had attained, he laboured incessantly to throw the whole odium of the disunion upon the ministers, who were fully as obnoxious to himself as to the Princes.

"They it is," he continually repeated, "who are the true cause of your estrangement. The Queen is, as I know, well disposed towards all the Princes of the Blood; but Sillery, Villeroy, and Jeannin are constantly representing to her the danger of allowing you to become too powerful. Your real enemies are the ministers who are fearful of affording you the opportunity of overbalancing their influence."

This assurance was too flattering to the self-love of the Princes to be repulsed; they forgot that Concini himself had been as eager as those whom he now inculcated to destroy their importance, and to limit their power; they saw the great nobles, whose ambition was disappointed, or whose vanity was wounded, successively espouse their cause, and they were easily induced to believe that the time was not far distant when they should triumph over their opponents, and be repaid for all their mortifications. This was precisely the frame of mind into which Concini had endeavoured to bring them; and so ably did he avail himself of his advantage that at length, when on one occasion he found himself in company with the Prince de Condé, the Comte de Soissons, and the Maréchaux de Bouillon and de Lesdiguières, he induced them to unite with him in attempting the ruin of the ministers.

He was, moreover, powerfully abetted in his intrigue by the Duke of Savoy; who, outraged at the insult which had been offered to him by the Regent in bestowing the hand of Madame Elisabeth, which had been solemnly promised to the Prince of Piedmont, upon the Infant of Spain; and who, moreover, hoped to profit by the internal dissensions of France, and to recover through the medium of the disaffected Princes the provinces which Henri IV had compelled him to relinquish in exchange for the marquisate of Saluzzo, omitted no opportunity of endeavouring to foment a civil war; from which, while he had nothing to apprehend, he had the prospect of reaping great personal advantage.

Thus supported, Concini, who was aware of the intimate relations subsisting between Charles Emmanuel and the Comte de Soissons, did not hesitate to urge the Princes to a resolute resistance; nor was this seed of rebellion scattered upon sterile soil. M. de Soissons pledged himself that on his return from Normandy, where he was about to sojourn for a short time, he would publicly insult the Chancellor; while M. de Lesdiguières, who was still furious at the disappointment to which he had been subjected, and who was about to return to Dauphiny, volunteered, should the Princes decide upon enforcing their claims, to march ten thousand infantry and fifteen hundred horse to the gates of Paris.

Nor did the vindictive Italian confine his efforts to thus tampering with the disaffected Princes; he was equally indefatigable with the Regent, who, even had she been disinclined to regard his own representations, never neglected those of her beloved Leonora; and who was, moreover, the better disposed to yield to his arguments because she saw her foster-sister once more happy, and believed that the affection of the Marquis had been restored to his wife through her own influence.

Success rendered Concini bold. He was aware that he had secured a strong hold upon the confidence and regard of the malcontents; but when he found the Queen inclined to make concessions in their favour which threatened to invest them with a power as dangerous to his own interests as that now wielded by the ministers, he did not hesitate to dissuade her from her purpose. Anxious to conciliate the Comte de Soissons, Marie declared her determination to effect this desirable result by bestowing upon him the government of Oulleboeuf, the refusal of which had been the original cause of his estrangement; a resolve from which she was, however, diverted by the representations of the Italian that such a concession, thus tardily and reluctantly made, must be fatal to her dignity, and would only lead to fresh demands on the part of the Prince, whose insatiable ambition was no secret; while, fearful lest his own representations should fail to change her purpose, he employed his confidential friend and ally the Baron de Luz to entreat of the Due de Guise to second his endeavour. In this attempt, however, the Marquis failed through an excess of subtlety, as the Duke, outraged by this double treason, not only refused to lend himself to so dishonourable an act of treachery, but immediately informed M. de Soissons of the deceit which was practised towards him; and feeling deeply aggrieved moreover by the affront that had been offered to César de Vendôme, he declared himself prepared to espouse the cause of the Princes against the machinations of the Marquis d'Ancre. His example was followed by the whole of his family, as well as by the Cardinal de Joyeuse and the Due de Bellegarde; and thus the unfortunate Regent was suddenly deprived of all her friends with the sole exception of the Duc d'Epéron, who, either from an excess of pride which would not permit him to humble himself so far as to induce him to pay his court to the Princes from whom he had received so many and such bitter mortifications, or from the state of indisposition under which he was at that period labouring, refused to take any share in the intrigues of the Court.

Concini became alarmed; he had so long been the spoilt child of fortune that every reverse overthrew his self-possession; and in the first paroxysm of his terror he considered himself lost. Chance and his own ready cunning still, however, stood his friends. The Grand Equerry (Bellegarde) was, with the insane superstition of the time, accused of having suborned witnesses to prove that the Marquis had endeavoured by means of a magic mirror to inspire some of the highest ladies of the Court with a passion for his person; and as Concini demanded reparation for this injury, an investigation was instituted, to effect which it was necessary that summonses should be issued to the witnesses. Sillery, to whom the Italian was peculiarly

Marie de Medicis

obnoxious, and who was the friend of the Duc de Bellegarde, made some difficulty when called upon to affix the official seal to these documents; upon which Concini hastened to complain to the Regent that the Chancellor was endeavouring to sacrifice him to his enemies; and Marie, indignant no less at the apparent injustice shown to her favourite than at the delay evinced in obeying her commands, made no attempt to disguise her displeasure.

On the other hand, the Comte de Soissons, who still hoped to obtain from the courtesy, or to wring from the fears, of the Regent the promised government of Quilleboeuf, made a voyage into Normandy, which so alarmed the Maréchal de Fervaques, who held the city, and who apprehended that the Prince was about to possess himself of it by force, that he privately reinforced the garrison; a fact which M. de Soissons no sooner ascertained than he bitterly upbraided the Maréchal, and a quarrel ensued between them that produced new difficulties.

Unfortunately Marie de Medicis was at this moment surrounded by evil and interested advisers, by whom she was induced to embroil herself, not only with the Princes of the Blood and great nobles, but also with the Parliament, and eventually with the Protestants. The misunderstanding which had arisen between the Duc de Rohan and the Maréchal de Bouillon unhappily produced a disunion among the Huguenot party which laid them open to the machinations of their enemies; and Marie, whose zeal for the Romish communion always made her eager to harass and oppress the Protestants, was readily persuaded to undertake the annulment of the edicts by which their allegiance had hitherto been secured. Bouillon had never forgiven the Duc de Rohan for the energetic part which he had played at the Assembly of Saumur; and secure of his influence over the mind of the Regent, who felt grateful for the offer of his services upon that occasion, and the efforts which he had made to carry out her wishes, he resolved to undermine the interests of the young Duke, and to attempt to deprive him of his government of St. Jean-d'Angély which had been bestowed upon him by Henri IV.

Apprised of his intention, M. de Rohan hastened to Court in order to justify himself, but the mind of Marie had been poisoned against him, and she treated his remonstrances with chilling indifference. Aware that the mayor of the town had been bought by his enemies, and that should that official be continued in his authority he must himself inevitably lose his government, and thereby forfeit all his influence, the Duke no sooner saw the period of the municipal election approach than, pretexting the dangerous illness of his brother, he took his leave of the Court and hastened back to St. Jean-d'Angély in order to compel the retirement of the obnoxious functionary. As he had anticipated, on the day of the canvass a letter was received from the ministers, ordaining the re-election of the mayor without modification or explanation of any kind; an affront which so exasperated M. de Rohan that he at once resisted its enforcement; declaring that the Regent had been misinformed with regard to the state of the town, which, according to the terms of the letter, was inferred to be divided into parties; and that, as he would undertake to convince her Majesty of the error under which she laboured, they had only to proceed at once to a new election.

Bouillon had been prepared for this opposition; and found it easy to induce Marie, whose jealousy of power always rendered her on such occasions as the present a mere tool in the hands of her *soi-disant* friends, to forward a second and more stringent order for the continuance in office of the existing mayor. The Duke, however, persisted in disregarding the mandate; and after having despatched his secretary to the Louvre to explain the reasons of his resistance, he proceeded to authorize the nomination of three persons, all eligible for the office, in order that the Regent might make her own selection; and, while awaiting her reply, the keys of the city were confided to the senior sheriff; and he found himself complete master of the place.

Nothing could exceed the indignation of Marie de Medicis on learning this contempt of her authority. The messengers of M. de Rohan were forthwith committed to the Bastille; orders were issued to the Duchess his mother, to his wife, and to his sisters, not to leave the capital; and preparations were even made to besiege the Duke in St. Jean-d'Angély as a rebel. Manifestoes to the Protestants were next put forth by both parties; that of the Queen-mother protesting that the aggressive measures which she was about to adopt involved no question of

faith, but were destined to be directed simply against M. de Rohan as an individual; and that consequently they would in no degree affect the edicts of pacification, which would be rigidly observed; and calling upon all faithful subjects of the King, whatever might be their religious persuasion, to aid and abet the effort by which she trusted to subdue the nascent rebellion threatened by so gross a disregard of the constituted authorities of the realm. The Duke, on his side, threw himself upon the justice and generosity of his co-religionists, reminding them that it was through zeal for their common faith that he had incurred the resentment of the Court; and having so done, he hastened to place the city in such a state of defence as should enable him to resist the attack of the royal troops.

The resolute position thus assumed by M. de Rohan alarmed the ministers; who apprehensive that the neighbouring provinces, already disaffected by the negative result of the Assembly of Saumur, would support the cause of so bold a recusant, and thus renew the civil war by which the nation had formerly been convulsed, became anxious to temporize. Negotiations were accordingly commenced between the adverse factions; and it was ultimately agreed that the keys of the city should be restored to the mayor from whom they had been taken, and some subaltern officers displaced by the Duke reinstated in their functions, and that so soon as this arrangement had been completed a new election should take place, by which M. de Rohan was to be at liberty to substitute others more agreeable to himself. This absurd ceremony was accordingly performed; the royal authority was supposed to have enforced its recognition; and the Duke, by a merely visionary concession, preserved his government.

Meanwhile the young Duc de Mayenne had taken leave of the Court, and departed with a brilliant suite for Madrid, to demand the hand of the Infanta for the King of France; and on the same day the Duque de Pastrano left the Spanish capital on his way to Paris to solicit that of Madame Elisabeth for the Prince of Spain.

The ducal envoy reached the French capital early in the month of July, accompanied by his brothers Don Francisco and Don Diego de Silva and a number of Spanish grandees, having been received with extraordinary honours in every town which he had traversed after passing the frontier. The Ducs de Luxembourg and de Nevers met him beyond the gate of the city, accompanied by five hundred nobles on horseback, sumptuously attired in velvet and cloth of gold and silver, with their horses splendidly caparisoned. The retinue of the Iberian grandee was not, however, as the French courtiers had fondly flattered themselves that it would have been, eclipsed by the lavish magnificence of their own appearance, his personal costume being of the most splendid description, his horses and equipages costly and gorgeous, and his numerous train of attendants habited in a livery of extreme richness.

On the 16th of the month the Spanish Duke had his first audience of the young King, at which were assembled the Princes of the Blood, all the high nobility of France, and the Cardinals de Sourdis and de Gondy. The two latter dignitaries endeavoured to excuse themselves, on the pretext that their rank as Princes of the Church would not permit them to seat themselves below the Princes of the Blood; but this pretension on their part was considered so monstrous, even by the Regent herself, that, anxious as she was to secure their attendance in order to render the ceremony more imposing to the Spanish envoy, she did not venture to support them in their arrogant assumption of equality with the first subjects of the Crown; and she accordingly informed them in reply that upon the present occasion there would be no regard paid to precedence, but that each individual who was entitled to attend the audience would be at liberty to seat himself as he saw fit.

Thus assured, the two prelates, attired in their rich robes of violet-coloured velvet, entered the hall; and were about to take their places near the royal daïs, when the Princes of the Blood, led by M. de Condé, hastily passed them, and ranged themselves in a line on the right hand of the King. The Cardinals then proceeded to adopt a similar position beside the Queen-Regent, but they were immediately displaced by the Dowager Princess of Condé, her daughter-in-law, and Madame de Conti; and upon finding themselves thus excluded from the

immediate neighbourhood of the sovereign, they withdrew in great displeasure, no effort being made to detain them.

Nor was this the only altercation which took place before the commencement of the ceremony; and the one which we are about to relate is so characteristic of the manners of that age among the great, that it must not be omitted. The Duc de Nevers had taken his place upon the bench appropriated to the Princes of the Blood, immediately below M. de Soissons, who, being engaged in conversation with his brother, the Prince de Conti, did not remark the intrusion. M. de Condé, however, who was seated above his two uncles, at once discovered the enormity of which the Duke had been guilty, and he forthwith commenced pushing the Prince de Conti so violently that he excited his attention; and his purpose was no sooner understood than his example was imitated with an energy which was instantly communicated to the Comte de Soissons, who in his turn so pressed upon M. de Nevers that he became extremely irritated, and demanded why he was subjected to such ungracious treatment.

"Because this is not a place for you," haughtily retorted the Prince de Condé.

The Duc de Nevers made a bitter rejoinder, and high words ensued, which were at length terminated by the Prince, who said significantly: "We can explain ourselves better elsewhere, M. le Duc; follow me."

The conversation had, however, been overheard by the Maréchal de Bouillon, who hastened to inform the King that the two Princes had retired for a hostile purpose; upon which Louis ordered them to be instantly recalled, and after having rebuked M. de Nevers for assuming a place to which he was not entitled, insisted upon their immediate reconciliation.

The Duque de Pastrano was then introduced by M. de Guise and his two brothers; and after the usual ceremony of welcome on the one side and obeisance on the other, he presented to the King and his royal mother the letters with which he had been entrusted by his sovereign. Thence he proceeded to the apartments of Madame Elisabeth, where he delivered the missives of the Prince of Spain; after which he was conducted to the presence of the other Children of France; and finally, having paid his respects to every member of the royal family, he was attended by a brilliant retinue of nobles to the residence which had been appropriated to his use during his sojourn in the capital.

So unparalleled was the splendour displayed upon this occasion, that the year 1612 was long known in Europe as "the year of magnificence," the festivities having been alike gorgeous throughout France, Spain, and Naples; and considerable mortification was experienced in the former kingdom when it was ascertained, on the return of the Duc de Mayenne, that the display made in Paris, extraordinary as it was, could not equal that exhibited at Lerma and Madrid. In the former city the favourite of Philip had received the French envoy in his own palace, and had lodged him in an apartment hung with tapestry of silk and gold, intermingled with emeralds and rubies. In Madrid it is true that the mourning still worn for the late Queen somewhat modified the brilliancy of the spectacle; but as every effort had been made to counteract the effect of this drawback, it became rather a singular feature than an actual blot upon the gorgeousness of the spectacle presented by the Spanish capital.

On the 25th of August the marriage articles were signed between Madame Elisabeth and the Prince of Spain, the dowry of the girl-bride being five hundred thousand golden crowns; after which the Duque de Pastrano, laden with magnificent presents, and satiated with pleasure and festivity, took his leave of the French Court, and left Paris on his return to Madrid.

The contract between Louis XIII and the Infanta was meanwhile completed on the 22d of the month in the Spanish capital; and at the close of the ceremony the Duc de Mayenne was conducted to an audience-chamber in which Philip was seated with the betrothed Prince and Princess on his right and left, awaiting his arrival. After having profoundly saluted the King in perfect silence, the Duke approached the Infanta, to whom he addressed himself as to the Queen of France. His compliment was courteously received; and before the termination of this private audience, when on taking leave he would have bent his knee and kissed the hand of the

Marie de Medicis

sovereign and his son, each in succession saluted him upon the cheek; an honour as great as it was unexpected, particularly in a Court where the observances of strict etiquette were more rigidly enforced than elsewhere in Europe.

The festivities consequent upon the double betrothal occupied several days, and they no sooner came to a close than the French envoy demanded a parting audience of his future sovereign, at which he entreated of her to entrust him with some letter or message for the King his master.

"Tell him," said the Princess eagerly, "that I am very impatient to see him."

"Oh, Madame!" exclaimed the Condesa d'Altamira, her *gouvernante*, "what will his Majesty of France think of your Royal Highness when my Lord Duke informs him that you are in such haste to become a wife?"

"You have always taught me to tell the truth," was the ready retort; and charged with this sincere and singular communication, M. de Mayenne returned to Fontainebleau.

The Duke of Savoy had no sooner ascertained that the hand of Madame Elisabeth was definitely pledged to the Spanish Prince than he declared to the Queen-Regent his readiness to receive that of the Princesse Christine for his own son; and for awhile Marie had affected to favour the alliance; but her great ambition was to see each of her daughters upon a throne, and she had accordingly entered into a negotiation with the English monarch for effecting a marriage between the younger Princess and Henry, Prince of Wales, who was about to be betrothed to the Princess of Savoy. She was the more encouraged to hope for the success of this proposal as James had already been a candidate for the hand of her elder daughter; nor was she deterred by the knowledge that the Grand Duke of Tuscany had offered one of his sisters, with an enormous dowry, to the British Prince.

So eager, indeed, was Marie de Medicis to effect this alliance for the Princesse Christine, that the English Ambassador did not hesitate to declare to his Government that from the manner in which the affair had been urged upon him by M. de Villeroy, he felt a conviction that his royal master might conclude the treaty of marriage whenever he considered it expedient to do so, and might moreover make whatever conditions he thought proper.

While the negotiations were still pending, however, the lamentable death of the high-spirited and promising young Prince terminated at once the struggle for his hand; and Marie de Medicis, to her undisguised regret, found herself unable to realize one of her most cherished hopes.

On the 1st of November the Comte de Soissons, who was suddenly attacked by scarlet fever while still engaged in projects of ambition and revenge, also breathed his last; an event which was destined to effect a complete change in the aspect of the Court. By his decease the governments of Dauphiny and Normandy, as well as the appointment of Grand Master of the King's Household, became vacant; and four-and-twenty hours had not elapsed before as many claimants presented themselves, eager to secure these coveted honours. The Prince had, however, left an infant son, to whom the Queen-Regent immediately transferred both the government of Dauphiny and the place at Court recently held by his father. As regarded Normandy, she resolved to retain it in her own hands, and to appoint a lieutenant-governor to whom she could confide the command of the province; but she had no sooner declared her intention than she was met by the expostulations of M. de Conti, who reminded her that having formerly ceded the government of Dauphiny to the Comte de Soissons at her request, he considered himself entitled to succeed to that which had now become available by his death.

Determined to retain her possession of the province, and yet fearful of exciting once more the resentment of the Princes of the Blood, the Regent was compelled to propose a compromise, which, after some hesitation, was accepted by M. de Conti. It will be remembered that the Comte d'Auvergne, Charles de Valois, recently become Duc d'Angoulême, had been committed to the Bastille by Henri IV for conspiring with his father and sister against the person of the King and the tranquillity of the realm; nor is it probable that Marie de Medicis

would have felt the slightest inclination to show any indulgence to the step-brother of Madame de Verneuil, had it not on the present occasion been a matter of policy to do so. The Marquis de Coeuvres was accordingly instructed to visit him in his prison, and to offer him his liberty provided he would resign to the Prince de Conti his government of Auvergne; and although the Duke at first evinced extreme reluctance to comply with this condition, he was ultimately induced to yield to the solicitations of the royal envoy, who convinced him that the freedom for which he yearned so eagerly could be purchased at no other price.

The body of the Comte de Soissons was conveyed to the Chartreuse at Gaillon, and there deposited in the tomb of his ancestors; and before the close of the month the Queen-Regent assisted, at the Hôtel de Soissons in Paris, at the baptism of his son, which was celebrated in the presence of all the most distinguished personages of the Court.

At this period a new cabal was organized which effectually neutralized all attempt at opposition. The chief of this formidable faction was the Prince de Condé; and it was moreover composed of the Ducs de Nevers, de Mayenne, and de Longueville, the Maréchal de Bouillon, and the Marquis d'Ancre. By this combination of rank, influence, and favour, the Guises, the Duc d'Epernon, and their adherents saw themselves thrown into the background, and threatened with utter annihilation as a political party. The Connétable de Montmorency, who believed the power of the Guises to be firmly established, and who had consequently allied himself to their interests, was absent in Languedoc, of which province he was governor; while the Grand Equerry, M. de Bellegarde, who was also their friend, was sojourning in Burgundy; and thus they found themselves exposed, almost without support, to the evil offices of the rival faction. The Queen openly espoused the cause of M. de Condé and his party, while the ministers soon saw themselves utterly deprived of both influence and credit; and at length, seriously alarmed by the posture of affairs, the Duc de Guise wrote to entreat M. de Bellegarde to return with all speed to Paris, in order to assist him in his endeavour to overthrow the rapidly-growing power of their mutual adversaries. M. le Grand was preparing to comply with this request, when an order to the same effect reached him from the Regent, which tended to hasten his departure; but on arriving at Sens he was met by one of his friends, who warned him not to trust himself in the capital, as he had only been recalled in order that he might either be bribed or frightened into the resignation of his government, of which the Marquis d'Ancre had undertaken to effect the transfer to the Duc de Mayenne.

In consequence of this intimation M. le Grand, instead of appearing at Court in compliance with the royal mandate, returned in all haste to Languedoc, and the Duc de Guise found himself deprived of his anticipated assistance. Bellegarde himself, who attributed this attempt to deprive him of his government to the Baron de Luz—who through the influence of Bassompierre had been reinstated in the favour of the Queen, and had consequently abandoned the faction of the Guises, of whose projects and designs he was cognizant, in order to espouse the interests and to serve the ambition of the Marquis d'Ancre—vowed vengeance against the recreant baron, and complained bitterly to his friends of the insult to which he had been subjected through this unworthy agency.

The Guises, already apprehensive of the consequences which might accrue to themselves from the defection of M. de Luz, were only too ready to sympathize with the indignant Duke, and unfortunately for all parties they did not confine their sympathy to mere words. Ever prompt and reckless, they at once resolved to revenge themselves upon their common enemy; nor was it long ere they carried their fatal determination into effect.

CHAPTER V

1613

The state of France at the commencement of the year 1613 was precarious in the extreme. As yet no intestine war had broken out, but there existed a sullen undercurrent of discontent and disaffection which threatened, like the sound of distant thunder, to herald an approaching storm. The Court was, as we have shown, the focus of anarchy and confusion; the power and resources of the great nobles had steadily increased since the death of Henri IV, and had they only been united among themselves, the authority of Marie de Medicis must have been set at nought, and the throne of the boy-King have tottered to its base. The provinces were, in many instances, in open opposition to the Government; the ministers indignant at the disrespect shown alike to their persons and to their functions; the Parliament jealous of the encroachments on its privileges; the citizens outraged by the lavish magnificence, and indignant at the insolent assumption of the nobility; and the people irritated and impoverished by the constant exactions to which they were subjected in order to supply the exigencies of the state.

Such was the condition of a kingdom dependent for its prosperity upon the rule of a favourite-ridden woman, and a helpless child.

We have already stated the anxiety of the Guises to revenge themselves upon M. de Luz; and we have now to relate the tragedy which supervened upon this resolution. It appears to be the common fate of all favourites to accelerate their own ruin by personal imprudence; nor was M. de Luz destined to prove an exception. His life had been a varied one; but the spirit of intrigue and enterprise with which he was endowed had enabled him to bid defiance to adverse fortune, and to struggle successfully against every reverse. Patient under disappointment because strong in his confidence of future compensation, he was less cautious in his more prosperous moments; and in one of these he was unhappy enough to afford a pretext for the violence of the enemies who had vowed his ruin.

Disregarding the presence of the Chevalier de Guise, or perhaps unconscious of his propinquity, De Luz, shortly after the return of the Duc de Bellegarde to Languedoc, was relating to a group of nobles, who were lounging away the time in the great gallery of the Louvre while awaiting the appearance of the King, the circumstances which preceded the assassination of the Duc de Guise at Blois; boasting that he was present with the Maréchal de Brissac when Henri III decided upon the murder, and had even prevented the former from intimating his danger to the intended victim. The Chevalier, who was young, impetuous, and, like all the members of his house, utterly careless of the consequences of his actions, would have felt himself justified in demanding satisfaction of M. de Luz simply for the insult offered to his brothers and himself by his abrupt and unscrupulous abandonment of their interests, and the affront given to their friend and ally the Duc de Bellegarde; but when to these real or imagined injuries was superadded the fact that he had publicly boasted of the share which he had gratuitously and wantonly taken in the murder of his father, no wonder that the fiery young man, disregarding alike the royal edicts against duelling and the dictates of humanity, at once resolved to silence the vauntings of the quasi-assassin, or to perish in the attempt.

At the moment in which he volunteered the fatal communication De Luz was protected by the roof that covered him. It was certain death to any individual, whatever might be his rank, who drew a hostile weapon within the precincts of the royal palace; and De Guise was aware that by such an act of imprudence he might forfeit all hope of vengeance. He affected, consequently, not to have overheard the imprudent admission of the baron, and controlled the impulse which would have led him to fell him as he stood; but his thirst of vengeance only

became the more unquenchable by delay, and he watched the movements of his destined victim with an assiduity which soon enabled him to slake it.

On the 5th of January, at mid-day, his carriage encountered that of M. de Luz in the Rue St. Honoré, when he immediately summoned him to alight and defend himself; and at the second pass stretched him lifeless at his feet.

The Regent, who since she had pardoned M. de Luz had found him a most zealous and efficient adherent, was angered beyond measure, not only at the wilful disregard of the royal authority exhibited by the Chevalier, but also at the loss of an active and useful agent; and the intelligence had no sooner reached her than, rising from her dinner, which she had just commenced when the news was brought, she burst into tears, and retired to her closet. When she had become somewhat more calm she assembled the Council, by which she was advised to refer the matter to the Parliament; but while the subject was under deliberation tidings reached the Louvre that a numerous body of nobles had assembled at the hôtel of the Duc de Guise, who was himself about to set forth for the palace attended by a strong party of his friends. Alarmed at the prospect of such a demonstration, which bore the semblance of an enforcement of impunity rather than of a deprecation of justice, the Queen was entreated by those around her to despatch M. de Châteaueux to the residence of the Duc de Guise, to forbid his approach to the royal presence until formally summoned to appear; and to command in her name that all the persons who had assembled under his roof should immediately retire.

The Regent followed this advice, and on his return to the palace M. de Châteaueux reported that he had rigidly performed his duty; that the Duke had abandoned his intention of demanding an audience of her Majesty; and that although many of those by whom he was surrounded had originally refused to obey her commands, they had ultimately been induced to do so by the persuasions of M. de Guise himself, who represented the propriety of their compliance with her will; with the sole exception of M. de la Rochefoucauld who had declined to quit the hôtel.

The Queen immediately issued an order for his exile from the Court, which was communicated to him upon the instant; nor was her indignation towards the Duc de Guise appeased, even upon learning that he had evinced the greatest respect for her authority, and the most perfect submission to her will; or that when, after his encounter with M. de Luz, the Chevalier had presented himself at his hôtel and claimed his protection, he had refused to receive him, or in any way to countenance the crime of which he had been guilty.

The displeasure of the Regent was, moreover, greatly excited by the Chancellor, who had evinced no disposition to proceed against M. de Guise; and she accordingly declared her determination to deprive him of the seals, and to bestow them upon some individual who would perform his duty more efficiently. For this purpose she secretly summoned the Prince de Condé, the Duc de Bouillon, and the Marquis d'Ancre to the Louvre, the whole of whom approved her intention; and it was arranged that M. de Condé should demand the seals, and at the same time command the Chancellor in the name of their Majesties to retire to one of his estates. It was, moreover, resolved that Marie should name a day when she would dine at the hôtel of Zamet, and that on her way she should enter the Bastille and cause the arrest of the Duc d'Épernon, who had only a week previously returned to Court, after a serious illness. The accomplishment of these hasty measures was, however, frustrated by the ambition of the Marquis d'Ancre, who was desirous of replacing the Chancellor by some creature of his own, while his wife was equally anxious that the vacant dignity should be conferred upon a person who was obnoxious to the Duc de Bouillon; and as it was necessary that in order to effect their purpose they should each propose the same individual, so much time was lost that Marie had leisure to reconsider her intention, and to abandon it.

The Marquis d'Ancre had, however, aggravated her displeasure against M. de Guise by introducing to her presence the son of the murdered man, who threw himself at her feet, weeping bitterly, and demanding justice.

Marie de Medicis

The woman-heart of Marie de Medicis was deeply moved; and while her anger increased against the Guises, her sympathy for the sufferer before her melted her to tears. Bidding him take comfort, she promised all he asked; and before he withdrew conferred upon him the offices and pensions of his father, assuring him that he might thenceforward rely upon her protection.

At the close of a few days Bassompierre, who was First Gentleman of the Chamber to the Regent, and greatly in her confidence; and who was anxious to reinstate the Duc de Guise in her favour, on account of his attachment to the Princesse de Conti, ventured to impress upon his royal mistress, not only the inexpediency of utterly estranging from her interests so powerful a family, but also the policy of recognizing with indulgence and pardon the ready obedience and loyalty of the Duke, who had not scrupled to sacrifice the safety of a brother to whom he was tenderly attached to his sense of duty towards herself. Marie suffered him to proceed for some time in silence; but at length his zeal was rewarded by her consent to receive M. de Guise, and to listen to his offered justification, provided he came to the Louvre at nightfall, and alone.

After expressing his deep sense of this concession Bassompierre hastened to communicate his success to the Duke, who lost no time in presenting himself before his offended mistress; and so ably did he plead his cause, replacing his accustomed haughtiness and impetuosity by a demeanour at once respectful and submissive, that Marie de Medicis, whose attachment to his house had long been notorious, declared herself satisfied, and assured him that thenceforward she should hold him exonerated from any participation in the crime of his brother. Upon one point, however, the Regent remained firm; and although the Duke earnestly implored the recall of M. de la Rochefoucauld, he was met by so decided a refusal that he was compelled to abandon all immediate hope of success. He had, nevertheless, save in this respect, every reason to congratulate himself upon his reception; and the affair would probably have elicited no further consequences, had not the Duchess his mother, whose pride of birth, and natural arrogance, led her to believe herself inferior to no crowned head in Europe, and who ill-brooked the authority of one whom she was accustomed to consider as a mere petty Princess, indebted to circumstances for her temporary position of command, resolved to demand an interview upon the same subject; which having been accorded by the Regent, renewed with greater violence than ever the anger of Marie, who, justly irritated at finding herself defied and braved by one of her own subjects, dismissed the imprudent Duchess with so much harshness that the position of the offending parties became more onerous than before, and the interference of Bassompierre was rendered worse than useless.

Disconcerted by this unexpected disappointment, M. de Guise, aware that no influence less than that possessed by the Marquis d'Ancre could any longer avail him, compelled himself to overcome his pride sufficiently to entreat the good offices of the astute Italian; who, eager to seize so favourable an opportunity of strengthening the faction of the Princes of the Blood, referred him to M. de Condé as the only individual likely to accomplish his reconciliation with the indignant Queen, and the rather as the Duc d'Epemon declared himself ready to second the appeal.

This advice was eagerly adopted by M. de Guise; who found little difficulty in effecting his object, the Princes having no sooner discovered that he had lost the favour of the Queen than they became anxious to attach him to their own interests; and so rapidly did this new alliance ripen that, with his usual impetuous recklessness, the young Duke ere long requested Bassompierre never again to mention the recall of M. de la Rochefoucauld to the Regent, as he should shortly accomplish it through the medium of the Prince de Condé; adding that thenceforward their mutual understanding would be so perfect that on the next occasion of the Queen's displeasure against himself, she would find no rod with which to chastise him.

The influence of M. de Condé at this precise period was indeed so great as almost to justify the confidence of his new ally; but it was destined to be rapidly undermined by his own imprudence. He had long coveted the command of the Château Trompette, of which, although it was situated in the principal city of his government, he was not in possession; and believing

Marie de Medicis

that the Regent would not venture, under existing circumstances, to refuse to him what he had taught himself to consider as a right, he induced the Ducs de Mayenne and d'Epemon and the Marquis d'Ancre to make the demand in his name. His friends zealously obeyed his bidding, and urged the Queen to this, as they declared, unimportant concession; reminding her that as M. de Condé had devoted himself to her cause, he merited every favour which she could bestow upon him without danger to the state.

Marie de Medicis was not, however, prepared to regard this new demand upon her indulgence in so unimportant a light. She apprehended, and not without reason, that the Princes were endeavouring to sap the foundations of her authority, by possessing themselves of the fortresses of the Crown; and it was consequently with a heightened colour that, having heard the arguments addressed to her, she briefly replied that she would give the subject her consideration. The three nobles, anxious for the success of their mission, were not, however, to be so easily discouraged; and they consequently proceeded to impress upon her Majesty the impolicy of a delay which could not fail to wound the susceptibility of the Prince; but the patience of Marie was not proof against this pertinacity, and again declaring that she should take time to consider the subject, she rose from her seat and withdrew to her private closet, still closely followed by the applicants, her eyes flashing with anger as she discovered that they were even yet resolved to persecute her with their entreaties. Soon, however, she recovered her self-possession; and turning with a smile towards her obnoxious guests, she said, as playfully as though no cause of annoyance were coupled with their presence: "I have just learnt a new gallantry of which Bassompierre has been the hero; he did not know that it would reach my ears, nor will he be well pleased to find that I have heard of it."

"I trust that your Majesty will inform him of the discovery," said the Duc de Nevers, instantly adding: "Approach, M. de Bassompierre; the Queen has something to confide to you."

"No, no," replied Marie, in the same tone of banter which she had so suddenly assumed, "I shall not tell him one word of the matter."

At once surprised and alarmed, the Marquis immediately approached the Regent, and entreated her to let him hear the intelligence which she had to communicate; and he had no sooner done so than Marie, whose subterfuge had succeeded, moved to a distant window, and motioned to him to follow her. When she had reached the recess, she still continued to stand with her back towards the two Dukes; and as Bassompierre gained her side, she said in a hasty whisper: "I know nothing of your intrigues; but tell me, has M. de Guise ceased to urge you to effect the return of La Rochefoucauld?"

"Only three days ago, Madame, he bade me desist from importuning your Majesty upon the subject, as the Prince de Condé had promised him that it should be shortly accomplished through his own means; adding, moreover, that he could scarcely be blamed for adopting the interests of the Princes, since your own creature, M. d'Ancre, had done the same."

As Bassompierre spoke warm tears gushed from the eyes of the Queen. "Yes," she exclaimed bitterly; "the very men who induced me to oppose the Princes and to offend the ministers are now endeavouring to profit by my unsupported position, to undermine my authority, and to ruin my credit with the people. You heard how insolently they demanded a royal fortress for their leader; and I am well aware that should I grant their request it would only expose me to the necessity of making new concessions."

"Do not distress yourself, Madame," replied the skilful courtier, eager to avail himself of so favourable an opportunity of serving his friends; "you can always command the means of recalling them to their allegiance; and, did I dare to proffer a counsel to your Majesty, I would suggest that you should employ them."

"We will talk no more at present," said Marie; "return here when I have risen from table, and by that time I shall have had leisure to reflect upon your advice."

She then advanced once more to the centre of the apartment, and commenced a trivial conversation, which she maintained until the departure of the two Dukes, thus effectually

preventing all recurrence to the obnoxious subject; but she was not destined to escape so readily as she had hoped from this new persecution. Concini and his wife had alike pledged themselves to M. de Condé that they would support his pretensions with all their influence, and their vanity was consequently enlisted in the cause as much as their interests. The Queen-mother, therefore, no sooner found herself alone with Leonora than the subject was renewed; and that with so much pertinacious resolution that the dignity of the Regent took alarm, and she expressed herself with considerable bitterness to the presumptuous favourite. At this crisis Concini entered the apartment; and with as little caution as his wife had previously exhibited, persisted in urging upon his harassed mistress the same unpalatable advice; until, utterly wearied, and deeply indignant at an interference which exceeded all the bounds of courtesy and respect, Marie commanded them both to quit her presence, and gave instant orders that they should not again be admitted until she had signified her pleasure to that effect.

As the officers of the household were about to marshal the Regent to the mid-day meal, Bassompierre encountered the Duc de Guise, of whom he immediately inquired if he had abandoned the cause of the unfortunate La Rochefoucauld, who would inevitably die of *ennui*, should he be long exiled from the gaities of the Court.

"No, no," vehemently replied the Duke, "he shall return to share them; nor will I be under an obligation to the Queen for his reappearance. I have served her with zeal, and have been repaid by coldness and neglect. I have therefore made new interests, and now recognize no leader but M. de Condé, no coadjutors but his cabal; nor will I abandon them although I adopted their policy with reluctance; a determination, Monsieur," he added pointedly, "which you at least will not condemn, as you are a member of the same party."

"Your Lordship is partially in error," said Bassompierre gaily. "I am, it is true, the very humble servant of all such individuals as are favoured by the Prince, but I do not recognize them as a political body. I am the devoted adherent of their Majesties, and I know no other masters. Pardon me, moreover, if I venture to say that you have yourself, M. le Duc, been very ill-advised. You were formerly the leader of your own faction, since it would appear that we are to talk of factions; you were dependent upon no one, and responsible only to yourself for your actions and opinions; and now you have allied your fortunes to those of persons by whom you will be subjected to a thousand indignities and annoyances when they no longer require your support. How, then, do you imagine that you will be able to brook such treatment, when you suffer yourself to be angered and alienated by a cold word from the Regent? You should remember that your brother killed M. de Luz almost under her eyes, and in defiance of a stringent edict; and that you could scarcely anticipate the immediate recall of one of the officers of the King's household who had peremptorily refused to obey the royal command by which he was enjoined to leave your hôtel."

"Well, well," exclaimed the Duke impatiently, "the Queen will one day discover her error in having ventured to offer me a slight in order to gratify those by whom she suffers herself to be governed. She will ere long seek my friendship, but I shall either refuse to listen or compel her to purchase it at a high price."

The Regent had no sooner returned to her closet than, in obedience to her orders, Bassompierre again presented himself; and as soon as she had dismissed her attendants she at once entered upon the subject that occupied her thoughts. "Bestein," she said, addressing the Marquis by the name which she usually applied to him during their confidential interviews, "this wretched affair has totally unnerved me. I was unable to swallow any food, and unless my mind is relieved at once I shall go mad. You must reconcile me to the Duc de Guise at any price. Offer him a hundred thousand crowns for himself, the commission of Lieutenant-General of Provence for his brother, and the reversion of the Abbey of St. Germain for the Princesse de Conti. In one word, promise him what you please, and I will consent, provided you annihilate this cabal and detach him from the interests of the Princes."

"Madame," replied Bassompierre with a gay smile, "you have filled my hands so amply that I am sure of making a successful bargain. But have I no similar commission with regard to M. d'Épernon?"

Marie de Medicis

"Ah, would that I could hope so much," said Marie gloomily; "but I have wounded his vanity, and he never forgives."

"Seldom, perhaps, Madame," was the ready rejoinder of the shrewd courtier, "his enemies, but readily his rulers."

"Endeavour then," exclaimed the Queen eagerly, "to effect this also, Bestein; remind him of all that I have already done, both for himself and his children, and assure him that I have never lost the inclination to serve him. If any one can accomplish so desirable an object, you are the person."

Bassompierre lost no time in opening the important negotiation with which he was entrusted; and the wiliness with which he first enlisted the ambition and cupidity of the females of the family presents a curious picture of the manners of the time. His success could not long remain doubtful at a period when the allegiance of the highest nobles of the land was bought and sold like the most common merchandise; and accordingly, although, as he informs us, the Duc de Guise for a time indulged in his ordinary extravagance of speech, he gradually yielded, and—as a natural consequence—received the price of his venal concession!

On this occasion, however, M. d'Epernon, whose birth was far inferior to that of his friend, displayed a higher sense of what was due to himself and to his rank. "In matters of this importance," he said proudly, as Bassompierre urged him once more to espouse the interests of the Regent, and hinted at the benefit likely to accrue to himself from his compliance with her wishes, "I never condescend to bargain. Decisions of real weight should be formed frankly and disinterestedly. I have no wish to capitulate with my sovereign. Offer me no bribe, for I should consider it only as an insult. Any service which I can render to the Queen has been already amply recompensed, and I should be unworthy alike of the name I bear and of the offices I hold did I place my loyalty at a price. I have only one favour to request of her Majesty before I again devote myself to her interests, and that is that she will henceforward exhibit more firmness, and attach a greater value to those who have served her with fidelity and zeal. This conceded, I am ready to attend her pleasure whenever she may see fit to summon me to her presence."

The exultation of Marie de Medicis at the happy termination of his mission rendered her profuse in her expressions of gratitude to Bassompierre, which she terminated by the assurance that he should be appointed First Lord of the Bedchamber to the young King, even should she, as she declared, be compelled to purchase the post from her own private funds; and these preliminaries arranged, on the following morning, at nine o'clock, the two Dukes proceeded to pay their respects to her Majesty, by whom they were most graciously received, and who commanded that a seat should be placed for M. d'Epernon, whose recovery from a severe illness was, as we have already stated, only recent. The interview was a long one, and no allusion was made on either side to the late defection of the distinguished guests, who, on rising to retire, were invited by the Queen to attend her to the theatre that evening; and they had no sooner expressed their acknowledgments than she gave orders to the captain of her guard to have benches prepared for both the Duc d'Epernon and M. Zamet, by whom he was to be accompanied.

This extraordinary favour excited universal comment when the assembled courtiers perceived that it was not even extended to the Duc de Mayenne, who was also present at the performance; and Concini, in particular, was so struck by the sudden change of affairs that he exclaimed energetically to Bassompierre, beside whom he stood: "*Per Dio!* Monsieur, I can but laugh over the mutations of this strange world; the Queen has found a seat for Zamet, and there is none for the Duc de Mayenne. Place your faith in princes after this!"

Great was the exultation of the courtiers when the disgrace of Concini became known; but that of the ministers, as they learnt its cause, was even more profound. One web of the complicated mesh which had been woven about the spirit of the Queen had at length given way, while her refusal to accede to the request of the Prince de Condé convinced them that he was no longer likely to prove so formidable an enemy to themselves as he had recently been.

Marie de Medicis

Acting upon this impression they hastened to solicit a private audience of the Regent, declaring that they had matters of great importance to treat with her, which they would only communicate to herself; and their satisfaction was complete when an answer was returned appointing an hour for their appearance at the Louvre, and naming as the place of their reception the private closet of the Queen.

"Messieurs," said Marie graciously, as they paused upon the threshold of the apartment to make the accustomed obeisance, "your request shall be strictly complied with." And then turning to the captain of her guard she added: "M. de Senneterre, you will suffer no one to enter here, be he whom he may."

Delighted by the manner of their reception, the ministers at once entered upon the subject which had induced them to solicit the interview, and respectfully represented to the Regent the alarm which they had felt at the dangerous demand advanced by the Prince de Condé, and the exertions which they had ascertained were to be made by the Marquis d'Ancre to induce her Majesty's compliance; assuring her that the surrender of a royal fortress of such importance as the Château Trompette to the control of the first Prince of the Blood could not fail to prove prejudicial to the interests of the King and the tranquillity of the nation.

"I am fully aware of the importance of such a concession, Messieurs," replied Marie with dignity; "and my resolution is already formed. I have not yet forgotten that my late lord your sovereign more than once assured me that had he, while at war with Henri III, gained possession of the Château Trompette, he could have made himself Duc de Guienne. A fact like this is well calculated to rivet itself upon the memory."

At this moment the usher scratched upon the door, and entered to announce that the Marquis d'Ancre desired admission to the presence of the Queen; but the ministers had scarcely had time to exchange one glance of alarm and annoyance before Marie, with considerable vehemence, repeated her former order, and the mortified Marquis was compelled to retire.

Cautiously as the audience had been accorded, the Italian had not failed to ascertain through his spies the presence of the ministers in the palace; and aware of his own danger should they regain their legitimate influence over the mind of the Queen, he unhesitatingly resolved to brave her interdict in order to counteract the effect of their representations. He had, however, as we have shown, signally failed; and with the most gloomy forebodings of impending evil he returned to the apartments of his wife to report the ill-success of his attempt.

Nor was Concini the only visitor who sought admission to the Queen during her conference with the ministers. M. de Condé, who was still unaware of the moral revolution which had been effected, had, as was his custom, proceeded to the Louvre in order to consult with her on state affairs; and had been panic-struck when denied admission to her presence, and informed that she was then closeted with his mortal enemies. In his consternation he sought a solution of the mystery from Bassompierre, who, after expressing his utter ignorance of its meaning, cunningly insinuated that it was, in all probability, an intrigue of the Maréchal de Bouillon, who had effected a reconciliation with the Regent and her ministers at his expense; a suggestion which appeared so probable to the Prince that he immediately hurried to the apartments of Concini to discuss with him the necessary measures for averting this new danger.

Madame d'Ancre, who was well aware of the extent of her own power over the spirit of her foster-sister, would not permit herself to regard her present disgrace as more than a passing shadow, and urged her less confident husband to persevere in his attempt to regain the good graces of Marie, assuring him that the Queen would ere long be as anxious for a reconciliation as himself. Somewhat encouraged by this declaration, Concini, whose vanity was only rivalled by his ambition, and who, despite daily experience, believed his own society to be as indispensable to the Regent as that of his wife, took measures to ascertain the precise moment at which the ministerial audience terminated, when, profiting by the opportunity, he

threw himself upon his knees before the justly-offended Queen, and entreated her forgiveness of his involuntary offence. Marie was, however, in no mood for trifling, and she sternly bade him leave her; a command which he obeyed only to wreak upon his wife the consequences of his own mortification.

The son of the Baron de Luz finding that, despite her promise, the Regent had taken no measures to avenge the death of his father, but that, on the contrary, she had stopped the proceedings which previously to her reconciliation with the Duc de Guise had been commenced against his brother, determined to demand satisfaction in his own person; and he accordingly despatched a challenge to the Chevalier, which was immediately accepted by the hot-headed young noble. Seconds were appointed, and in compliance with the barbarous custom of the time the four combatants fought on horseback at the Porte St. Antoine. At the first pass François de Guise was wounded, but at the third his sword pierced the body of his antagonist, who fell from his saddle and expired a few minutes afterwards. Notwithstanding this tragical result, however, the murderer alike of the father and the son boldly returned to Paris, where he was visited and congratulated by numbers of the nobles, who, instead of shrinking from all contact with a man who had desolated the hearth and home of a sorrowing and now childless widow, were loud in their encomiums on his bravery and skill. Nor was this the most revolting feature of the case; for it is on record that Marie de Medicis herself, in her eagerness to retain the alliance of his family, no sooner learnt that the Chevalier had received a wound in the encounter than she despatched an officer of her household to convey to him her regret and to inquire into the extent of his hurt, overlooking, with extraordinary inconsistency, or still more reprehensible recklessness, the fact that only a few weeks previously she had instructed the Parliament to put him upon his trial for the murder of his first victim.

The unslumbering eye of Heaven, however, and the unerring fiat of divine justice, proved less oblivious of this monstrous crime. In the course of the following year, while at the fortress of Baux near Arles, François de Guise was in the act of firing off a cannon, which burst and wounded him in so frightful a manner that he expired two hours subsequently in extreme torture, thus partially expiating by a death of agony a youth of misrule and bloodshed.

The murder of the younger De Luz had no sooner reached the ears of M. de Luynes than he resolved to avail himself of the circumstance to awaken the ambition of Louis, and to induce him to fling off the shackles of maternal authority. Eager as he had long been for an opportunity of effecting this object, his attempts had hitherto been negated by the ceaseless energy with which Marie de Medicis had smothered in their germ all attempts at sedition, thus rendering herself essential to the well-being and security of the kingdom; and he accordingly felt all the importance of the present crisis.

Under this impression, after listening attentively to the narrative of his informant, he hastened to the apartment of the King, who was still engaged in the cares of his morning toilet; and no contrast could have been more striking than the simple costume of the young sovereign and the elaborate dress of his favourite. The pourpoint of Louis was of deep crimson velvet, slashed with satin of the same colour, and totally without ornament, a simplicity which marked his own observance of the sumptuary edict that he had lately issued; whereas De Luynes, with an arrogant disregard of the royal proclamation, was attired in a vest of pale blue, richly embroidered with gold and relieved by a short mantle of amaranth, clasped by a rich jewel similar to that which attached the snowy plume to his black velvet cap.

As the cap was doffed, however, and the long feather swept the tapestried floor, Louis forgot to chide this ostentatious defiance of his will, and with a smile motioned his splendid courtier to a seat.

"You come like a bridegroom from the wedding feast, Albert," he said cheerfully; "and you surely bring me a message of good import, or your garb belies you. Has De Brantès announced the speedy arrival of my sparrow-hawks?"

"Of one only, Sire; the smaller of the two died under his training."

Marie de Medicis

"Ah!" exclaimed the King, with great petulance; "it is always so. Whatever is destined to give me pleasure fails when I am the most eager to possess it."

"And yet," interposed De Luynes gaily, "never, in so far as I can judge, did fortune show herself more favourable to your Majesty."

"What mean you?" asked Louis, roused for an instant from his usual apathy.

"Oh! it is a long tale, and a strange one," said the favourite. "You may remember, Sire, the quarrel that arose between the old Baron de Luz and the Chevalier de Guise, and which grew out of the cabal against Concini. You cannot have forgotten, moreover, that the Baron was killed. Well, his son Antoine de Luz, impatient for a vengeance which was too tardy according to the principle of his filial chivalry, took, as it seems, the affair into his own hands, and flattered himself that where his father had failed he should come forth victorious. Poor boy! he has paid dearly for his mistake. His sword has proved duller than his hopes. He has encountered the Chevalier in his turn, and in his turn has bit the dust. François de Guise pierced him through and through one day last week near the Porte St. Antoine."

"Holy Virgin!" exclaimed Louis in an agitated voice; "do you mean that he is dead?"

"Dead, like his father," was the unmoved reply.

"And her Majesty the Queen-Regent was no sooner informed of the fact than she commanded M. de Bassompierre to arrest the Chevalier."

"I will not permit it!" cried the young King vehemently. "I love François de Guise; he is one of my firmest friends; he shall not be imprisoned."

"Calm yourself, Sire," said De Luynes with a significant smile; "Madame la Régente was soon appeased, and so little does she resent the crime of M. de Guise that she has this morning condescended to cause inquiries to be made after his health."

"Right, right," murmured Louis; "and yet it is a bad precedent, and a dangerous example to the lesser nobles. I hate this spilling of blood. The Princes are too bold. Upon what will they next venture?"

"Nay, it requires no sphynx to solve that problem, my gracious master," said the favourite, toying with his plumed cap; "they will endeavour to effect the exile of Concini and his dark-browed wife: your good subjects have no love for foreigners, and believe that you, their sovereign, would find no want of faithful and devoted servitors among themselves. Then Jeannin, Sire, and Sillery are obnoxious to them; and they trust, with your good help, to be ere long freed from all these incubi."

"Luynes," said Louis in a tone of weariness, "I hate to hear you talk upon such subjects. I have more than enough of them from others. Is De Guise recovering from his wound? for he must also have suffered in the fray, or the Queen-mother would not have sought tidings of him."

"Fear not for him, Sire," said the favourite; "he will be quite able to keep the saddle when M. de Condé heads an army to snatch the crown of our fair France from your own brow."

"Stay, sir!" exclaimed the young King with sudden dignity. "Have *you* also forgotten that I am the son of Henri IV?"

"May your Majesty never forget it more than I do," said De Luynes, with an audacity before which the eye of Louis sank; "but believe me that the fact will avail you little until you have purged the nation of the foreign fungus which is corroding the root of your authority."

"Albert," murmured the weak young monarch, "in the name of Heaven, what would you ask?"

"To see you in reality the King of France, Sire."

"And for this purpose—"

Marie de Medicis

"You must appease the Princes. They are weary of the despotic rule of the Queen-mother and of the influence of these Florentines."

"I dare not urge the Queen to banish them."

"Nor should you, Sire. It is for subjects to solicit, and for sovereigns to command. There is, moreover, a safer cure than exile for such an evil."

"Nay, now, De Luynes, you jest," said Louis, striving to force a sickly smile; "you surely would not counsel—"

"Your Majesty mistakes me," interposed the favourite; "I would dare anything to secure your safety. Justice holds her sword as firmly as her balance, and wields the one as freely as she weighs the other."

"Enough, enough," gasped out Louis; "we will talk of this again—but blood, blood, always blood! It is sickening. You will attend me to Fontainebleau, Albert; I must have some sport to-day, and endeavour to forget for a time all your moody arguments."

De Luynes bowed low as he glanced significantly towards Roger, the favourite valet of the King, who replied to the meaning look by an almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders as he adjusted the mantle of his royal master.

"Go, Monsieur le Grand Fauconnier," pursued the King, "and see that all is prepared. I will follow on the instant."

Ten minutes subsequently the Court of the Louvre was thronged with courtiers, equipages, and led horses; and within a quarter of an hour the voice of the usher was heard at the foot of the great staircase announcing "The King." Then Louis himself appeared, and taking his place in the coach which was awaiting him, he motioned De Luynes to his side, gave the signal of departure, and left the palace at a rapid pace. The royal suite mounted in haste; and ere long nobles, pages, and equerries had disappeared, and all was once more silent beneath the deep shadows of the regal pile.

It is evident that, crafty as Bassompierre had shown himself when conversing with M. de Condé on the subject of the extraordinary changes which had taken place at Court, he was nevertheless suspected by the Prince of having contributed to effect them, as a short time subsequently a banquet was given at the Hôtel de Condé, to which every nobleman in office was invited save the handsome and popular Gentleman of the Bedchamber, who was generally one of the most coveted guests at entertainments of that description; but the exclusion, marked as it was, failed to cause any mortification to Bassompierre, who had no sooner communicated the circumstance to the Regent than she commanded his attendance in her private *salon*, where he passed the afternoon at cards with herself and her ladies.

Concini, finding that the Queen did not relax in her coldness towards himself and his wife, withdrew in great displeasure to Amiens; and at the same period Marie discovered that, despite his promise to the contrary, the Duc de Vendôme had joined the faction of Condé, and that they were conjointly endeavouring to win back M. de Guise. Alarmed by this new cabal, and made aware that the latter had betrayed symptoms of irresolution which augured ill for his adhesion to her cause, she lost no time in reminding him of the pledges which he had given, and in entreating him not to abandon her interests. The Duke, flattered by the importance that the Queen-mother attached to his allegiance, readily promised all she wished; and she had reason to congratulate herself upon her promptitude, as only a few days subsequently M. de Vendôme and Concini arrived at Fontainebleau, where the Court had recently established its residence, when the former hastened to take leave of their Majesties previously to his departure for Brittany, where he was about to preside over the Assembly of the States, and the latter on the pretext of bearing him company; but in reality to induce Zamet, who possessed considerable authority in the palace, to assign rooms to them in that portion of the building occupied by the Duc de Guise.

Such an arrangement could not, however, be effected without reaching the ears of the Regent, whose suspicions of their motive were immediately excited; and she desired Bassompierre not to lose sight of M. de Guise until he had retired to rest, and to prevent his holding any communication with the Duc de Vendôme. Resolved, moreover, to ascertain the correctness of those suspicions, she directed M. de Senneterre to watch throughout the night upon the staircase of the Duc de Guise; a vigilance which was rewarded by his discovery of the two nobles, who, shortly after Bassompierre had withdrawn, paid a visit to the Duke which lasted upwards of two hours. The astonishment of the Regent was consequently by no means great when M. de Guise in his turn waited upon her Majesty to take leave, upon the pretext that he had been chosen by Madame d'Elboeuf, conjointly with the Duc de Mayenne, as her arbitrator in a reconciliation which was about to be attempted between herself and Madame de la Trémouille, who had on her side selected the Prince de Condé and the Maréchal de Bouillon. Marie, however, refused to consent to his departure, and informed him that she would despatch Bassompierre as his substitute; an arrangement with which he was compelled to comply, but which greatly embarrassed his friends.

Meanwhile the anger of the Queen against Concini had been seriously increased by this new instance of ingratitude; and even the pleadings of his wife, who had been restored to favour, failed to appease her displeasure. In imparting her commands to Bassompierre, Marie had inveighed bitterly against the attitude assumed by a man who owed everything to her indulgence; and as her listener endeavoured to excuse him, she said vehemently:—

"Urge nothing in his behalf. He has thought proper to judge for himself, and to join a cabal which he knows to be opposed to my authority. Tell him from me that if he does not return here by Thursday evening, I will teach him in future to obey me; and that had it not been from consideration for his wife, I should already have provided him with a lodging which he would have found it difficult to quit. Leonora is indignant at his conduct; while he continues to act more disgracefully from day to day. Inform him that he will do well not to neglect my orders."

The arrogant Italian was, however, by no means inclined to obedience; nor was it without considerable difficulty that Bassompierre succeeded in impressing upon him the extent of the danger to which he exposed himself by the line of conduct he had so recklessly adopted, and in ultimately effecting his reconciliation with his justly offended mistress.

This was no sooner accomplished than the ministers, who thenceforward despaired of ever permanently counterbalancing the influence of Concini and his wife, determined, if possible, to unite their interests to his; and for this purpose the President Jeannin, who had maintained a better understanding with the Marquis than any of his colleagues, proposed to the Queen that an effort should be made to reconcile the Chancellor and Villeroy with her favourite, a suggestion which she eagerly adopted, being anxious to strengthen her own party by weakening that of the Princes. She had been apprised that the Maréchal de Bouillon, who was indignant that he could not attain to the degree of power which he had anticipated under a regency, was perseveringly employed in endeavouring to detach the Duc de Guise from her interests, and to fortify the cabal of the Prince de Condé, in order to render his own allegiance indispensable to the Crown; and she consequently welcomed any method of circumventing a conspiracy which was becoming formidable. It was therefore determined that a marriage should be proposed between the daughter of Concini and the Marquis de Villeroy, the grandson of the Secretary of State; and this overture was accompanied by the most lavish promises on the part of the ministers that they would serve him by every means in their power, and exert all their energies to advance his fortunes.

This negotiation, which was undertaken without the knowledge of Bassompierre, had nearly proved fatal to his prospects; as both parties, dreading his influence with the Regent, determined to undermine him in her regard; and for this purpose they so wilfully misrepresented his actions, and contrived to invest them with so suspicious an appearance, that Marie, who had begun to misdoubt every one about her, treated him with a harshness

Marie de Medicis

which his proud spirit could not brook; and he accordingly made preparations for quitting the Court of France, with the intention of entering the service of some foreign Prince.

His design was no sooner ascertained, however, than his friends, particularly the Duc de Guise and the Princesse de Conti, hastened to represent to the Queen the impolicy of forfeiting the friendship and assistance of one who had so faithfully espoused her cause; and their representations prevailed. Bassompierre was permitted to justify himself, and Marie frankly admitted her conviction that she had been misled by his enemies.

In addition to these intestine intrigues, the Regent was occupied with the troubles generated by the disputed succession of the duchy of Mantua, regarding which she was reluctant to come to any resolution without securing the advice of the Princes and great nobles; upon which she was, moreover, the more anxious to insist, as it would afford an opportunity of summoning to the capital not only M. de Condé himself, but all the other leaders of the adverse faction; who had, as we have shown, withdrawn from the Court, and were exasperated by the reconciliation of the Regent with the Ducs de Guise and d'Epernon, and the recall of the ministers. The Council accordingly met; and as the Cardinal-Duke of Mantua was a near relative of the Queen, it was decided that France should support him in his pretensions against the Duke of Savoy. An army was consequently organized, which was to march on Monferrat from three several points: one division under the Maréchal de Lesdiguières, a second under the Duc de Guise, and the third under the Grand Equerry M. de Bellegarde. The troops were not, however, destined on this occasion to cross the frontier, the friends of the Duke of Savoy having soon succeeded in convincing Marie de Medicis of the danger of investing three great nobles with the command of an armed force of such importance during the minority of the sovereign; while Ubaldini, the Papal Nuncio, jealous of the presence of the French soldiery in Italy, and apprehensive that Lesdiguières would be accompanied by a large number of Huguenots, was equally strenuous in dissuading her from her purpose; assuring her that the King of Spain had resolved to oppose the Duke of Savoy, and to compel him to restore to the House of Mantua the territories which had been wrested from it in Monferrat. The Duke of Savoy himself, moreover, alarmed at the demonstration about to be made by France, and conscious that he was unable to compete with such an adversary, resolved to open a negotiation; upon which the Marquis de Coeuvres was despatched to Italy to arrange the terms of the treaty.

While the whole of the other European Princes were occupied with the succession in Mantua, James of England was engrossed by his anxiety to divert the minds of his subjects from the grief which was universally felt at the untimely death of his eldest son; and so little did he himself feel the bereavement that he entered with apparent enjoyment into every kind of entertainment which presented itself. The unfortunate Prince had expired on the 6th of November; and as his demise threatened to prevent that close alliance with France which he had so eagerly anticipated, James caused its announcement to the Regent to be accompanied by an offer of the hand of his other son, Charles, who had thus become Prince of Wales, to the Princesse Christine; a proposal which reached the French Court only three days subsequently to the decease of Henry, and which consequently created considerable surprise. Marie de Medicis, however, felt no inclination to quarrel with this indecent haste, as she trusted that by giving her daughter to the son of a Protestant sovereign, she should conciliate the Huguenots, whom she had greatly alienated by concluding the double alliance with Spain; but the Sovereign-Pontiff was no sooner apprised of the offer of James, and of the gracious reception afforded to it by the Regent, than he expressed his extreme displeasure, and refused to listen to any arguments, declaring that no question of state policy should sanction a contract the observance of which must prove detrimental to the interests of the Church. Ubaldini, the Papal Nuncio at the French Court, seconded these remonstrances with more zeal than judgment; and at length proceeded so far as to reproach the Queen with the ill return which she was about to make to God for the blessings He had vouchsafed to her. The haughty spirit of Marie de Medicis could brook no more; and her reply is worthy of record. "Monseigneur," she said with dignity, "I do nothing more upon this occasion than several Princes of Italy have done before me, and that too under the very eyes of the Pope. The Grand Duchess of Tuscany, with all her

Marie de Medicis

devotion, did not refuse her consent when she was formerly asked to give the hand of her daughter to the Prince of Wales."

Thus the proposal was accepted, and the heir to the British throne was thenceforward considered as the future husband of the young Princess.

At this period the death of M. de Fervaques left a marshal's *bâton* disposable, which, to the extreme disgust of the nobility, was bestowed by the Regent upon Concini, who had never throughout his life been present at the firing of a hostile shot. The ill-judged manner in which this dignity was conferred is so characteristic that it merits mention. Her temporary estrangement from Madame d'Ancre had been a source of great discomfort as well as sorrow to the Queen; and her ladies, hoping still further to disgust her with the favourite, had unwittingly compelled her to feel her dependence upon the disgraced mistress of the robes. To every petty requirement she was answered that it was not within their province, and that reference must be made to the Marquise.

"I desire to have the entrance to my closet draped by a screen of crimson velvet edged with gold," said the Regent on one occasion to Madame de Guercheville; "be good enough to have it done immediately."

"Your Majesty has probably overlooked the fact that such orders must be issued by the Marquise d'Ancre," was the formal reply of the stately lady of honour.

"Madame du Fargis," resumed the Queen, a short time afterwards, "I have mislaid a letter—a petition—bearing the name of the Comtesse de Touraine; I wish it to be found and answered."

"Madame," responded the beautiful Countess meekly, "the Marquise d'Ancre has charge of all the petitions addressed to your Majesty."

Marie de Medicis turned away in silence. She had striven to believe that she could dispense with the services of Leonora; but every day, and almost every hour, she became more convinced of her utter helplessness without her. Madame d'Ancre had been the playmate of her infancy, the friend of her girlhood; she was the confidante of her most hidden thoughts, her counsellor in difficulty, and her consoler in her moments of trial. The ill-advised bearing of those about her sufficed to remind her of these facts, and her resolution was forthwith formed. Concini might still be made to feel and to suffer for his fault, but she could not dispense with the society and support of Leonora.

The Queen retired to her private closet, and the mistress of the robes was summoned to her presence by a page. As she entered, Marie was startled by the change which had taken place in her appearance; her eyes were swollen with weeping, and her cheek was even more sallow than its wont. Whatever might be her faults, there can be no doubt that Leonora was deeply and tenderly attached to her royal foster-sister; and that the disgrace into which she had fallen had consequently affected her to an intense degree. She was no longer the proud and imperious favourite who through the Regent sought to govern France, but a weak and sorrowing woman, mourning over the ruin of all her hopes.

The apartment to which the Queen-mother had so unexpectedly summoned her foster-sister was, as we have said, her private closet, in which she passed several hours each day while residing at the Louvre. The walls were covered to the height of ten feet from the floor by magnificent hangings of crimson damask, surmounted by a dome of pale blue silk, upon which were elaborately embroidered the arms of the Medici. From the centre of this dome hung a silver lamp, chiselled by the hand of Benvenuto Cellini, and suspended by a chain of the same metal; a table of carved oak stood in the centre of the room, upon which were placed a pair of globes, sundry astronomical instruments, an illuminated missal, and a flask of Hungary water; while a low divan, heaped with cushions of black velvet sprinkled with *fleurs-de-lis* in gold, occupied two entire sides of the apartment, and completed its furniture.

"Approach, Leonora," said the Queen. "Here, place yourself on this cushion at my feet, and wipe the tears from your eyes. Even if we part, we may do so without bitterness."

Marie de Medicis

"Ha, Madame!" exclaimed the Florentine, "should such a feeling indeed exist it can be only in the bosom of your Majesty, for no true subject can do otherwise than love and venerate her sovereign."

"Would that it were so," said Marie; "but that is a delusion under which I have long ceased to labour; for too often where I have sought to excite affection I have only engendered hatred."

"I know not if your Majesty would address that reproach to me," said Madame d'Ancre, raising her drooping head with the sudden energy of honest pride; "but should it really be so, I can summon the past to vindicate my good faith. I can call upon the Queen-Regent of France herself to do me justice; I can invoke the two years of that regency, so full of trial, of struggle, and of calamity, during which I have at times perilled my head to ensure alike the tranquillity and the triumph of my august mistress; I can quote the several cabals which I have helped to crush; and, above all, I can prove the fidelity and submission with which I have constantly obeyed the behests of my sovereign lady. All this is, however, worse than idle; the servant only sins the more in every attempt at self-justification. Monarchs are accustomed from their cradles to punish upon suspicion, however strong may be the evidences of the past. Gratitude, as the term is understood between man and man, never drapes itself in purple; perfect confidence cannot steady its foot upon the steps of a throne, for the royal canopy is a heaven of impunity for those whom it overshadows. Yet think not, Madame," she continued, in a more subdued voice, as she clasped her thin fingers together so forcibly that they became ashy white beneath the pressure—"think not, I beseech you, that I say this of myself. I have no such presumption. I have not forgotten what I was, in feeling what I am. I yet remember, deeply, thankfully, that I was poor, obscure, and insignificant, and that it was your royal hand which raised me to rank and honour; and thus it is with the most fervent gratitude that I now thank you for your past bounties; and with the utmost humility that I prepare to take my leave of you for ever."

Marie did not reply; the outburst of outraged feeling in which the Marquise had indulged was so unexpected and so bold that she remained speechless, and the tears which had risen to her eyes on the entrance of her foster-sister congealed upon their lids. Leonora awaited for an instant some token of relenting in her royal mistress, but as the threatening silence continued, she became alarmed, and casting herself upon her knees, she gasped out falteringly, "I am at your feet, Madame; I kneel before you, wretched and repentant; I am here to bid you farewell—a life-long farewell. Pardon, and forget me."

The heart of Marie was moved; and as her favourite knelt before her she pressed her to her bosom, and bade her be of good cheer, for that all was forgiven. Leonora, unprepared for such an admission, wept abundantly; and it was long ere she could recover her composure, while the Queen on her side was scarcely less distressed.

"I cannot part from you, *mia cara, mia dolce*" pursued Marie passionately; "you are my good angel, the friend and sister of my happy years—for we were happy then, *Leonora mia*, before a crown and a court came between us. You have said truly that you have been my guardian spirit, and we do not part with our best security in the hour of peril. No, Leonora, no; I will listen no more to the evil accusations of those who would fain separate us. You shall not quit the Louvre."

Madame d'Ancre pressed her hand forcibly upon her heart as if to control its tumultuous throbbings; and then, fixing her large dark eyes earnestly upon those of her royal mistress, she said in a low deep accent of earnest emotion, "And thus you love me still—you, the proud daughter of the Medici, the wife and the mother of kings—you love me still, and I have not lived in vain! Did you hear those words, Countess?" she asked, suddenly springing to her feet, and addressing Madame du Fargis, who was standing in the recess of one of the tall windows, with the tears falling fast over her fair cheeks; "the Regent will not suffer me to leave France—the Regent will not allow me to wither away my life an alien from her presence. Now I am once more calm and strong—calm in the security of my happiness, strong in the

Marie de Medicis

consciousness of my honesty. Let them accuse me now, I defy their malice, for my royal mistress believes in me, and loves me."

"Compose yourself, Leonora," said the Queen-mother affectionately; "your feeble frame is unequal to these bursts of passion. Come hither, child, and pillow your aching head upon my knees, as you were wont to do long, long ago, when we sang together the beloved songs of our fair Florence, or indulged in day-dreams which were never destined to be realized. Let Madame de Conti beware in her turn: higher heads than hers have been brought low; and from this day I will teach a bitter lesson to her and to her kinsmen. I have borne much, but I am still a Medicis; I can be as firm as Catherine, although I shall endeavour to act with greater justice, and to be in all things worthy of the name I bear."

"Ha, Madame!" exclaimed the favourite, "you have already proved that however others may endeavour to forget that you are the widow of Henry the Great the fact is ever present to yourself." And as she spoke, Leonora buried her face in the lap of her royal foster-sister, while her long black hair, which had become unfastened by the energy of her movements, fell to the floor and covered her like a pall.

Little did either the Queen or the Marquise at that moment anticipate how soon a deeper and a denser pall would replace those luxuriant and gleaming tresses! Happy was it for both that no prophetic glance into the future darkened the joy of that bright hour of reconciliation!

Meanwhile the Princesse de Conti, who dreaded the effect of this same reconciliation upon herself and her family, privately despatched a messenger to the Prince de Condé to inform him that Madame d'Ancre was at that very time closeted with the Regent, and that he must forthwith devise some method of terminating so dangerous a conference. M. de Condé was for a moment aghast; and on reflection could adopt no better expedient than that of prevailing upon M. de Brèves, the governor of the Duc d'Orléans, to suggest to the young Prince that he should proceed to the apartments of his royal mother, in order to pay his respects to her Majesty. Monsieur obeyed; and Leonora was still seated on a cushion at the feet of her foster-sister, with her pale face pillowed upon her knees, when Madame de Conti threw open the door of the royal closet, and announced the Prince.

"Let Monseigneur await my pleasure without," exclaimed Marie angrily. "I understand the motive of this breach of etiquette, and shall reward it as it deserves. *Leonora cara*" she added, as the drapery again closed over the portal, "dry your tears; I owe you some recompense for all that you have suffered, and I will not be tardy in my requital."

At this instant some one scratched upon the door of the royal closet.

"Again!" cried the Queen indignantly. "See who waits, Madame du Fargis."

The Countess proceeded to draw aside the tapestry. "Madame," she said, as she retired a pace or two with a profound curtsy, "his Majesty the King."

"Ha!" exclaimed the Regent, starting from her seat, and advancing towards the young sovereign, whom she tenderly embraced, "your visit could not have been more welcome or better-timed, my son. The death of M. de Fervaques has created a vacancy which must be at once filled, and I have a marshal's commission for you to sign."

The wife of Concini gazed eagerly into the face of her royal mistress. Marie smiled. "Go, Madame," she said affectionately, "and bid the Marquis d'Ancre hasten here upon the instant to kiss the gracious hand from which he is about to receive a marshal's *bâton*."

Leonora knelt before the startled King, who suffered her in silence to perform the same ceremony; and then radiant with happiness she pressed the jewelled fingers of the Queen to her quivering lips. "And hark you, Leonora," pursued Marie, "cause Concini to be announced by his new title when he seeks admission here. This will at once put an end to a host of rivalries which are now unavailing."

Marie de Medicis

Madame d'Ancre hastily withdrew; but as she passed through the apartments of the Queen she remarked that the antechamber was already thronged with a crowd of courtiers, who had been attracted thither by curiosity; while they, in their turn, did not fail to detect in the flushed cheek and flashing eye of the Marquise the indications of some new triumph. Little, however, were they prepared for its extent; and when Concini, some minutes afterwards, appeared, with a sarcastic smile upon his lips, and glanced a look of defiance around him, even while he bowed right and left alike to his friends and to his enemies, every pulse quickened with anxiety. The suspense was but momentary. The Italian was preceded by one of the royal pages, who, as the captain of the guard flung back the door of the cabinet in which Louis XIII was still closeted with his mother, announced in a voice so audible that it was heard throughout the apartment, "Monseigneur le Maréchal d'Ancre."

"Concini a Marshal of France!" exclaimed simultaneously the Ducs de Guise, d'Epernon, and de Bellegarde, who were standing together; and then there was a dead silence as the draperied door closed upon the exulting favourite.

CHAPTER VI

1614

The commencement of the year 1614 was productive of new anxieties to the Queen-Regent. The Maréchal de Bouillon, whose restless ambition was ever prompting him to some new enterprise, had warily, but not the less surely, possessed himself of the confidence of the Princes and the other disaffected nobles, and had succeeded in aggravating their feelings against the Court party to such an extent that he experienced little difficulty in inducing them to abandon the capital and to retire to their several governments. M. de Condé had never forgiven the refusal of Marie to bestow upon him the command of the citadel of Château Trompette, or the recall of the ministers; and he also deeply resented the desertion of the Maréchal d'Ancre from his interests, as well as the wealth and honours to which he had attained; while the Ducs de Nevers, de Mayenne, de Vendôme, de Longueville, and de Piney-Luxembourg, together with a host of others, considered themselves aggrieved by their exclusion from power, and were consequently ready to espouse his cause. Thus Bouillon found it easy to induce them to retire simultaneously from the Court; and it was agreed that they should assemble in Champagne, and collectively demand a reform in the Government.

Accordingly the Prince de Condé took his leave of their Majesties on the 6th of January, and retired for a time to Châteauroux, whence he afterwards proceeded to Mézières. This example was shortly followed by the other chiefs of his faction. The Duc de Nevers retired at once to Champagne, the Duc de Mayenne to the Isle of France, and M. de Longueville to Picardy. In February the Duc de Vendôme prepared in his turn to join his friends; but as their purpose had by this time become apparent to the Regent, she caused him to be confined in an apartment of the Louvre; whence, however, he succeeded a short time afterwards in escaping by a door that had long been unused, and which being covered by the tapestried hanging of the chamber had been at length forgotten.

The Maréchal de Bouillon, however, upon whom the cabal mainly relied, as his sovereignty of Sedan gave them the assurance of a secure retreat should they be menaced with reprisals, made no haste to imitate his dupes. He had been far too crafty to compromise himself beyond redemption with a party which might ultimately fail; and he had consequently calculated with great care the probable chances of furthering his own fortunes. After the departure of the Princes he formed his decision; and his first act was to wait upon the ministers, and to reveal to them the intentions of M. de Condé and his adherents; a communication which excited more annoyance than surprise in those to whom it was addressed. He then proceeded to the Louvre, where he repeated to the Regent what he had previously declared to her ministers; and although he tempered his information with assurances of the respect and attachment of the self-exiled Princes towards her person, Marie considered the mere fact of such a coalition so dangerous, that even when Bouillon volunteered to exert all his influence to induce them to abandon their design, and to return to the capital, although she accepted his offer, and permitted him to follow them ostensibly for that purpose, she was far from feeling reassured; and she soon had reason to discover that her fears were only too well-grounded; as the Duke, after an elaborate leave-taking at the palace, publicly declared that he was about to proceed to Sedan in order to avoid arrest.

This fact, coupled with the escape of M. de Vendôme, who lost no time in reaching Brittany, where he was joined by the Duc de Retz with an armed force, and took the town of Lamballe, sufficed to convince Marie that no faith must be placed in the professions of Bouillon; and she accordingly forwarded orders to all the governors of the royal fortresses to forbid the entrance of the Duc de Vendôme within their walls, and commanded the Parliament

to issue an edict for the suppression of levies of troops throughout Provence. This done, she next despatched the Duc de Ventadour to Châteauroux with letters of recall to M. de Condé; but before his arrival the Prince had left that city for Mézières; and as the letters, which were forwarded to him, remained unanswered, the royal envoy was compelled to return to the capital without accomplishing his mission.

The next intelligence which reached the capital was the seizure of the citadel of Mézières by the Duc de Nevers; and as matters daily assumed a more serious aspect, the Queen resolved to recall M. d'Epéron from Metz, whither he had withdrawn a few months previously, and to conciliate him by reviving in the person of his son M. de Candale the nominal office of First Lord of the Bedchamber, which he had himself held under Henri III; while, at the same time, she held out to the Duc de Guise the prospect of commanding the armies of the King, should it be found expedient to march against the Prince de Condé.

These precautions were, however, far from sufficient to tranquillize the mind of Marie de Medicis, who began to apprehend a renewal of the intestine calamities which had overwhelmed the nation during the preceding reigns; and satisfied that despite all her efforts at conciliation she was personally obnoxious to the Princes, she expressed her determination to resign the regency. Nor did either Concini or his wife, although their own fortunes were involved in her retirement, venture to dissuade her from her purpose, the threats of the disaffected nobles against themselves having convinced them that they had little mercy to expect at their hands should they still further urge the Queen to aggressive measures. From this hasty resolution Marie was, however, with some difficulty, dissuaded by her Council, who represented to her the dangerous position in which she could not fail to place the young King; who, utterly unaccustomed to public business, must prove incompetent to maintain his interests at so perilous a crisis as that which now excited her own fears.

The Regent readily admitted the validity of this argument; but in support of her purpose she informed them that she had just been apprised of a rumour which had spread in Brittany since the Duc de Vendôme had retired from the Court, by which she was accused of having attempted to poison the King in order to lengthen her own period of power; and with pardonable indignation she declared that she possessed no other means of refuting so horrible a calumny than that which she had adopted, and that she consequently owed this justice to herself. As she was, however, still entreated to sacrifice her own feelings to the safety of the sovereign and the welfare of the kingdom, she at length yielded; but that she made the concession with reluctance was sufficiently evident.

"As regards the horrible crime imputed to me, Messieurs," she said, "I can only swear that I would rather suffer death than continue to live on under such an accusation. I am well aware, moreover, that this is not the only calumny which has been circulated against my person and reputation; nor is it the first time that the Maréchal d'Ancre has been designated as the instigator of my unpopular measures; every new cabal inventing some fallacy to undermine my authority and to throw discredit upon my government. Since, however, you give it as your opinion that I shall better serve the King by retaining the regency until he shall be of fitting age to act upon his own responsibility, I will continue to exercise the power delegated to me by my late lord and husband; and to maintain that good understanding with my son which has ever hitherto existed between us."

The question was then discussed of whether it were more desirable to levy such troops as still remained faithful to the Crown, and at once endeavour to reduce the faction of the Princes by force, or to attempt a reconciliation by pacific means. The Cardinal de Joyeuse, Villeroy, and Jeannin were urgent that the former measure should be adopted; assigning as their reason that after the tergiversation and deceit of which the cabal had been convicted, they would profit by any delay on the part of the Government to strengthen their army, and to effect other means of defence, thus augmenting the difficulty of their suppression; the Chancellor was, however, of a different opinion, and counselled the Queen to avert, so long as it might be possible to do so, the horrors of a civil war. He represented to her the fact that all the principal nobles, with scarcely one exception, had leagued themselves with M. de Condé, while she had

on her side only the Ducs de Guise and d'Epernon, who were, moreover, at variance; each coveting the dignity of Connétable, and scarcely seeking to disguise his jealousy of the other; and finally, he pointed out to her the dangerous attitude assumed by the Huguenots, who would not fail to take advantage of any civil dissension to advance their pretensions, which could only be done successfully during the minority of the sovereign.

Between these conflicting opinions Marie at length resolved to steer a middle course; and she consequently declared her intention of attempting by negotiation to reconcile the Princes, while at the same time she made a levy of six thousand Swiss troops. She, moreover, by the advice of her Council, addressed a circular-letter to all the Parliaments of the kingdom, governors of provinces and fortresses, and mayors of towns, exhorting them to remain faithful to the Crown, and not to suffer themselves to be seduced by the Prince de Condé and his partisans; and terminating by the declaration that her Majesty had determined to convoke the States, in order to consult upon the measures necessary for ensuring the welfare and prosperity of the nation.

Meanwhile M. de Condé had assembled the leaders of his party at Mézières, whence he forwarded a species of manifesto to the Queen-Regent, in which he complained in the name of his faction of "the waste of the public money; of the unworthiness of the individuals in power; of the undue authority assumed by the ministers; of the want of respect displayed towards the Princes of the Blood, the peers, and the officers of the Crown; of the obstacles endured by the Parliaments in the exercise of their jurisdiction; of the ruin of the great nobles; the excessive charges of the law courts; the oppression suffered by the people; the neglect exhibited in assembling the States-General; and the precipitation shown in concluding the marriage of the sovereign before he had attained his majority." Other objections followed, and then succeeded the conditions upon which the cabal declared themselves willing to return to their allegiance. The States-General were to be convened within three months; the royal marriages were to be deferred until the close of the Assembly; and the then-existing household of his Majesty was to be replaced by individuals of acknowledged probity.

The Prince at the same time wrote to the two Parliaments, to the Prince de Conti, to the dukes and peers, and to the great officers of the Crown, soliciting their assistance in the work of reform which he was about to undertake. Neither of the Parliaments, however, replied to his letter; and that addressed to Paris was placed unopened in the hands of the Regent, who forthwith forwarded it to the Chancellor.

The answer of Marie de Medicis to the manifesto addressed to herself was calm and dignified. She declared her willingness to assemble the States-General; but accompanied this concession by expressing her regret that the Prince should not, during the last four years, have personally made the representation, and assisted her in averting the evils of which he now complained, instead of absenting himself from the Court on the pretext of disapproving the proposed alliance with Spain, to which he had previously affixed his consent and signature. To each of his other objections he received an equally categorical reply; and the document terminated by an expression of her conviction that his offer to effect a reform in the state by pacific means rather than have recourse to force was desirable indeed, but little to be anticipated, since the formation of a cabal like that of which he had constituted himself the leader, and which was opposed to the legitimate authority of the sovereign, could only terminate in intestine broils, and compel the King to adopt the most violent measures in order to suppress it.

Precisely at this period intelligence reached the Court of the death of the veteran Connétable de Montmorency, one of the most gallant soldiers of his day, whose judgment and strong sense had long been proverbial, although he was utterly without education, and could scarcely sign his own name.

While the negotiation with Condé was still pending, a new anxiety added to the embarrassment of the Regent. The Swiss levies were about to be raised; but suspicions of the loyalty of the Duc de Rohan, who was colonel-general of this force, rendered her unwilling to confide so important a body of troops to his control; and she ultimately resolved to offer him a

sum of money, and to induce him to resign his appointment. M. de Rohan readily acceded to the proposal, his position at that moment rendering him indifferent to its possession; and the Queen next sought to find an individual whose popularity with the Switzers, and devotion to her own interests, might render him an eligible successor to the displaced Duke. After considerable reflection she selected Bassompierre; but the suggestion was at once negatived by M. de Villeroy, who reminded her Majesty that the office was one which had never been filled by any person under the rank of a prince. So brilliant a prospect, however, gave the favoured courtier courage to plead his cause so successfully with his royal mistress, that she was at length induced to consent that, if he were enabled to persuade the Swiss themselves to solicit his appointment, the difficulty should be overcome. Fortunately for the aspirant the officer to whom the levies were entrusted was his personal friend, and so zealously did he advocate his cause that the Thirteen Cantons united in consenting to receive him as their leader; and Bassompierre, although only a petty noble of Lorraine, found himself invested with a command which was coveted by all the proudest subjects of France.

Two days subsequently the Court were informed that the Prince de Condé and the Duc de Nevers had taken Mézières and Sainte-Menehould, upon which the newly-raised troops received orders to join M. de Praslin, who, with the remainder of the army, was concentrating his forces at Vitry. Their arrival so alarmed the insurgent party that they resolved to evacuate the latter city, and demanded that even should the troops remain in their vicinity, Bassompierre himself, who, from the share that he had taken in the affair throughout, was peculiarly obnoxious to them, should be recalled. The Duc de Ventadour and the President Jeannin, through whom M. de Condé and his party carried on their negotiation with the King, accordingly wrote to the young commander to apprise him that the Regent required his services in the capital, for reasons which she would explain on his arrival; and, greatly to his mortification, Bassompierre found himself compelled to retrace his steps.

Once more Marie de Medicis resolved to afford to the adverse faction the opportunity of terminating their ill-advised struggle without bloodshed; and she accordingly despatched a trustworthy messenger to M. de Condé, volunteering to send deputies who should be authorized to effect a reconciliation. The offer was accepted, the malcontents having become paralyzed by the unexpected energy of their opponents; and after sundry meetings between the agents of the Government and the chiefs of the cabal, in which each made particular conditions for himself which were veiled by three demands of a more public nature, a treaty of peace was drawn up and signed by both parties, and amity was once more restored. Situated as they were, the Princes had been careful not to insist on more than they were aware would be readily conceded; and thus they asked only that the States-General should be convoked with as little delay as possible, that the double alliance with Spain should be delayed until the termination of the King's minority, and that the royal troops should be immediately disarmed.

To this last requisition the reply of the commissioners of the Crown was positive; the rebel faction were in the first place to lay down their own arms after which they pledged themselves that their example should be followed by the troops of the sovereign; and to this arrangement M. de Condé, after some hesitation, agreed.

Thus far all had progressed favourably; but the subsequent exactions of the disaffected party caused considerable anxiety in the Council of the Regent. The exorbitant pretensions of its leaders alarmed the ministers, but the crisis was sufficiently critical to induce them ultimately to satisfy the demands of their dearly-purchased allies. The Prince de Condé was invested with the government of Amboise, and received four hundred and fifty thousand livres in ready money. The Duc de Mayenne three hundred thousand, and the survivorship of the government of Paris; and all the other chiefs of the cabal the sums or governments that they had seen fit to exact; after which they ceased to insist upon the public grievances, and the Ducs de Longueville and de Mayenne returned to Court; an example which was followed by the Prince de Condé as soon as he had taken possession of his new government. The coldness with which he was received, however, and the little desire evinced to pay him that deference which he was ever anxious to exact, soon disgusted him with the capital, and he once more withdrew, little less disaffected than before.

Marie de Medicis

On the 5th of June the Duc d'Anjou and the younger Princess were baptized at the Louvre with great ceremony, by the Cardinal de Bonzy, the almoner of the Queen. The sponsors of the Prince, who received the names of Gaston Jean Baptiste, were the ex-Queen Marguerite and the Cardinal de Joyeuse; while those given to his sister, who was held at the font by Madame and the Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld, were Henriette Marie; this being the Princess who subsequently became the wife of the unhappy Charles I. of England.

The completion of the treaty with the Princes had restored the nation to apparent tranquillity, and the government of the Regent bore a semblance of stability to which it had not previously attained, when new troubles broke out through the restlessness and jealousy of César de Vendôme; who, having merely been reinstated in his government and other dignities, considered himself to have been ill-treated by the Prince de Condé, to whose care he had confided his interests, and who consequently resolved to enforce more ample justice for himself. With a view of effecting his purpose, he induced the Duc de Retz, who was equally dissatisfied, to follow his example, and Brittany soon became ripe for revolt. As, however, Vendôme did not fail to perceive that without extending his faction he could not hope to make head successfully against the Court, he next endeavoured to engage M. de Rohan and the Protestants in his interest, believing the Duke to be much more powerful with the reformed party than he really was; and Rohan so far yielded as to attempt a convocation of the General Assembly in Gascony; but the prudence of Du Plessis-Mornay, who represented to the Huguenots the impolicy of embroiling themselves with the Government in order to gratify the ambition of an individual, decided them to refuse all participation in a political movement of that nature.

Repulsed but not discouraged, Vendôme still persevered, and as his intrigues tended to unsettle the minds of the people, and to harass the Regent, she resolved to despatch the Marquis de Coeuvres, then recently returned from his embassy in Italy, to expostulate with him, and endeavour to recall him to reason. This mission was peculiarly distasteful to the Marquis, who, being nearly connected with M. de Vendôme through his mother (Gabrielle d'Estrées), was fearful, should he fail to effect his purpose, that he must offend one or the other party; but as the commands of the Queen-mother were stringent, he was compelled to obey. His task proved an arduous one, the two Dukes warmly asserting their right to share in the benefits which M. de Condé had secured for himself and his immediate friends, and declaring their intention to obtain by force what they had been denied by the ingratitude of the Crown: nor was it until the envoy had been a second time instructed to assure them that should they persist in their disloyalty the King was prepared to march an army against them, that they were at length induced to sign a treaty which had been drawn up for that purpose, and to lay down their arms.

This desirable result had scarcely been accomplished when the Prince de Condé, disappointed by his government of Amboise (which he soon discovered to be of much less importance than he had imagined when he insisted upon its possession), resolved to make himself master of the city of Poitiers, where he had secured many and active allies, among whom the most considerable was the Due de Roannois, the governor; while in addition to this advantage he had also received from the Marquis de Bonnivet a promise that he would furnish a body of troops to assist him in his enterprise. The city was about to elect a mayor, and the friends of Condé had exerted themselves to the utmost to cause the choice of the citizens to fall upon an individual of their own party, but their design was penetrated by the Bishop, who hastened to apprise the Regent of the cabal which had once more been commenced against her authority.

The communication of the prelate renewed all the apprehensions of Marie, who, after expressing her acknowledgments for his zeal, commanded him to adopt every means in his power to contravene the endeavours of the Prince and his adherents; and so ably did he fulfil her directions that he succeeded in winning over to the royal cause the greater number of the inhabitants; which he had no sooner accomplished than he caused the guards to be doubled, and thus rendered himself more powerful in the city than M. de Roannois himself. This fact soon became apparent to Condé, but he still trusted to the support of his friends, and

accordingly presented himself at the gates with a small retinue, believing that the citizens would obey their governor, and refuse to oppose his entrance. The Bishop had, however, by the promptitude of his measures, effectually defeated the hopes of the Prince. He had loudly proclaimed in the streets that there was a conspiracy on foot for delivering up the city to the enemies of the King; and this announcement had at once sufficed to arouse all the energy of the inhabitants. In a short time the gates were closed, chains were stretched across the thoroughfares, and numerous barricades were erected. The prelate, gratified by these fearless evidences of his influence, became to the full as excited as his adherents, and arming himself with a pike, he placed himself at the head of the people, urging them to resist to the utmost the dishonour by which they were threatened; while the Governor, who was then inhabiting a suburban residence, no sooner became apprised of the belligerent demonstrations of the Bishop, and the effects which they had produced, than he galloped to the gates with the intention of opposing his authority to that of his clerical antagonist. At his command the gates were opened, and directing the immediate demolition of the barricades, he proceeded to the episcopal palace; not, however, without being subjected to the abuse of the irritated populace. The Bishop, whose policy was not inferior to his courage, offered him an asylum until the fury of the crowd should be appeased; and M. de Roannois, alarmed by the rough reception he had already encountered, at once accepted the offer, and thus became the prisoner of the prelate; who, producing the letter of the Regent, issued the orders necessary to ensure the safety of the city. Nor was this all; for with a sword by his side, the Bishop personally posted the sentinels at nightfall, and distributed money from his own private purse to the non-military combatants who had formed themselves into a militia.

Enraged by his disappointment, M. de Condé, after vainly attempting to obtain a hearing from the excited citizens, found himself compelled to retire with his companions, having on his way burnt down the country palace of the bishops of Poitiers; and he had no sooner reached that city than he wrote to the Regent to complain of the insult to which he had been subjected by the inhabitants of Poitiers, and to demand justice. The sympathies of the Court were, however, with the adverse party; but Marie de Medicis was so well aware of the consequences to be apprehended from Condé's irritation that she resolved to proceed to Poitou and Brittany in person, on the pretext of the weak health of the King, by whom she was to be accompanied. She accordingly caused a rumour to be spread that Louis had displayed symptoms of disease which rendered it probable that he could not long survive; and having done this, the troops were warned to hold themselves in readiness to leave the capital with his Majesty. Meanwhile the Due de Mayenne was despatched to M. de Condé to assure him on the part of the Regent that every respect should be paid to his representations, and at the same time letters of abolition were sent to all his adherents; although he was requested to retire from Poitou during the sojourn of their Majesties. To this demand Condé at first demurred; but finding that he could not succeed in securing the assistance of the reformed party, he at length consented to withdraw; and not venturing to return to Amboise, he took up his temporary residence at Châteauroux in Berry.

The retreat of the Prince was a great triumph for the warlike Bishop, who lost no time in proceeding to Tours (where the Court had already arrived), at the head of two hundred of his supporters, to entreat of their Majesties to proceed at once to Poitiers, in order to restore public confidence. His reception by the Regent was gracious in the extreme, nor did the young sovereign fail to express to the exulting prelate his own sense of obligation. At Poitiers the Court was met by the most enthusiastic acclamations: their Majesties honoured the election of the new mayor with their presence; and the lieutenant-generalship of the province was bestowed upon the Comte de la Rochefoucauld, an adherent of the Due de Guise.

From Poitiers the Court proceeded to Angers, on its way to Brittany; where, however, the Due de Vendôme did not wait its arrival to make his submission. The inertness of the Government upon previous occasions not having prepared him for the energy now exhibited by the sovereign, his alarm was correspondingly increased; and he hastened to meet their Majesties accompanied by all the nobility of the province. On approaching the King he laid his sword at his feet; and, as he knelt beside it, entreated his forgiveness of his past errors, and expressed his determination thenceforward to give him no further subject of complaint; upon

which Louis commanded him to rise, and granted him a free pardon, which was ratified by the Regent. Letters patent were despatched by which he was reinstated in his government, and made irresponsible for all the excesses committed by his troops; and once more the son of Gabrielle d'Estrées was restored to the favour, if not to the confidence, of his sovereigns.

The assembly of the States then took place at Nantes, presided over by the Duc de Rohan; and during its meetings the King was apprised by its members of the enormities of which the followers of Vendôme had been guilty throughout the province, and respectfully solicited to exclude from the letters of abolition the authors of the frightful crimes of which the people had been made the victims. Among those of which they complained were the ransom of wives by their husbands, of daughters and young children by their parents, and of fields of grain by their owners. They, moreover, demanded justice for still greater enormities; and revealed to the Council the appalling fact that wealthy individuals had been subjected to torture, and in many instances even put to death, in order to obtain possession of their money; while others had been compelled to pay a heavy sum to save their dwellings and their property from the brand of the incendiary.

These frightful revelations excited the horror and indignation of Marie and her Council; and, in reply to their requisition, the complainants were assured that, although the King and his Government had preferred to pardon the injuries which they had personally sustained from the faction of M. de Vendôme, rather than visit them with the vengeance that they had legally merited, neither the sovereign nor those who held office under him could permit crimes like those detailed in their remonstrance to be exercised with impunity upon the people, and those crimes would consequently be punished with the most extreme rigour.

The first independent act of the Duc de Vendôme had thus greatly injured him in the estimation of the young monarch and his mother; nor did his afterlife tend to give them cause to alter the opinion which they then formed either as regarded his stability or his capacity. Even the marriage which his father, Henri IV, had with so much difficulty contracted for him with the heiress of the House of Mercoeur, failed to produce the result that had been anticipated, as he squandered her wealth, without increasing his own political importance.

On her triumphant return to the capital Marie de Medicis was apprised of the death of the Prince de Conti, which had taken place on the 13th of August; but the void was little felt, the infirmities under which he laboured, and the weakness of his intellect, having, despite his exalted rank, rendered him a mere cipher at the Court. By the nation his loss was totally unfelt; while this indifference was shared by his wife, whose violent passion for Bassompierre had long been notorious, and who shortly afterwards privately gave him her hand. Mademoiselle d'Entragues, the sister of the Marquise de Verneuil, to whom he had previously been betrothed, and who had made him the father of a son, had in vain endeavoured in the law courts to compel him to fulfil his contract, and persisted in bearing his name; a fact which was so well known as to induce many persons to believe that she was in reality his wife. On one occasion, when he was in attendance upon the Queen, the royal carriage was detained for a moment by the crowd near that of Mademoiselle d'Entragues, whom Marie immediately recognized. "See," she said with a malicious smile, as she pointed towards the lady with her fan, "there is Madame de Bassompierre."

"That is merely a *nom de guerre*, Madame," was the ready reply, uttered in a tone sufficiently loud to reach the ears of the person named, who angrily exclaimed:

"You are a fool, Bassompierre!"

"If I be not," was the quiet rejoinder of the ungallant Lothario, "it has at least, Madame, not been your fault."

Thus, after his union with the Princesse de Conti, Bassompierre, although claimed as a husband by two celebrated women, the one of a family notorious for the profligacy of its members, and the other a daughter of the proud house of Guise and, moreover, the widow of a Prince of the Blood, still continued to assume the privileges of a bachelor; resolutely disowning the one, while the other did not dare publicly to declare her marriage.

Marie de Medicis

A fortnight after the return of the Court to Paris it was followed by the Prince de Condé, who had been summoned to attend the sovereign to Parliament on the termination of his minority, which ended when he entered his thirteenth year. On the 1st of October, the day preceding that on which the ceremony of his recognition as actual monarch of France was to take place, Louis XIII issued a declaration confirmatory of the edict of pacification previously published, and renewing his prohibition against duelling and blasphemy. On the following morning the King ascended his Bed of Justice; and both the procession and the meeting were conducted with the greatest pomp. He was attended by the Queen-mother, Monsieur, and the Princes de Condé and de Soissons, the Ducs de Guise, d'Elboeuf, d'Epemon, de Ventadour, and de Montbazou, and upwards of eight hundred mounted nobles, all attired in the most sumptuous manner. On his arrival at the palace the King was received by two presidents and four councillors, by whom he was conducted to the great hall; and after all the persons present had taken their places, his Majesty briefly declared the purpose for which he had convened the meeting. Marie de Medicis then in her turn addressed the Assembly, declaring that she had resigned the administration of public affairs into the hands of the sovereign, who had some days previously attained his majority; and when she had ceased speaking Louis expressed his acknowledgments for the valuable services which she had rendered to the kingdom, his resolution still to be guided by her advice, and entreated her not to withhold from him her important assistance in the Government. The Chancellor, the First President, and the Advocate-Generaleach delivered a harangue; after which the Chancellor pronounced the decree which declared the majority of the sovereign; and the declaration that he had forwarded to the Council on the previous day was duly registered. This act terminated the ceremony, and Louis XIII returned to the Louvre accompanied and attended as he had reached the Parliament, amid the acclamations of the populace.

The assembly of the States-General at Sens had been fixed for the 10th of September, and would consequently have been held before the King had attained his majority, had not this arrangement been traversed by the Regent, who apprehended that they would seize so favourable an opportunity of thwarting all her views; and would not only demand the dismissal of the ministers and the Maréchal d'Ancre, but also, which was still more important, dissuade the sovereign, whose minority would terminate during their sitting, from permitting her to retain any share in the Government. The Prince de Condé and his partisans, whose interests undoubtedly demanded such a result, had, however, themselves been instrumental in the delay so earnestly desired by Marie; the hostile demonstrations of Vendôme in Brittany, and the ill-judged movements of Condé himself in Poitou, having furnished her with a plausible pretext for deferring the opening of the States until the King could preside over them in person; when the public declaration made before the Parliament by the young sovereign of his intention still to be guided by the counsels of his mother at once freed her from all her apprehensions; and she accordingly lost no time in transferring the Assembly from Sens to Paris, and proroguing it till the 10th of October.

Nevertheless much was to be feared should the clergy, the nobility, and the people act unanimously; and in order to prevent such a coalition, neither Marie de Medicis nor her ministers spared any exertion. As much depended upon the presidents whom they might select, the first care of the Queen-mother was to ensure the election of persons favourable to her own interests; but as great caution was necessary with regard to the agent to whom she could entrust so delicate a mission as that of causing such individuals to be chosen, she hesitated for a time before she came to a decision. Ultimately, however, she fixed upon the young Comte de Brienne; and so thoroughly did he justify her preference, that he eventually succeeded, without any appearance of undue interposition, in securing the election of three presidents, all of whom were favourable to the Court party.

This important point gained, the Government recovered its confidence; and its next care was to awaken the jealousy of each order against its coadjutors, and thus to paralyze the influence of the Assembly. In this attempt it was perfectly successful; and the general welfare of the country was overlooked in the anxiety of the several parties to carry out their own individual views. The clergy demanded the publication of the decrees of the Council of Trent, and their unrestricted admission throughout the kingdom; the nobility asked that the privilege

of the *paulette* should be abolished; and the *tiers-état* solicited either the suppression or diminution of the pensions by which the public treasury was involved in debt.

The speaker elected by the clergy was the Archbishop of Lyons; the nobility chose as their spokesman the Baron du Pont Saint-Pierre, while the *tiers-état* was presided over by M. Miron. The two first-named orators addressed the King standing and bareheaded; but this privilege was considered too great for a body which could boast of neither hereditary nor ecclesiastical nobility; and the able diplomatist and rhetorician who upon that occasion pleaded before his sovereign the rights and immunities of the class which he had been called upon to represent, was compelled to address that sovereign upon his knees. Miron had, previous to the meeting of the States, excited the indignation of the more patrician orders by declaring that he regarded the three bodies of which it was composed as one family, of which the nobility and clergy represented the elder, and the *tiers-état* the junior branches; while the Queen herself, even while she felt the importance of his support, did not hesitate to treat the deputies of his order with the greatest arrogance and discourtesy, although they distinguished themselves by a loyalty and devotion to the interests of the Crown which met with no response from the haughtier members of the Assembly. Aply, indeed, through the agency of Miron, did they persist in defending the royal prerogative, and demand that a principle should be established forbidding the deposition of their sovereigns on accusations of heresy; expressing their desire that the Crown should be recognized by law as completely independent of spiritual power; and although the clergy, through Cardinal Duperron, formally and strenuously opposed these propositions, so little was Miron affected by the adverse circumstances under which he appeared, that he replied with a logic and energy which compelled the States to defer their decision until the following year

Louis XIII, at this period, was in so delicate a state of health as to require constant care and attention, while his sullen and self-centred disposition demanded no less watchfulness. His first preceptor was M. Vauquelin des Ivetaux, a man of great talent, and quite equal to the task of forming the mind and intellect of a Prince, but of dissolute principles and sensual habits. He, however, did not long remain about the person of the boy-King, having been replaced a year after the death of Henri IV by Nicolas Le Fèvre, who was distinguished alike for his learning and his piety. Unfortunately for the young Louis, this excellent man only lived a year after his appointment, and was, in his turn, replaced by M. de Rivault, a celebrated mathematician, who had been educated with Guy, Comte de Laval. Thus, however competent these several individuals might have been to conduct his education, it will be at once evident that the perpetual changes of method and purpose to which he was subjected greatly tended to impede the progress of the illustrious pupil; and it consequently ceases to be matter of surprise that at his majority he had by no means attained to the degree of knowledge common to his age. Louis XIII knew little Latin; cared nothing for literature; but although either irritable or inert when compelled to study, could develop great energy when he was engaged in gunnery, horsemanship, or falconry. The latter pursuit was his principal amusement, His purity of heart and propriety of language were extreme, and deserve the greater mention from the contrast which they afforded to the morals and manners by which he was surrounded. He would neither permit an oath nor an obscene expression to be uttered in his presence, and never failed to rebuke any violation of his pleasure in this respect. He was passionately attached to dogs, and conversed with them, according to a contemporaneous historian, in a peculiar language; but as regarded his kingly duties he was utterly incompetent. With good intentions, a love of justice, and a deep sense of religion, he was vacillating and indolent; and cared little either to assert his privileges, or to take upon himself the cares and fatigues of government while he could transfer them to others, and thus secure time to abandon himself to more congenial pursuits.

In this circumstance were comprised all the errors of his reign; as even while deeply imbued with a sense of his dignity as the sovereign of a great nation, he exhibited the feeling only in acts of petty and obstinate opposition which tended to no result, and were productive only of a want of attachment to his person, and of respect for his opinions, which increased the arrogance of the great nobles, and fostered the ambition of his ministers.

Marie de Medicis

It is now time that we should introduce an individual whose subsequent importance in the kingdom, humble as were his antecedents, was one source of the bitter trials to which the unfortunate Marie de Medicis was subjected during a long period of her life. The Comte de Lude had in his service a page, who was subsequently transferred to that of the young King; and it is the history of this apparently insignificant person which we are now called upon to detail to the reader. Albert de Luynes, his father, was the son of Guillaume Ségur, a canon of the cathedral of Marseilles, and of the housekeeper of the said ecclesiastic; and derived the name of Luynes from a small tenement upon the bank of that river, between Aix and Marseilles, which was the property of the canon, who preferred that his son should adopt the appellation of his farm rather than his own. There was, however, an elder brother, on whom the little property belonging to the priest was exclusively bestowed, and Luynes accordingly discovered that he must become the architect of his own fortunes. With all the fearless confidence of youth he made his way, as he best could, to the capital, where he enlisted as an archer of the bodyguard, displayed great aptitude and courage, and finally obtained the governorship of Pont-St.-Esprit. While thus prospering in the world he married, became the father of seven children, of whom three were sons; and died without suspecting that his name would be handed down to posterity through the medium of one of these almost portionless boys, whose sole inheritance was a small dairy-farm of the annual value of twelve hundred livres.

Charles de Luynes, the elder of this numerous family, became, as already stated, the page of the Comte de Lude; and, as his brothers were totally without resources, he induced his patron to receive them gratuitously into his suite, in order that he might be enabled to share with them the four hundred crowns a year which, together with his slender patrimony, formed his own income. This favour had no sooner been conceded than the three young men discarded the modest names of Charles, Honoré, and Léon d'Albert, by which they had previously been known, and assumed those of Luynes, Cadenet, and Brantès, from the field, the vineyard, and a small sandy island beside them, which composed their joint estate. "Possessions," as Bassompierre facetiously observes, "over which a hare leapt every day." On the miserable pittance of the elder brother the three young adventurers, nevertheless, contrived with considerable difficulty to exist, although it was notorious that they had but one cloak, at that period an indispensable article of costume, among them; a circumstance by which two were compelled to avoid observation while the third fulfilled his duties; and so little, moreover, were their services valued by M. de Lude that he was in the habit of declaring that they were fit for nothing but "to catch green jays," a reproach which they owed to their skill in training sparrow-hawks to catch small birds; and to which he was far from supposing when he gave it utterance that they would ultimately be indebted for a prosperity almost fabulous.

Such, however, was fated to be the case. Charles de Luynes had not been long at Court before he ascertained the passion of the young King for falconry, and having carefully trained two of his miniature hawks, he caused them to be offered in his name to his royal master. Louis was delighted with their docility and skill, and desired that the donor should be presented to him; when he found that the page was deeply versed in all the mysteries of that sport to which he was himself so much attached; and thenceforward he constantly commanded his attendance whenever he pursued his favourite pastime in the gardens of the Tuileries.

At this period M. de Luynes had already attained his thirtieth year; and, with admirable self-government, he had so thoroughly controlled himself as to disguise the salient features of his character. No one consequently suspected either his latent ambition, or the violent passions which he had craft enough to conceal; and thus the very individuals who were the objects of his hatred regarded him merely as a shallow and superficial young man, whose whole soul was in the puerile sports to which he had addicted himself.

It was not, however, solely to take small birds that De Luynes aspired when he thus found himself the chosen companion of the Dauphin; he had other talents which he exerted so zealously that he ere long made himself indispensable. Gifted with a magnificent person, insinuating manners, and that ready tact by which an indolent nature is unconsciously roused to excitement, he soon obtained an extraordinary influence over his royal playmate by the

power which he possessed of overcoming his habitual apathy, and causing him to enter with zest and enjoyment into the pleasures of his age. Henri IV, who perceived with gratification the beneficial effect produced upon the saturnine nature of his son, and who was, moreover, touched by the fraternal devotion of the page, transferred him to the household of the Dauphin, and augmented his income to twelve hundred crowns; and thenceforward he became at once the companion, counsellor, and friend of the young Louis; and at the desire of the Prince he was created Master of the Aviary.

Time passed on. The Dauphin succeeded to the throne of his murdered father; the Regency tottered under the machinations of the great nobles; faction grew out of faction; cabals and conspiracies kept the nation in one perpetual state of anxiety and unrest; but the influence of De Luynes continued undiminished; and neither Marie de Medicis nor her ministers apprehended any danger from an association that was fated to produce the most serious consequences; while the Princes were equally disinclined to disturb the amusements in which the young monarch was so entirely absorbed as to pay little attention to the important events which succeeded each other around him.

As he grew older Louis became still more attached to his favourite. His discontented spirit made him irritable under every disappointment, and vindictive towards those by whom his wishes were opposed: he detested alike explanation and remonstrance, and from De Luynes he never encountered either the one or the other. Under the remonstrances of his mother he became sullen; to the arrogant assumption of the Princes and the Maréchal d'Ancre he opposed an apathetic silence which caused them to believe that it was unfelt; and it was only to De Luynes that he poured forth all his indignation, that he complained with bitterness of the iron rule of Marie, the insolence of his nobles, and the ostentatious profusion of the Italian: contrasting the first with his own helplessness, the second with the insignificance to which he was condemned, and the last with the almost penury to which he was compelled to submit.

No Prince had ever a more attentive or a more interested auditor. The enemies of the young Louis were also those of his favourite; for, as before remarked, the grandson of the reverend canon of Marseilles was alike vain and ambitious, and consequently inimical to all who occupied the high places to which he himself aspired. Moreover, the powerlessness and poverty of the young monarch necessarily involved those of his follower; and thus both by inclination and by interest De Luynes was bound to share the antipathies of his master.

Like all favourites, moreover, he soon made a host of personal adversaries; while, as these were far from suspecting the height to which he was ultimately destined to attain, they took little pains to dissemble their dislike and contempt of the new minion; and thus, ere long, De Luynes had amassed a weighty load of hatred in his heart. To him it appeared that all the great dignitaries of the kingdom, although born to the rank they held, were engrossing honours which, possessed as he was of the favour of the sovereign, should have been conferred upon himself; but the especial antipathy of the arrogant adventurer was directed against the Queen, the Maréchal d'Ancre, and the President Jeannin. To account for his bitter feeling towards Marie de Medicis, it is only necessary to state that, blinded by his ambition, he had dared to display for the haughty Princess a passion which was coldly and disdainfully repulsed; and that he had vowed to revenge the overthrow of his hopes.

His hatred of Concini is as easily explained; it being merely the jealousy of a rival favourite. The Italian was to the mother of the King precisely what De Luynes was to the King himself; and as Marie possessed more power than her son, so also was her follower more richly recompensed. Still, however, the game was an unequal one, of which the chances were all in his own favour; for the Maréchal was playing away the present, while his adversary was staking upon the future. The President Jeannin was also, as we have stated, especially distasteful to De Luynes, as he made no secret of his dissatisfaction at the frivolous existence of the young sovereign, and his desire that he should exchange the boyish diversions to which he was addicted for pursuits more worthy of his high station; while at the same time he exhibited towards the favourite an undisguised disdain which excited all the worst passions of its object.

Thus, insignificant as he appeared to those who were basking in favour, and who esteemed themselves too highly to waste one thought upon the obsequious dependent of a youthful and wayward sovereign, who suffered himself to be guided by those about him as though reckless of the result of their conflicting ambitions, it will be readily understood that De Luynes was laying up a store of antipathies which required only time and opportunity to develop themselves, and to bear the most bitter fruits; and already did the active favourite begin to enjoy a foretaste of the coming harvest. Ever earnest for right, Louis XIII never exhibited any personal energy to secure it, and consequently could effect nothing of himself; readily prejudiced, alike by his own caprices and by the representations of others, his very anxiety to act as became a monarch rendered him vulnerable to the intrigues of those whose interests tended to mislead his judgment; and as De Luynes, while sharing in his superstitious acts of overstrained devotion, or amusing his idleness by the futilities of falconry and other even less dignified sports, did not fail occasionally and cautiously to allude to more serious subjects, the boy-King listened eagerly to the recitals and opinions of his chosen friend, and finished by adopting all his views. This fact soon became so obvious to Concini, that the wily Italian, who dreaded lest the day might not be far distant when the son of Marie de Medicis would shake off the yoke of her quasi-regency and assert his own prerogative, resolved to secure the good offices of De Luynes, and for this purpose he induced M. de Condé to restore to the King the government of Amboise; representing to the Prince the slight importance of such a possession to a person of his rank, and the conviction which its voluntary surrender must impress upon the ministers of his desire to strengthen the royal cause. Let it not be supposed, however, that, at the period of which we write, such a surrender could for a moment be effected gratuitously; and thus, when the first Prince of the Blood was at length induced to yield to the representations of his insidious adviser, the terms of the bargain were fully understood on both sides; but even when he had succeeded in obtaining the consent of M. de Condé himself to the arrangement, Concini had still to overcome the scruples of the Queen-mother, to whom he hastened to suggest that the vacant government should be bestowed upon Charles de Luynes.

As he had anticipated, Marie de Medicis was startled by so extraordinary a proposition. De Luynes was a mere hanger-on of the Court; the companion of the boyish pleasures of her son; and without one claim to honour or advancement. But these very arguments strengthened the position of the Maréchal. The poverty of the King's favourite secured, as he averred, his fidelity to those who might lay the foundations of his fortune; and if, as the astute Italian moreover cleverly remarked, De Luynes were in truth merely the playmate of the monarch, he possessed at least the merit of engrossing his thoughts, and of thus rendering him less desirous to control or to criticize the measures of others. Marie yielded to this argument; she had begun to love power for its own sake; and she could not disguise from herself that her future tenure of authority must depend solely upon the will of the young sovereign. In order, therefore, to secure to herself the good offices of one so influential with his royal master as De Luynes, she consented to follow the advice of Concini, who forthwith, in her name, remunerated M. de Condé for his secession by upwards of a hundred thousand crowns, and the grandson of Guillaume Ségur became governor of the city and fortress of Amboise.

CHAPTER VII

1615-16

The assembly of the States-General occupied the commencement of the year 1615; and was closed on the 22nd of February, by their Majesties in person, with extreme pomp. When the King and his august mother had taken their seats, and the heralds had proclaimed silence, Armand Jean du Plessis, Bishop of Luçon, presented to the sovereign the requisition of the clergy; and after a long harangue, in which he detailed their several demands, he entered into an animated eulogium of the administration of the Queen, exhorting his Majesty to continue to her the power of which she had so ably availed herself during his minority. He spoke fluently, but in a broken and uncertain voice, and with an apparent apathy, which, according to contemporaneous authors, gave no indication of the extraordinary talents that he subsequently displayed.

The States-General had no sooner closed than Marie de Medicis resolved to terminate the double alliance which had been concluded with Spain, and in honour of this event she determined that Madame, the promised bride of Philip, should appear in a ballet, which by the sumptuousness of its decorations, the beauty of its machinery, and the magnificence of its entire arrangements, should eclipse every entertainment of the kind hitherto exhibited at the French Court.

"It is necessary," she said, "that my daughter should give a public festival before her departure for Spain, and that the Parisians should remember a Princess who is about to be lost to France."

That the worthy citizens were on their part most anxious so to do, is evident from the testimony of Bassompierre, who states that the Court officials, being unprepared for so great a crowd as that which presented itself upon the occasion, had not taken proper precautions, and it was subsequently found necessary to postpone the amusement for some days, and to arrange that no one should enter the Salle de Bourbon without a ticket; which the Duc d'Epéron and himself were entrusted to receive.

This entertainment was followed by another of a similar description at the Hôtel de Condé; but although they affected to be equally engrossed by the festivities in which they shared, neither the Queen nor the Prince were so indifferent to their personal interests as they endeavoured to appear. Marie de Medicis was striving to discover some means of frustrating the cabals which were perpetually thwarting her designs, and threatening her authority, while M. de Condé was as eager as ever to undermine her power. The Maréchal d'Ancre was intriguing to effect the disgrace of the ministers, particularly that of Villeroy, whose alliance he no longer coveted; and the great nobles were busied in searching for some pretext sufficiently plausible to cause the ruin of the domineering favourite who presumed to treat them rather as inferiors than as equals. Thus the gilded surface of the Court concealed a mass of hatred, jealousy, and unrest, which threatened every instant to reveal itself, and to dispel an illusion as false as it was flattering: and while the foreign guests of the young monarch danced and feasted, and the native nobility struggled to surpass them in magnificence and frivolity, the more thoughtful spectators of the glittering scene trembled at its instability, and every instant anticipated an outbreak.

The attempt of Concini proved successful, and the deportment of Marie towards M. de Villeroy became so chilling that he withdrew from the Court, without seeking to ascertain the cause of his disgrace.

Marie de Medicis

On the 27th of March the ex-Queen Marguerite breathed her last, but for some time previously she had appeared so seldom at Court that her death did not tend to disturb the gaieties of the royal circle, who had almost ceased to remember her existence. She had outlived even the reputation of her vices.

When the Prince de Condé and his faction demanded a meeting of the States they were far from anticipating its results; the unanimous loyalty of the deputies having greatly subserved the interests of the Queen, and thus weakened their own position. Aware too late of the error which they had committed, they were consequently compelled to seek elsewhere for support, and it was at length decided that they should excite the disaffection of the Parliament, by representing that all the services which its members had rendered to Marie on her assumption of the regency had been repaid by ingratitude and neglect; and that they no longer commanded that authority in the Government to which they were justly entitled. Coupled with these insidious arguments were profuse offers of assistance to enable them to enforce their rights, and the object of the faction was at once gained; the ambition and the vanity of the Parliament being alike engaged in a question which involved their own influence and importance. Strong in the support of the Princes, they, however, overacted the part assigned to them, and proceeded so arrogantly to remonstrate with the sovereign upon what they termed the abuses of the Government, that the King issued a decree in Council, by which he abrogated both their own decree and their remonstrances, declaring that they had exceeded the power accorded to them by the law; and commanding that those documents should be cancelled, torn from the registers, and delivered to his Majesty on the receipt of the royal decree. The Parliament, however, expostulated, and although they were again commanded to deliver up the obnoxious records, they failed to obey; and thus, by their determination, overruled the will of the sovereign.

During this struggle for power the Prince de Condé had absented himself from Paris, in order to avert any suspicion of connivance; but previous experience had rendered the Queen distrustful of his movements, and she was consequently prepared to counteract his subsequent intrigues. The Council had, accordingly, no sooner annulled the decree of the Parliament, than she sent to forbid him, in the name of the King, from assisting in their deliberations; upon which the Prince availed himself of so specious a pretext for abandoning the Court, alleging that he no longer considered it safe to remain in the capital.

In accordance with this declaration he left Paris by the Porte St. Antoine, followed by the acclamations of the populace, who, weary of the rule of the Queen, and exasperated by the arrogance of her favourites, regarded M. de Condé as a victim, and thus rendered his retreat a new subject of anxiety to the Court party. Nor was their annoyance decreased when they ascertained that throughout his journey to Creil, where he possessed an estate on the banks of the Oise, he was met by numerous bodies of armed citizens from Senlis, Mantes, Beaumont, and other towns, and was accompanied by the Duc de Longueville and the nobles attached to his cause. Within a league of Creil the harquebusiers were drawn up to receive him, with drums beating and colours flying, and thus escorted he finally entered the city.

On learning these circumstances Marie de Medicis became apprehensive that he might avail himself of so favourable an opportunity to raise an army, and enter into open rebellion against the Crown; and in order to avert this contingency, she lost no time in despatching a messenger who was instructed to invite him to return to Paris, and to accompany the Court in their approaching journey to Guienne. M. de Condé was, however, aware of the advantage which he had gained, and resolutely refused to retrace his steps until the King reformed the Council, replied to the remonstrances of the Parliament, and redressed the alleged wrongs of himself and his friends; demanding in his own name the presidency of the Council, and the ministry of finance which had been promised to him; while the Maréchal de Bouillon, in his turn, asked as the price of his obedience the office of Connétable de France vacant by the death of the Duc de Montmorency.

Marie de Medicis

These demands not being conceded, the Prince de Condé refused to accompany the King to Guienne, an example which was followed by many of the high nobility; and the faction became ere long so formidable that a civil war appeared inevitable.

Nevertheless, the Maréchal d'Ancre and his adherents affected to treat the warlike demonstrations of the adverse party with contempt, and assured Marie de Medicis that all the efforts of the Prince must prove abortive while the King possessed a strong army and able generals to oppose the forces of the malcontents; and, in support of his assertion, the Duc de Guise and d'Epéron alike offered their services to her Majesty. In the former, however, Marie dared not confide; his near relative, the Duc de Mayenne, being the ally of Condé, while De Guise himself was the avowed enemy of Concini. Of M. d'Epéron's sincerity she felt more assured; but she was aware that she could not bestow upon him the command of the royal army without exciting the jealousy of Guise, and thus opening up a new source of difficulty. Desirous of proceeding to Guienne without further delay, the Queen consequently urged her advisers to suggest some other individual to whom so serious a responsibility might be entrusted; and after considerable deliberation the Duc d'Epéron, the Chancellor, and his son the Chevalier de Sillery proposed to the Maréchal d'Ancre that he should become a candidate for the command, offering at the same time to exert all their influence with the Queen to ensure his success.

Blinded by vanity, Concini, who was a soldier only in name, did not fail to listen with greedy ears to this unexpected proposition; and while his seeming friends were speculating upon his ruin, and calculating that during his absence they should have time to impress upon Marie de Medicis that, by the sacrifice of her favourite, she might reconcile the disaffected Princes. Concini himself foresaw that the increase of influence which so important a command could not fail to secure to him must tend to diminish that of the Duc d'Epéron, whose overthrow had been for some time his greatest wish. Moreover, by quartering his troops in the neighbourhood of M. de Condé, an opportunity would present itself of effecting his reconciliation with that Prince, which he ardently desired; and this end accomplished, he flattered himself with the hope that his vision of becoming first minister of France could not fail to be realized.

Unfortunately, however, for the ambitious Italian, it was not long ere D'Epéron and Sillery recognized the error into which they had been led by their eagerness to injure him. They suddenly remembered that Concini had already once joined the faction of the Princes, and they were aware that the Duc de Bouillon had made more than one subsequent effort to induce him to abandon the royal cause; and they were no sooner convinced of the fault which they had committed, than they hastened to represent to the Queen that the appointment of the Maréchal d'Ancre to the command of the King's armies had caused great dissatisfaction throughout the capital; the citizens affirming that the troops of a sovereign of France ought not to be led against the enemy by a man who was ignorant of the art of war, and who was, moreover, a foreigner, detested by the people to an extent which rendered it probable that, should Concini be invested with the command, they would open the gates of Paris to M. de Condé, in the event of his marching upon the city. Marie de Medicis yielded to these reasons, and simply replied by reminding Sillery that if she had committed an error in accepting the proposal of the Maréchal d'Ancre, she had done so at his own instigation; but that as he considered it desirable to appoint some other individual to the command, she would offer no opposition. Concini was accordingly superseded, and the veteran Maréchal de Bois-Dauphin was selected as his successor, with the title of lieutenant-general. Indignant at the disappointment to which he had been subjected, Concini left Paris, and proceeded to his government at Amiens, vowing vengeance against the Duc d'Epéron and Sillery.

The impatience of the Queen to conclude the double alliance with Spain was so great that she disregarded the advice of Jeannin and Villeroy; who, in conjunction with Concini and his wife, had endeavoured to induce her to delay her departure for Guienne, and to proceed either to Laon or St. Quentin, in order to secure the Isle of France and Picardy, and to prevent the Prince de Condé and his adherents from concentrating their forces in the vicinity of the capital; while, on the contrary, she was urged by the Chancellor and his brother, the

Marie de Medicis

Commandeur de Sillery, who was her first-equerry and gentleman-usher, to carry out her original design. The 17th of August had been already fixed for the commencement of the royal journey; and Marie eagerly availed herself of their advice to persist in her purpose; contenting herself with giving orders to the Maréchal de Bois-Dauphin to cover Paris, to impede the approach of the disaffected forces, and, at all risks, to avoid coming to an engagement. She then withdrew from the Bastille eight hundred thousand crowns for the purpose of defraying the expenses of the Court during its progress.

Despite the absence of the Princes, the royal retinue was magnificent and numerous. The troops by whom the august travellers were attended consisted of a thousand horsemen, and the royal bodyguard amounted to three thousand men, who were placed under the command of the Duc de Guise, who was also to accompany Madame Elisabeth to the frontier of the kingdom, and to receive the Infanta, whom he was to conduct to the capital of Guienne, where their Majesties were to await her. The King left Paris soon after dawn; the Queen followed some hours subsequently, having previously caused the arrest of M. Le Jay, in order to intimidate the Parliament; and finally, in the course of the afternoon, Madame took leave of the municipal authorities, and departed in her turn. The Marquise d'Ancre having in vain endeavoured to dissuade her royal foster-sister from this journey, became so thoroughly dispirited by the disappointment of her husband, and the evident decline of her own influence, that she resolved to excuse herself from accompanying the Court, and to remain in the capital; a project from which she was, however, dissuaded by MM. de Villeroy and Jeannin, who represented to her the impolicy of incurring the displeasure of her Majesty, and thus insuring her own ruin. She was consequently induced to join the royal suite, but she did so with a heavy heart, and without one hope of resuming her original empire over the mind of Marie. The Court reached Orleans on the 20th of August, and Tours on the 30th, whence their Majesties proceeded to Poitiers, at which city they arrived on the 9th of September; but the anxieties of Marie de Medicis were not yet to terminate. Madame was attacked a day or two subsequently with small-pox, while the Queen herself was confined to her bed by a severe illness, which compelled the constant attendance of Madame d'Ancre in her sick-room, where, by her affectionate assiduity, she soon succeeded in recovering the good graces of her royal mistress. She had secured to her interests a Jewish physician, in whose astrological talent Marie de Medicis placed the most implicit confidence; and eager to revenge her husband upon Sillery, who, as she was well aware, had been the cause of his losing the coveted command, she instructed this man, whom the Queen had hastened to consult, to persuade the credulous invalid that she had been bewitched by the Chevalier de Sillery. Strange as it may appear, Leonora was perfectly successful; and believing herself to have been the victim of the Chancellor and his party, Marie entered earnestly into the views of her favourite, consenting to withdraw her confidence from Sillery, and to follow thenceforward the counsels of Villeroy and Jeannin.

The delay consequent upon the recovery of the Queen and her daughter enabled the Prince de Condé to strengthen his party, and to advance towards Paris, with an army of five thousand infantry and two thousand horse. His troops were, however, badly armed, and might at once have been beaten or dispersed by the Maréchal de Bois-Dauphin, had that general marched against them; but, fettered by the stringent orders which he had received not to give battle to the enemy, he remained inactive; and the Duc de Bouillon profited by his inertness to seize Château Thierry, whence he marched to Méré-sur-Seine.

Meanwhile M. de Condé ascertained that the King had issued on the 10th of September a proclamation of *lèse-majesté* against himself and his adherents; to which he replied by another, wherein he affirmed that he had taken up arms for the sole purpose of preventing a foreign invasion. He then crossed the Seine, with the intention of possessing himself of the town of Sens; a project in which he, however, failed, Bois-Dauphin and his adjutant-general, the Marquis de Praslin, having already garrisoned the place.

The two armies were at this period in such close juxtaposition that an engagement appeared inevitable; but whether it were that Bois-Dauphin was deficient in ability, or that he had resolved, whatever might be the result of his inaction, to obey implicitly the instructions of

the Queen, he vacated Sens after a few slight skirmishes. Be the real cause of his supineness what it might, it excited the indignation of Bassompierre, Praslin, the Marquis de Coeuvres, and the other leaders of the royal army, who did not scruple to accuse him of incapacity; declaring, moreover, that he had harassed the troops far more than if he had led them into action.

On the arrival of the Court at Angoulême the Queen was agreeably surprised by the appearance of the Comte de Saint-Pol, who, she had been led to believe, had joined the faction of Condé with his nephew the Duc de Longueville; and her exultation was increased when, with assurances of his fidelity to the Crown, he placed under her orders the two fortresses of Fronsac and Caumont.

Profiting by the retreat of the Maréchal de Bois-Dauphin, the Duc de Bouillon had made all haste to pass the Loire, and to reach the confines of Touraine and Poitou; nor would it have been possible for their Majesties to have reached Bordeaux in safety, had it not been for the secession of the Comte de Saint-Pol from the faction of the Princes, together with the impossibility of marching the rebel troops upon Poitou in so short a space of time. Thanks to this combination of circumstances, however, the Court arrived without accident in the capital of Guienne on the 7th of October; where the King and his august mother were received with great magnificence, and enthusiastically welcomed by all classes of the citizens, whom the Maréchal de Roquelaure, lieutenant-general for the King in Guienne, and Mayor of Bordeaux, had adroitly gained, by his representations of the honour conferred upon them by the sovereign in selecting their city as the scene of his own marriage and that of his sister, the future Queen of Spain.

It had been arranged that the royal marriages should be celebrated on the same day (the 18th of October), at Bordeaux and Burgos; and accordingly the Duc de Guise, as proxy for the Prince of Spain, espoused Madame Elisabeth, with whom, accompanied by the Duchesse de Nevers and the ladies of her household, he immediately departed for the frontier, after a painful leave-taking between the young Princess and her family; while the Duque d'Usseda performed the same ceremony for Louis XIII, with the Infanta Anna Maria of Austria. The exchange of the two Princesses took place on the 9th of November, in the middle of the Bidassoa, with a host of petty and futile observances which excite mirth rather than admiration; but at the same time with a magnificence surpassing all that had ever previously been exhibited on such an occasion; the two Courts of France and Spain vying with each other in splendour and profusion. De Luynes, to whom such a mission appeared peculiarly adapted, presented to the Infanta the letters of welcome with which he had been entrusted by Louis XIII and his mother, and which were received by the Princess with an undisguised delight that the favourite did not fail to report to his royal master.

The guard with which the Duc de Guise had conducted Madame Elisabeth to the frontier consisted of fifteen hundred horse, four thousand infantry, and four pieces of ordnance; and it was with the same troops that he escorted the newly made Queen of France to Bordeaux, who, previously to her departure from Burgos, had signed a formal renunciation, written entirely by her own hand, of all her claims to the Spanish succession. On her arrival at Bordeaux on the 21st of November, the young Queen was received with all the splendour of which the circumstances were susceptible, and the marriage ceremony was immediately repeated by the Bishop of Saintes; after which, on the 17th of December, the Court, under the escort of a strong body of troops, left the capital of Guienne for Tours, which latter city they did not, however, reach for five weeks, owing to the long halts that they were compelled to make in the several towns through which they passed, where every species of entertainment had been prepared for the reception of the august travellers. Meanwhile the army suffered fearfully from exposure to the cold, from sickness, and from want of provisions and forage; numbers of the men died, and the progress of the royal party consequently resembled a disastrous retreat rather than a triumphant procession.

In addition to this misfortune the Queen-mother had other and still more serious motives for anxiety. Although her personal ambition had been gratified by the accomplishment

of that close alliance with Spain which she had so long and so earnestly desired, she could not conceal from herself that as regarded the nation over which she had been called to govern, the irretrievable step thus taken was one of extreme impolicy. On every side she was surrounded by difficulties. The first Prince of the Blood, and nearly the whole of the high nobility, were not only disaffected, but actually in arms against the Crown. The Protestants, to whom she had repeatedly promised that she would observe the Edict of Nantes, incensed by her breach of faith, had revolted against her authority; her troops had failed to offer any effective resistance; and meanwhile foreign soldiers had traversed Champagne, and advanced into Berry to join Condé, without any impediment from the royal army. The intelligence that she received from Paris was equally alarming; scarcely a day passed in which pamphlets and pasquinades of the grossest description were not published and circulated among the population, assigning the most foul and degrading motives for her journey to Guienne under the protection of the Ducs d'Epéron and de Guise; while her anxiety for the Spanish alliance was represented as arising from her desire to conciliate those who were accused of being the assassins of her husband.

Angered as she was by these insults, Marie de Medicis still pined to return to the capital. She was wearied alike by the exacting and arrogant temper of M. d'Epéron, and by the monotony of the provincial cities, where she saw herself surrounded only by aldermen and citizens with whom she had no feeling or habit in common; and as the several individuals of her circle were equally ill at ease in so novel a position, far from allaying her impatience, they aggravated the *ennui* which she did not attempt to disguise, until she eventually brought herself to attach all the blame of her own disappointment and mortification upon those who had advised her to leave the capital; and to evince the greatest eagerness to follow the counsels of their adversaries.

The Court left Bordeaux at the close of the year 1615; and in the month of January following proceeded to take up its abode at Tours, there to await the close of a negotiation into which the Queen-mother had entered with the Princes; while at the same time her agents secretly exerted all their efforts to induce the allies of M. de Condé to abandon his cause. The command of the troops was taken from the Maréchal de Bois-Dauphin and conferred upon the Duc de Guise, with the title of lieutenant-general of the King's army; and an immediate attempt was made to gain over the Duc de Mayenne and the Maréchal de Bouillon, as being the most influential of the revolted nobles. James I offered to Marie de Medicis his services as a mediator on the occasion; they were gratefully accepted, and the English Ambassador was forthwith despatched to the Prince de Condé at St. Jean-d'Angély, with instructions to avert, by every argument in his power, the horrors of a civil war. Convinced that no better opportunity could possibly occur for securing to himself and his party the advantageous conditions which he coveted, Condé received the royal envoy with great courtesy, declaring that he had acted throughout the whole affair solely in the interests of his country, and that he was ready to write respectfully to his Britannic Majesty, to offer to him the same assurance.

His proposal was accepted; the letter was forthwith prepared; and the Baron de Thianges was entrusted with its delivery into the hands of the English monarch. A reply was returned by the same messenger; and finally a conference was decided on, which was to take place at Loudun on the 10th of February.

While preparations were making for this important event, the Queen-mother, on the 29th of January, summoned the nobles of her Court to her apartment, in order to discuss the necessary measures to be adopted for securing the allegiance of the disaffected Princes; and on this occasion she nearly lost her life by a singular accident. The young Comte de Soissons, the Ducs de Guise and d'Epéron, Bassompierre, Jeannin, and many others who held office about the Court or in the Government were scarcely assembled when the flooring of the room gave way, and twenty-eight persons were precipitated into the hall beneath. The arm-chair of Marie herself had fortunately been placed above a beam which held firm, and to which the President Jeannin resolutely clung, thus breaking his fall; but MM. de Soissons, d'Epéron, de Bassompierre, de Villeroy, and several others were less fortunate, and all were more or less gravely injured. With great presence of mind the Queen retained her seat; and with the help of the Duc de Guise ultimately contrived to reach her bed, over which she passed, and thus

escaped into an adjoining apartment; and meanwhile the unfortunate victims of the accident were conveyed to their respective residences, where her Majesty caused them to be immediately visited by one of the officers of her household, who was commissioned to inquire into their condition, and to express her regret at the event.

There was one exception, however, to this royal act of sympathy and consideration, and that one was the Duc d'Epéron; who, although the greatest sufferer on the occasion, was entirely overlooked; a marked and threatening want of courtesy on the part of the Queen-mother, which convinced the arrogant courtier that his period of favour was past, and that his enemies had triumphed. This conviction at once determined him to retire voluntarily from the Court before he should be compelled to do so by an order which he felt satisfied would not be long delayed; and he was accordingly no sooner sufficiently recovered to leave his bed than he waited upon their Majesties to take leave, alleging that his shattered health having received so violent a shock, he felt it necessary to withdraw for a time from all participation in public affairs, and to endeavour by perfect repose to overcome the effects of his accident.

His reasons were graciously accepted both by the King and Queen, who assured him of their deep sorrow at his sufferings, and expressed the most flattering wishes for his recovery; but the Queen-mother uttered no word either of regret or sympathy. With the most chilling indifference she returned his parting salutation; and M. d'Epéron quitted her apartment with a demeanour almost as haughty as her own.

Marie de Medicis, who possessed the most implicit confidence in the so-called science of astrology, and who was always anxious to penetrate the mystery of the future, having been informed on her return to Paris that a certain Giorgio Luminelli, a native of Ragusa who was celebrated as a soothsayer, had recently arrived in the capital, and taken up his abode in the Place Royale, immediately expressed a wish to consult him; for which purpose she despatched a messenger to his residence, by whom he was invited to wait upon a person of high rank who, attracted by his renown, was desirous of testing his skill. To this somewhat imperious summons Luminelli, however, simply replied by declaring that he never quitted his own apartments for any one, whatever might be the station of the person who required his services; but that those, who sought his aid were at liberty to visit him whenever they saw fit to do so. This answer only increased the eagerness of the Queen-mother; nevertheless, previously to seeking him in person, she requested M. de Créquy, the Duc de la Force, Bassompierre, and Rambure to go to his house in disguise, in order to ascertain whether he were indeed worthy of the reputation by which he had been preceded.

While they were making the necessary arrangements, and deciding to exchange dresses with their confidential valets in the hope of being enabled to mystify the necromancer, to whom they were entirely unknown, the Maréchal d'Ancre arrived to pay his respects to his royal mistress; and, upon being made acquainted with the project, he determined to join the party in the character of a Venetian noble, of whom there were at that moment several residing in Paris. On the completion of their preparations the merry masquers set forth, and soon reached the abode of Luminelli; where, on their arrival, they found a servant stationed at the door, as if awaiting the advent of expected guests, who no sooner saw them pause beside him than, addressing Concini and the disguised serving-men, he politely requested them to follow him; coupling the invitation with an assurance that his master had desired him to watch for the arrival of five great nobles who were about to consult his art. Lavallée, the lackey of M. de Bassompierre, assuming an air of importance, expressed both for himself and his companions their sense of this attention; and then, somewhat startled by the coincidence, for as such they simply considered it, the whole party followed their guide upstairs.

On reaching the apartment of the astrologer the four disguised courtiers remained respectfully upon the threshold, while their unliveried representatives advanced to the middle of the room; and courteously saluting their host, informed him that they had been induced by his great renown to solicit a display of his skill, and to claim from him a knowledge of their future fortunes. Lavallée was once more their spokesman; and the eyes of Luminelli remained fixed upon him until the conclusion of his address, when he turned away abruptly, without

Marie de Medicis

vouchsafing any reply, and drew back a curtain behind which was placed a large globe of polished steel. He looked earnestly upon this for a few moments; and then rising, he put on a cap of dark velvet which lay beside him, took Lavallée by the hand, and approaching Bassompierre placed his valet a few paces behind him, saying as he did so:

"Monseigneur, why should you thus have assumed a disguise? You are already a great noble, but your fortunes have not yet reached their acme. You will one day be Maréchal de France, and the dignity will be conferred upon you on the other side of the Rhône. Beauty has great influence over you; but with those whom you seek to please your purse has even more charms than your person. You will ere long have immense success at the gaming-table, far beyond any which you have yet achieved. You have been engaged in a lawsuit against an unmarried woman. You hold one of the highest offices in the kingdom. You are not by birth a Frenchman, but a German. One of the greatest ladies in the world will cause you considerable misfortune, through the medium of a red animal. You will, however, finally triumph over your troubles, although the trial will be a long and a severe one."

Luminelli then consulted his magic globe a second time; led the lackey of M. de Créquy to the rear of his master; made a profound salutation to the latter; and addressing him in his turn, detailed, as he had previously done in the case of Bassompierre, all the leading events of his past and future life. He next went through the same ceremony with the Duc de la Force and M. de Rambure; and ultimately he turned towards the Maréchal d'Ancre, exclaiming: "You, Sir, are no Venetian, although you have sought to appear such; but it would be well for you if you were so. As it is, if you will follow my advice, you will leave Paris to-morrow for Venice; for should you long delay your departure, it will be too late to effect it. When you arrived in France you were alike poor and obscure, although you are now rich both in gold and honours. Leave the country, nevertheless, or these advantages will avail you nothing. With few exceptions, you are detested by all classes; and you will find your native air of Florence more wholesome than that of the country which you have adopted. You possess governments, and wield the *bâton* of a Maréchal de France, but your tenure of these dignities is unstable; and you will do well to save yourself while you have yet the opportunity. You place your reliance on the favour of a crowned head, but that very favour shadows forth your ruin."

As Concini stood motionless before him, the astrologer took him by the hand, and leading him towards the globe, by a slight touch caused it to revolve. As he gazed upon the polished surface of the mysterious instrument, the colour of the Italian came and went so rapidly that his companions believed him to be attacked by sudden indisposition; and depositing a heavy purse of gold upon the table, they urged him to withdraw. Before they could effect their object, however, Luminelli thrust the purse from him, having previously withdrawn from it a single pistole which he flung to his attendant. He then cast himself back upon his chair; the heavy curtain again fell before the globe; and he appeared totally unconscious of the continued presence of his visitors, whose departure was retarded for a few seconds by the utter incapacity of Concini to leave the room. With a powerful effort the Italian, however, suddenly suppressed his emotion, although he still trembled so violently that he was compelled to lean upon Bassompierre for support; nor did the attack, as had been anticipated, yield to the influence of the external air, for the Maréchal continued throughout the entire space of two hours wholly unable to control its violence; while not all the eager questioning of his companions could induce him to reveal the cause of his frightful agitation; a fact by which they were firmly persuaded that the astrologer had revealed to him an intimate acquaintance with past events which justified his warning, or had foreshadowed a future well calculated to arouse alarm. Be this as it might, it appears at least certain that the five nobles were each and all deeply impressed by the scene through which they had just passed, by whatever agency it might have been effected; and that the report which they made on their return to Marie de Medicis effectually indisposed her from seeking any further knowledge of Giorgio Luminelli.

CHAPTER VIII

1616

The famous Conference of Loudun assembled on the 13th of February 1616; but as the Prince de Condé presented no less than thirty-one articles for consideration, many of which required careful examination, it was mutually agreed that the truce should be prolonged until the decision of his Majesty might be formed. The position of the Court was, moreover, rendered more difficult from the fact that several great nobles, who had not hitherto openly espoused the faction of the rebels, hastened to swell their ranks, not with the intention of caballing against the Government, but simply of being included in the concessions to which it was evident that the Council would be compelled in order to accomplish a peace. Among others the Duc de Vendôme, who had so recently solicited his pardon, and declared his intention of adhering to the royal cause, was conspicuous in the ranks of the enemy; together with the young Duc de Candale, the son of D'Epemon, who had embraced the reformed faith, the Duc de Piney-Luxembourg, and the Dowager Countess of Soissons, who withdrew from the Court at Tours, and joined her son at Loudun. This example, contemptible as it was, proved contagious, and was followed by two of the greatest Princesses of the Blood, the Dowager Princesses of Condé and Longueville, to the extreme annoyance of the Queen-mother, who was aware of the extent of their influence, and quite alive to its probable consequences.

Meanwhile both armies were suffering so severely from extreme cold and scarcity of provisions, that more than ten thousand men fell victims to exposure and famine; and the bodyguard of the King became at length so much weakened that he found himself compelled to summon the Swiss under Bassompierre for the protection of his person.

The demands with which Condé and his partisans opened the Conference were such as required little deliberation; but as the proceedings advanced they became more and more onerous; until, finally, as the Council had foreseen, they all resolved themselves into questions of individual interest. The Duc de Longueville claimed full authority over all the fortresses in his government of Picardy which were held by the Maréchal d'Ancre, and refused to accede to any terms with the Crown until they were given up; while the other Princes and nobles asked either gratuities for themselves, or vengeance upon their enemies; and all agreed in claiming the payment of their troops by the royal treasury before they would consent to lay down their arms.

Finally, on the 5th of May, the Conference was closed; several of the articles presented by M. de Condé having been conceded, others deferred, and the remainder conditionally agreed to. In the meantime, however, the Prince had been taken seriously ill, and the fear that he might not survive so threatening an attack determined the leaders of his faction to accept whatever terms the Court should decide to offer. While the disease was at its height, the Princes and royal commissioners assembled about his bed, where the English Ambassador also presented himself; but, although he had taken so active a part in the reconciliation about to be effected between the Crown and the rebel nobles, M. de Villeroy vehemently refused to permit him to remain, declaring that upon such an occasion it was impossible to allow a foreigner to interfere between a sovereign and his subjects. This dispute was followed by a second, the deputies of La Rochelle having demanded a continuance of their assembly; a demand which was opposed with such warmth and violence that M. de Condé, unable to support the disturbance, weakened as he was by the fever which preyed upon him, commanded instant silence; and desiring that a pen might be brought to him, together with the edict of pacification which had been drawn up, he forthwith affixed his signature to the document, declaring that

those who loved him would do the same, while such as refused to follow his example should be compelled to do so. He then pronounced a short prayer, in which he thanked God for the cessation of hostilities, after which he desired to be left alone; and on the morrow preparations were commenced for disbanding the rebel troops.

This apparent precipitation did not, however, involve any sacrifice either on the part of the Prince himself or on that of his principal adherents, since Richelieu has recorded that the peace for which M. de Condé so piously uttered his thanksgiving cost Louis XIII upwards of six millions of livres; every individual of mark having cause to feel satisfied with the result of the Conference save the Protestants, who, as a body, derived no benefit whatever from the treaty.

Concini, who had remained in Paris during the absence of the Court, had meanwhile been subjected to a mortification which, to his haughty spirit, far exceeded a more important evil. The citizens who had continued to keep watch and ward, despite the cessation of hostilities that had taken place, persevered in requiring that all who entered or quitted the capital should be provided with passports; a formality with which the arrogant Italian considered it unnecessary to comply; and, accordingly, when on one occasion he was about to proceed to his house in the faubourg attended by some of the gentlemen of his suite, he had no sooner reached the Porte de Bussy, where a shoemaker named Picard was on guard, than this man compelled his carriage to stop, and demanded his passport. Enraged by such a mark of disrespect, the Maréchal imperiously ordered his coachman to proceed, but this was rendered impossible by the threatening attitude of the well-armed guardian of the gate.

"Rascal!" shouted Concini, showing himself at the door of the carriage; "do you know who I am?"

"Right well, Sir," was the unmoved reply; "and nevertheless you shall not stir a step beyond the walls without a passport."

The Italian was pale with indignation, but he dared not resent the insult, as a crowd was rapidly collecting from whom he was aware that he could expect no mercy; and he accordingly restrained himself sufficiently to despatch a messenger for an order of egress, which promptly arrived. His southern blood, however, beat and burnt in his veins, and he awaited only an opportunity of revenge. A few days subsequently, unable any longer to control his rage, he desired his equerry to proceed to the residence of Picard with two valets, and to repay his insolence by a sound cudgelling; an order which was so implicitly obeyed that the unfortunate shoemaker narrowly escaped with his life; while a mob, attracted by the uproar, seized the two serving-men—who, confiding in the power of their master, treated their menaces with contempt—and hanged them before the door of the house in which they had committed the outrage. The equerry, who had also fallen into the hands of the populace, was put upon his trial, and it was only by means of a heavy bribe that the discomfited Maréchal, alarmed by what had taken place, was enabled to induce Picard to withdraw his accusation against him.

At the close of the Conference of Loudun the Court returned to Paris, where the reception of their Majesties was enthusiastic, while that of Marie de Medicis was cold and constrained, although it was well known that M. de Condé had all but obtained the presidency of the Council, and that the Queen-mother had made other concessions which she had previously repelled with considerable haughtiness at Tours; such as granting to the Duc de Longueville the exclusive authority in Picardy, which deprived the Maréchal d'Ancre of his cherished fortresses; while on the other hand, despite the advantages which they had reaped from the weakness of the Government, the discontented nobles had separated in no better spirit. The Ducs de Rohan and de Sully loudly complained that they had been deceived by the Prince; M. de Longueville, who had vainly sought to obtain the government of Normandy, and who was afraid to return to Picardy until convinced that he had nothing to fear from the resentment of the Maréchal d'Ancre, considered himself aggrieved; and such, in short, was the general jealousy and distrust exhibited by the lately coalesced nobles that, with the exception of the Duc de Mayenne and the Maréchal de Bouillon, who found themselves involved in one common interest—that of destroying the influence of the Ducs d'Epernon and de Bellegarde—the whole of the late cabal appeared by mutual consent to have become inimical to each other.

On the arrival of the Court in Paris the seals were taken from the Chancellor, and delivered into the keeping of Guillaume du Vair, who was at that period in his sixtieth year, on the pretext that so important a charge must be oppressive to M. de Sillery at his advanced age; a subterfuge which could not have failed to excite the discontent of the people had they not distrusted his cupidity as much as Marie was wearied of his services. Certain it is, however, that his dismissal occasioned no regret, and was speedily forgotten. Villeroy and Jeannin were the immediate agents of his dismissal from office, as they ascribed to him their own previous discredit at Court, and had long been secretly labouring to repay him in kind; but their triumph was destined to be short-lived. Concini had effected the disgrace of his old and hated rival the Duc d'Epéron; and that feat accomplished, he next resolved to rid himself of the two veteran ministers who were the most formidable stumbling-blocks upon his path of ambition. Aware of the distrustful nature of the Queen-mother, whose experience had made her suspicious of all by whom she was surrounded, he at once decided upon his plan of action; and it was not long ere he induced her to believe that they had acted in the interests of the Prince de Condé, rather than her own, during the Conference of Loudun; while such plausible proofs did he adduce of this assertion, that once more Marie de Medicis consented to exclude them from the Council.

This was the moment for which the Italian favourite had so long sighed. From the death of Henri IV he had exerted all his energies to overthrow the Princes of the Blood, and to replace the old ministers by creatures of his own; but so hopeless did the attempt appear that more than once he had despaired of ultimate success. Now, however, he found himself pre-eminent; the Queen-mother, harassed and worn-out by the cabals which were incessantly warring against her authority, and threatening her tenure of power, threw herself with eagerness into the hands of the adventurer who owed all to her favour, and implicitly followed his advice, in the hope that she might thus escape the machinations of her enemies. Mangot, whose devotion to the Maréchal d'Ancre was notorious, was appointed Secretary of State, in which dignity he replaced M. de Puisieux; while the administration of finance was conferred upon M. Barbin, although Jeannin nominally retained office.

While these changes were convulsing the Cabinet, irritating the great nobles, and exciting the apprehensions of all those who desired the welfare of the nation, the young sovereigns, whom they more immediately concerned, were either ignorant or careless of their consequences. The girl-Queen, surrounded by her Spanish attendants, spent her time in the enjoyment of the pleasures congenial to her age. According to Madame de Motteville, she was strikingly handsome, but rather Austrian than Spanish in her style of beauty, with an abundance of fair hair which she wore in ringlets about her face. On her arrival in France she retained the national costume; and discarding the tapestried chests common at the period, made use of a pile of cushions as her seat. The Marquise de Morny (quoted by Madame de Motteville) described her on the occasion of her own presentation as reclining upon this Moorish sofa in the midst of her attendants, habited in a dress of green satin embroidered with gold and silver, with large hanging sleeves looped together at intervals by diamond buttons; a close ruff, and a small cap of green velvet with a black heron-feather.

At once regal and elegant as such a costume must have been, it is deplorable to contrast it with those which she adopted in after-years, when the most monstrous caprices were permitted at her Court; and when it was by no means uncommon to see women of the highest rank, about to ride on horseback, present themselves in the royal circle in dresses reaching only to the knee, with their legs encased in tight pantaloons of velvet, or even in complete *haut-de-chausses*; while the habitual attire of the sex was equally *bizarre* and exaggerated. There were the *vasquines* or rollers which encircled the waist and extended the folds of the petticoats, thus giving additional smallness to the waist; the *brassards-à-chevrons* or metallic braces for expanding the sleeves; and the *affiquet* of pearls or diamonds coquettishly attached to the left breast, and entitled the *assassin*. Added to these absurdities there were, moreover, bows of ribbon, each of which had its appropriate name and position; the *galant* was placed on the summit of the head; the *mignon* on the heart; the *favori* under and near the *assassin*; and the *badin* on the handle of the fan. Short curls upon the temples were designated *cavaliers*; ringlets were *garçons*; while a hundred other inanities of the same description compelled the

great ladies of the period to adopt a slang which was perfectly unintelligible to all save the initiated; and when we add to these details the well-authenticated fact that the royal apartments were fumigated with powdered tobacco (then a recent and costly importation into France), in lieu of the perfumes which had previously been in use for the same purpose, it will scarcely be denied that caprice rather than taste dictated the habits of the Court under Louis XIII.

To revert, however, to the earlier years of Anne of Austria, it would appear that the troubles of the royal bride did not await her womanhood. Like Marie de Medicis, she clung to all which appeared to link her to her distant home, and caused her to forget for a time that it was hers no longer; and under this impulse it was by no means surprising that she attached herself with girlish affection to the individuals by whom she had been followed in her splendid exile; but even as her predecessor had been compelled to forego the society of her native attendants, so was Anne of Austria in her turn deprived of the solace of their presence. With the exception of Doña Estefania, her first waiting-woman, to whom she was tenderly attached, and who had been about her person from her infancy, all were dismissed by Marie de Medicis, who, anxious to retain her authority over the wife of her son, dreaded the influence of Anne's Spanish followers.

Nor was this her only disappointment. We have already shown with what eagerness she looked forward to her first meeting with her intended bridegroom, whose grave but manly beauty so fully realized all her hopes that, as she ingeniously confessed, she could have loved him tenderly had he possessed a heart to bestow upon her in return. But she soon discovered that such was not the case; and that Louis XIII saw in her nothing more interesting than a Princess who was worthy by her rank and quality to share with him the throne of France.

This was a sad discovery for a lovely girl of fifteen years of age, who had anticipated nothing less than devotion on the part of a young husband by whom she had been so eagerly met on her arrival; nor did she fail to contrast his coldness with the ill-disguised admiration of many of his great nobles, and to weep over the wreck of her fondest and fairest visions. But, young and high-spirited, she struggled against the isolation of soul to which she was condemned; and probably resented with more bitterness the coercion to which she was subjected by the iron rule of her royal mother-in-law than even the coldness of the husband to whom she had been prepared to give up her whole heart.

Louis, on his side, although the sovereign of a great nation, was also exposed to privations; merely physical, it is true, but still sufficiently irritating to increase his natural moroseness and discontent. While the Maréchal d'Ancre displayed at Court a profusion and splendour which amounted to insolence, the young King was frequently without the means of indulging the mere caprices common to his age; but although he murmured, and even at times appeared to resent the neglect with which he was treated, he easily consoled himself amid the puerile sports in which he frittered away his existence; and attended by De Luynes and his brothers, found constant occupation in waging war against small birds, and in training their captors. In such pursuits he was moreover encouraged by the Queen-mother and her favourites; who, anxious to retain their power, did not make any effort to awaken him to a sense of what he owed to himself and to the kingdom over which he had been called upon to rule. The only occasions upon which he appeared to feel the slightest pleasure in the society of his beautiful young wife was when he engaged her to share in his rides and hawking-parties, in order to excite her admiration of his skill, an admiration of which Anne was lavish, as she trusted by flattering his vanity to awaken his affection; while she moreover enjoyed, with all the zest of girlhood, so agreeable an escape from the etiquette and formalities of a Court life.

The treaty of Loudun was no sooner concluded than the revolted nobles separated, each dissatisfied with the other, and all murmuring at the insufficiency of the recompense by which their several concessions had been met. The Prince de Condé, on his convalescence, withdrew to Berry, which government had been given to him in exchange for that of Guienne; Sully retired to Poitou, and the Duc de Rohan returned to La Rochelle; while of all the lately disaffected leaders the Maréchal de Bouillon and the Duc de Mayenne alone proceeded to

Court, in order to claim the immunities promised in requital of their secession from the interests of the Prince de Condé. The King and the two Queens were residing at the Louvre on their arrival, where they had every reason to be satisfied with their reception; and the Maréchal d'Ancre, who, terrified by the undisguised hostility of the Parisians, had not ventured to accompany his royal mistress, no sooner ascertained the return of the two nobles to the capital than he hastened to make them the most brilliant offers in the event of their consenting to espouse his interests. Neither the Maréchal nor the Duke were, however, disposed to second his views, and only profited by his advances to swell the ranks of his enemies. This was a task of comparatively slight difficulty, as all classes in the kingdom considered themselves aggrieved by his unparalleled prosperity; and thus, ere long, the Duc de Guise was prevailed upon to join the new cabal, into which it was only further deemed necessary to enlist M. de Condé. Bouillon, who possessed great influence over the Prince, exerted himself strenuously to prevent his return to Court, in order to increase his own consequence in the estimation of the Queen-mother; but his efforts proved ineffectual, as M. de Condé believed it to be more compatible with his own interests to effect a reconciliation with the Crown; and, acting upon this impression, he pledged himself to support Concini, on condition that he should be appointed chief of the Council of Finance, and take a share in the government. His proposal was accepted, and to the great annoyance of M. de Bouillon, the Prince once more appeared at Court. His reception by the citizens was, however, so enthusiastic that Marie de Medicis became alarmed, until she was assured by Richelieu, then the open and zealous ally of the Maréchal d'Ancre, that the King had nothing to fear from a popularity which would only tend to render M. de Condé a more efficient ally; an assurance which afforded so much gratification to the Queen-mother, that she repaid it by appointing the Bishop of Luçon Almoner to the young Queen, and shortly afterwards Councillor of State.

Ten days subsequently to the return of M. de Condé to Paris a new embassy arrived from James I., to renew the negotiation of marriage between the Prince of Wales and Madame Christine de France, upon which occasion the Court of Louis XIII displayed all its magnificence, without, however, eclipsing that of the English nobles to whom the embassy had been entrusted. The hôtel of the late Queen Marguerite was prepared for their reception, where they were visited by all the great nobles and foreign ministers; and finally, on the following Sunday, they were received in state at the Louvre. Lord Hay (afterwards Earl of Carlisle) was the accredited ambassador; while Mr. Rich (subsequently Lord Holland), Goring, and other individuals of mark contributed to increase the splendour and importance of his mission.

Nothing could be more sumptuous than the spectacle which was presented by the Louvre upon this occasion. The halls and galleries were alike thronged by all that was noble and beautiful at the Court of France. Princes of the Blood, nobles, marshals, and prelates were mingled with the great ladies of the household in their state dresses, rustling in silks, velvets, and cloth of gold and silver, and glittering with diamonds. Amid this galaxy of magnificence the Queen-mother shone conspicuous. Still remarkable for her stately beauty and dignified deportment, she had left no means untried to enhance their effect, and she had been eminently successful. She was attired in a long robe of amaranth velvet, of which the wide and open sleeves were slashed with white satin, and looped together by large pearls, save at the wrists and elbows, where they were fastened by immense brilliants. Her ruff of rich Alençon lace rose half a foot in height at the back of her neck, whence it decreased in breadth until it reached her bosom, which was considerably exposed, according to the fashion of the period. A coronet of diamonds surmounted her elaborately curled hair, which was drawn back, so as to exhibit in its full dimensions her broad and lofty brow; and the most costly jewels were scattered over her whole attire, which gave back their many-coloured lights at every movement of her person.

The Prince de Joinville, the Ducs de Guise and d'Elboeuf, the Marquises de Rosny and de Créquy, and M. de Bassompierre, accompanied by a numerous train of nobles, escorted the English envoys to the palace; while more than fifty thousand persons crowded the streets through which the glittering train was compelled to pass.

During the following week Paris was the scene of perpetual gaiety and splendour. All the Princes and great nobles vied with each other in the magnificence of the balls, banquets, and other entertainments which were given in honour of their distinguished guests. Presents of considerable value were exchanged; and the British Ambassador had every reason to anticipate the favourable termination of his mission; but subsequent circumstances compelled him to abstain from seeking a definite reply.

The arrival of M. de Condé in Paris, and the pledge given by that Prince to support him with his influence, determined Concini once more to hazard his own return to the capital under the escort of Bassompierre; but he found the popular irritation still so great against him, that when he visited the Prince he was accompanied by a suite of a hundred horse. His reception by his new ally was, moreover, less cordial than he had hoped; for Condé had already begun to regret his promise, and to feel apprehensive that by upholding the interests of the Italian favourite he should lose his own popularity. He also believed that the amount of power which he had at length succeeded in securing must render him independent of such a coalition; and he resolved to seize the earliest opportunity of impressing upon Concini the unpalatable fact.

This opportunity soon presented itself. On the 14th of August the Prince gave a banquet to the English envoy, which was attended by all the principal nobility of the Court, but from which the Maréchal d'Ancre had been excluded. While the guests were still at table, however, Concini, on the pretext of paying his respects to Lord Hay, entered the banqueting-hall, attended by thirty of those gentlemen of his household whom he arrogantly called his *conios di mille franchi*.

He had no sooner seated himself than Mayenne, Bouillon, and others of the cabal which had been formed against him proposed that so favourable an opportunity should not be lost of taking his life, and thus ridding the country of the incubus by which it had so long been oppressed in the person of an insolent foreigner; but the project was no sooner communicated to M. de Condé than he imperatively forbade all violence beneath his own roof. Meanwhile Concini, although he did not fail to perceive by what was taking place about him that he had placed himself in jeopardy by thus braving his enemies, nevertheless maintained the most perfect self-possession, and was suffered to depart in safety. On the following morning, however, he received a communication from the Prince, who, after assuring him that he had experienced great difficulty in restraining the Princes and nobles into whose presence he had forced himself on the preceding day from executing summary justice upon him in order to avenge their several wrongs; and that they had, moreover, threatened to abandon his own cause should he persist in according his protection to an individual whom they were resolved to pursue even to the death, concluded by declaring that it would thenceforward be impossible for him to maintain the pledge which he had given, and advising him to lose no time in retiring to Normandy, of which province he was lieutenant-general.

Although exasperated by the bad faith of M. de Condé, Concini was nevertheless compelled to follow this interested suggestion; but, before he left the field open to his enemies, he resolved to strike a parting blow; and he had accordingly no sooner dismissed the messenger of the Prince than he proceeded to the Louvre, where, while taking leave of the Queen-mother, he eagerly impressed upon her that she was alike deceived by Condé and trifled with by Bouillon, and that all the members of their faction were agreed to divest her of her authority; an attempt of which the result could only be averted by the seizure of their persons.

It is probable, however, that, even despite the avowed abandonment of the Prince de Condé, Concini might have hesitated to quit his post had not the affair of Picard convinced him that his prosperity had reached its climax. Even the Queen-mother, indignant as she expressed herself at the insult to which he had been subjected, betrayed no inclination to resent it; and so entire was his conviction that his overthrow was at hand, that there can be no doubt but that thenceforward he began seriously to meditate a return to his own country.

Nearly at the moment in which the Maréchal d'Ancre was thus unexpectedly compelled to leave Paris, his untiring enemy the Duc de Longueville made himself master of the three towns of Péronne, Roye, and Montdidier in Picardy, which, by the Treaty of Loudun, had been secured to Concini. Publicly the Princes blamed this violation of the treaty, and exhorted the Duke to relinquish his conquests; but being in reality delighted that places of this importance, and, moreover, so immediately in the neighbourhood of the capital, should be in the possession of one of their own allies, they privately sent him both men and money to enable him to retain them.

Meanwhile Marie de Medicis made no effort to compel the restitution of the captured towns; the insult to which Concini had been subjected by Picard remained unavenged, and the Italian could no longer conceal from himself that he had outlived his fortunes. It is scarcely doubtful, moreover, that, with the superstition common to the period, the prediction of Luminelli had pressed heavily upon his mind; as from that period he became anxious to abandon the French Court, and to retire with his enormous wealth to his native city. It was in vain, however, that he sought to inspire Leonora with the same desire; in vain that he represented the prudence of taking the initiative while there was yet time; the foster-sister of Marie de Medicis peremptorily refused to leave Paris, alleging that it would be cowardly to abandon her royal mistress at a period when she was threatened alike by the ambition of the Prince de Condé and the enmity of De Luynes, whose power over the mind of the young sovereign was rapidly making itself felt.

At this precise moment a new and grave misfortune tended to augment the eagerness of the Maréchal d'Ancre to carry out his project. His daughter, through whose medium he had looked to form an alliance with some powerful family, and thus to fortify his own position, was taken dangerously ill, and in a few days breathed her last. His anguish was ungovernable; and while his wife wept in silence beside the body of her dead child, he, on the contrary, abandoned himself to the most vehement exclamations, strangely mingling his expressions of fear for his future fate with regret for the loss which he had thus sustained. "Signore," he replied vehemently to Bassompierre, who vainly attempted to console him, "I am lost; Signore, I am ruined; Signore, I am miserable. I regret my daughter, and shall do so while I live; but I could support this affliction did I not see before me the utter ruin of myself, my wife, my son, and my whole house, in the obstinacy of Leonora. Were you not aware of my whole history I should perhaps be less frank, but you know that when I arrived in France, far from owning a single sou, my debts amounted to eight hundred crowns; now we possess more than a million in money, with landed property and houses in France, three hundred thousand crowns at Florence, and a similar sum in Rome. I do not speak of the fortune accumulated by my wife; but surely we may be satisfied to exist for the remainder of our lives upon the proceeds of our past favour. Had you not been well informed as to my previous life I might seek to disguise it from you, but you cannot have forgotten that you saw me at Florence steeped in debauchery, frequently in prison, more than once in exile, generally without resources, and continually lost in disorder and excess. Here, on the contrary, I have acquired alike honour, wealth, and favour, and I would fain disappoint my enemies by leaving the country without disgrace; but the Maréchale is impracticable; and were it not that I should be guilty of ingratitude in separating my fortunes from those of a woman to whom I owe all that I possess, I would forthwith leave the country and secure my own safety and that of my son."

The allusion made by Concini to the growing ambition of the Prince de Condé was unfortunately not destitute of foundation; and suspicions were rapidly gaining ground that he meditated nothing less than a transfer of the crown of France to his own brow, on the pretext that the marriage of Henri IV with the Tuscan Princess was invalid, his former wife being still alive, and his hand, moreover, solemnly pledged to the Marquise de Verneuil. On more than one occasion, when he had feasted his friends, their glasses had been emptied amid cries of *Barre à bas*; a toast which was interpreted as intended to signify the suppression of the bar sinister which the shield of Condé bore between its three *fleurs-de-lis*. Neither Sully, who had recently returned to Court, nor the Duc de Guise could be induced to join in so criminal a faction; and the former had no sooner been informed of the dangerous position of the King than, dissatisfied as he was with the treatment which he had personally received, he demanded

Marie de Medicis

an audience of the young sovereign and his mother, in order to warn them of their peril. In vain, however, did Marie, touched by this proof of loyal devotedness, urge him to suggest a remedy.

"I am no longer in office, Madame," he replied proudly; "and you have your chosen counsellors about you. I have done my duty, and leave it to others to do theirs."

He then made his parting obeisance, and had already reached the door of the apartment, leaving the Queen-mother in a state of agitation and alarm which she made no effort to disguise, when, suddenly pausing upon the threshold, he once more turned towards her, saying impressively:

"Sire, and you, Madame, I beg your Majesties to reflect upon what I have said; my conscience is now at rest. Would to God that you were in the midst of twelve hundred horse; I can see no other alternative." And without awaiting any reply, he then withdrew.

The advice of the veteran minister appeared, however, to the friends of the Queen-mother too dangerous to be followed. France had so recently been delivered from the horrors of a civil war that it was deemed inexpedient to provoke its renewal by any hostile demonstration on the part of the Crown; while, moreover, the popularity of Condé was so notorious that no doubt could be entertained of his success should the *ultima ratio regum* be adopted. His influence was alike powerful with all classes; the people were unanimous in his cause; the Princes and great nobles were his zealous adherents; and since his entrance into the Council as its president, not content with dividing his authority with the Queen-mother, he had gradually absorbed it in his own person. His hôtel was crowded by those who formerly thronged the apartments of the Louvre; all who had demands to make, or remonstrances to offer, addressed themselves to him only; and thus he had become too dangerous an enemy to be lightly opposed.

Under these circumstances it appeared impossible to proceed openly against him, while it was equally essential to deliver the Crown from so formidable an adversary; his arrest offered the only opportunity of effecting so desirable a result, but even to accomplish this with safety was by no means easy. In his own house he was surrounded by friends and adherents who would have rendered such an attempt useless; and after mature deliberation it was accordingly agreed that he must be made prisoner in the Louvre.

Under a specious pretext the Swiss Guards were detained in the great court of the palace; the Marquis de Thémines undertook to demand the sword of the Prince, and to secure his person, volunteering at the same time to procure the assistance of his two sons, and seven or eight nobles upon whose fidelity he could rely; arms were introduced into one of the apartments of the Queen-mother in a large chest, which was understood to contain costly stuffs from Italy; and a number of the youngest and most distinguished noblemen of the Court, to whom Marie appealed for support, took a solemn oath of obedience to her behests, without inquiring into the nature of the service to which they were thus pledged.

All being in readiness, Bassompierre was awakened at three o'clock in the morning of the 1st of September by a gentleman of the Queen-mother's household, and instructed to proceed immediately to the Louvre in disguise. On his arrival he found Marie only half-dressed, seated between Mangot and Barbin, and evidently in a state of extraordinary agitation and excitement. As he entered the apartment she said hurriedly:

"You are welcome, Bassompierre. You do not know why I have summoned you so early; I will shortly explain my reason."

Then, rising from her seat, she paced to and fro across the floor for nearly half an hour, no one venturing to break in upon her reverie. Suddenly, however, she paused, and beckoning to her companions to follow her, she entered her private closet; and the hangings no sooner fell behind the party than, turning once more towards him, she continued with bitter vehemence:

Marie de Medicis

"I am about to arrest the Prince, together with the Ducs de Vendôme, de Mayenne, and de Bouillon. Let the Swiss Guards be on the spot by eleven o'clock as I proceed to the Tuileries, for should I be compelled by the people to leave Paris, I wish them to accompany me to Nantes. I have secured my jewels and forty thousand golden crowns, and I shall take my children with me, if—which I pray God may not be the case, and as I do not anticipate—I find myself under the necessity of leaving the capital; for I am resolved to submit to every sort of peril and inconvenience rather than lose my own authority or endanger that of the King."

The final arrangements were then discussed, and Marie de Medicis was left to her own thoughts until the hour of eight, when M. de Thémines was announced.

"Ha! you are come at length," she exclaimed joyfully; "I was awaiting you with impatience. The Council is about to open, and it is time that we were all prepared. Can you depend on those by whom you are accompanied?"

"They are my sons, Madame."

"Bravely answered!" said Marie forcing a smile, as she extended her hand, which the Marquis raised to his lips. "Go then, and remember that the fate of France and of her monarch are in your keeping."

Although surrounded by devoted friends, the Queen-mother was agitated by a thousand conflicting emotions. She was well aware that her own future existence as a Queen hung upon the success or failure of her enterprise, as should the slightest indiscretion on the part of any of her agents arouse the suspicions of the Prince and induce him to leave the capital, he had every prospect of obtaining the crown. Moreover, MM. de Créquy and de Bassompierre, who were in command of the French and Swiss Guards, and who had received orders to draw up their men in order of battle at the great gate of the Louvre immediately that the Prince should have entered, and to arrest him did he attempt to leave the palace, became alarmed at the responsibility thus thrust upon them, and declined to comply with these instructions until they had received a warrant to that effect under the great seal; but this demand having been conceded, they hesitated no longer. All the precautions which had been taken nevertheless failed in some degree in their effect, as the Duc de Mayenne and the Maréchal de Bouillon were apprised by their emissaries of the unusual movements of the Court, and at once adopted measures of safety. Bouillon feigned an indisposition, and refused to leave his hotel, where, after a long interview with the Duke, it was resolved that Condé should be warned not to trust himself in the power of the Queen-mother. The Prince, however, who had been lulled into false security by the specious representations of Barbin, treated their caution with contempt, being unable to believe that Marie would venture to attempt any violence towards himself.

"If there be indeed any hostile intention on the part of the Crown," he said disdainfully, "it probably regards M. de Bouillon, whose restless spirit excites the alarm of the Queen-mother. Let him look to himself, if he see fit to do so. Should he be committed to the Bastille my interests will not suffer."

Angered by his presumption, the two friends made no further protest, but contented themselves with redoubling their own precautions. Bouillon retired to Charenton with a strong escort, while the Duc de Mayenne remained quietly in his hôtel, having made the necessary preparations for instant flight should such a step become essential to his safety.

Meanwhile at the Louvre nothing remained to be done but to communicate to the young King the project which was about to be realized, and to induce him to sanction it by his countenance; an attempt which offered little difficulty, the jealousy of Louis having been excited by the assumed authority of the Prince, and his dissimulating nature being gratified by this first participation in a state intrigue.

At ten o'clock a great clamour upon the quay near the gate of the palace attracted the attention of the Queen-mother, who commanded silence, and in another moment distinct cries of "Long live the Prince!" "Long live M. de Condé!" were heard in the apartment. Marie de

Marie de Medicis

Medicis rose from her seat and approached an open window, followed by the Maréchale d'Ancre.

"The Prince is about to open the Council," said Leonora with a bitter smile.

"Rather say the King of France," replied Marie with a flushed cheek, as she saw Condé graciously receiving the petitions which were tendered to him on all sides. "But his royalty shall be like that of the bean; it shall not last long."

When he alighted at the palace Condé proceeded to the hall of the Council, which was on the ground-floor; and at the termination of the sitting ascended, as was his custom, to the apartments of the Queen-mother, where Louis, who had entered eagerly into the part that had been assigned to him, and who had just distributed with his own hands the arms which had been prepared for the followers of M. de Thémynes, met him in the gallery, entered into a cheerful conversation, and, finally, invited him to join a hawking-party which was to take place within an hour. Condé, however, whose thoughts were otherwise engaged, declined to participate in the offered pastime, and the young King, having accomplished all that had been required of him, accepted his excuses, and returned to the apartment of his mother. At the same moment Thémynes and his two sons issued from a small passage, and, approaching the Prince, announced that they had received an order to arrest him.

"Arrest me!" exclaimed Condé in astonishment. "It is impossible!"

"Such are my instructions," said the Marquis, as he extended his hand to receive the forfeited sword, while his two sons placed themselves on each side of the prisoner. "You are aware that I am the first Prince of the Blood."

"I know, Monseigneur, the respect which is your due," was the reply, "but I must obey the King."

"I must see their Majesties," persisted the Prince.

"It is impossible. Come, sir, suffer me to conduct you to the apartment to which I have been directed to escort you."

"How!" vehemently exclaimed Condé, looking round upon the nobles who were collected in the hall of which he had just reached the entrance, "is there no one here who has sufficient courage to spare me this outrage? You, Monsieur," he continued, addressing himself to Du Vair, "you at least I know to be a man of probity. Did you counsel this violation of all the solemn promises which have been made to me?"

"I was not consulted upon the subject, Monseigneur," replied the Keeper of the Seals; "nor shall it be my fault if so grievous an error be not speedily redeemed. The more brief the folly the better the result."

This imprudent retort was destined to seal the disgrace of the upright minister without serving the Prince, who, seeing that he had nothing to anticipate from any demonstration on the part of the assembled nobles, haughtily desired his captor to conduct him to his allotted prison. "And when you have done so," he added in a firm voice, as he swept the apartment with an eye as bright and as steady as though he had not stood there unarmed and a captive, "you may tell the Queen-mother that she has anticipated me only by three days, for had she waited beyond that time, the King would no longer have had a crown upon his head."

The Prince was then conducted by a back staircase to an upper chamber strongly barred, where he remained guarded by M. de Thémynes until he was conveyed to the Bastille.

The exultation of Marie de Medicis was at its height. She embraced her son as fervently as though by the imprudence of which she had just been guilty she had ensured the security of his throne, and received the congratulations of the courtiers with undisguised delight. "See, Sire," she exclaimed, as with one hand resting upon the shoulder of the young King she advanced to the centre of the great hall, "here is our brave M. de Thémynes, to whom we are so

Marie de Medicis

greatly indebted. Can you not offer him a royal recompense? He is not yet a Marshal of France."

"I salute you, M. le Maréchal," said Louis with regal gravity. "In an hour I will sign your brevet."

M. de Thémynes bowed low, and kissed the hand of the King.

"And I," smiled Marie de Medicis, "present you with a hundred thousand crowns. Your elder son [pg 367] the Marquis de Thémynes is henceforth captain of my bodyguard, and your younger the Baron de Lauzière equerry of Monsieur."

Again the captor of M. de Condé bent low and uttered his acknowledgments.

Low murmurs were heard among the nobles.

"Advance, M. de Montigny," continued Marie, turning graciously towards an individual who had only just reached the capital, having on his way provided the Duc de Vendôme with a relay of horses in order to facilitate his escape. "Sire, the Comte de Montigny was a faithful and devoted follower of your father. You owe him also some mark of favour."

"M. de Montigny shall be a marshal," said Louis XIII, delighted with his new and unchecked exhibition of power.

"It would appear that to ask a *bâton* is to have one on this occasion," said M. de Saint-Géran in a low voice to the Marquis de Créquy; "let us therefore put in our claim."

"With all my heart," replied the Marquis gaily. "The ladies do not refuse us their smiles, nor the Queen-mother the festivities in her honour by which we impoverish our estates; why, therefore, should the King deprive us of our share of the easily-won distinctions of the day?" So saying, the two courtiers moved a pace nearer to Marie de Medicis, who did not fail to observe and to comprehend the action.

"Happy is the monarch who sees himself surrounded by loyal subjects and by faithful friends," pursued the exulting Princess; "your Majesty has not yet completed the good work so royally commenced?"

"M. de Créquy has already a *bâton*," said Louis, somewhat bewildered by the new part he was called upon to enact on so large a scale.

"But you have forgotten, Sire, that he is neither duke nor peer."

"I salute you, M. le Duc et Pair," said the young King.

The Marquis acknowledged his new honours, and made way for his companion.

"Our list of marshals is full, M. de Saint-Géran," said Louis coldly.

The disappointed courtier bowed, and was about to retire, when Marie de Medicis met his eye, and its expression was far from satisfactory.

"MM. de Praslin and de Saint-Géran have both, nevertheless, merited high distinction, Sire," she said anxiously. "Your pledge for the future will suffice, however, as they are both young enough to wait."

"Be it so, Madame," rejoined her son, who was becoming weary of the rapacity of his loyal subjects and faithful friends. "Gentlemen, your services shall not be forgotten on the next vacancy." And thus, as Bassompierre has recorded, did M. de Saint-Géran "extort the promise" of a *bâton*.

"And you, M. de Bassompierre," exclaimed the Queen-mother, as in advancing up the hall their Majesties found themselves beside him, "unlike the others, you have put in no claim."

"Madame," was the dignified reply, "it is not at such a moment as this, when we have merely done our duty, that we should seek for reward; but I trust that when by some important

Marie de Medicis

service I may deserve to be remembered, the King will grant me both wealth and honours without any claim upon my own part."

Louis hesitated for a moment, and then, with a slight bow, passed on; and he had no sooner entered his private closet, still accompanied by his mother, than a herald announced in a loud voice that a great public council would be held on the following day at the meeting of the Parliament.

It might well be imagined that when she retired Marie de Medicis left grateful hearts behind her, but such was not the case; lavish as she had proved upon this occasion, she was far from having satisfied those who had assisted in the arrest of the Prince, and who did not fail openly to express their discontent.

During this time the Dowager-Princess of Condé had been apprised of the arrest of her son; and, maddened by the intelligence, she had immediately rushed out of her house on foot, and hurried to the Pont Neuf, crying as she went, "To arms! To arms!"

"It is Madame de Nemours!" shouted the crowd which gathered about her. "Long live Madame de Nemours!"

"Long live Madame de Nemours!" echoed a voice, which was immediately recognized as that of the shoemaker Picard, who had, since his insult to the Maréchal d'Ancre, been the idol of the mob. "Concini has assassinated the first Prince of the Blood in the Louvre!"

Even this announcement, however, failed in the effect which had been anticipated by the Princess, whose object was to accomplish the rescue of her son; for while the respectable citizens hastened to close their shops and to place their families in safety, the lower orders rushed towards the hôtel of the Maréchal d'Ancre in the Faubourg St. Germain. The doors were driven in, furniture and valuables to the amount of two hundred thousand crowns were destroyed, and lighted torches were applied to the costly hangings of the apartments, which soon caused the carved and gilded woodwork to ignite; while a portion of the mob at the same time attacked the house of Corbinelli his secretary; and soon the two residences presented only a mass of bare and blackened walls. M. de Liancourt, the Governor of Paris, opposed his authority in vain; he was hooted, driven back, and finally compelled to retire. Couriers were despatched to the Louvre to inform the Queen-mother of the popular tumult, but no orders were issued in consequence; the counsellors of Marie de Medicis deeming it desirable that the populace should be permitted to expend their violence upon the property of Concini, rather than turn their attention to the rescue of the Prince, until the public excitement had abated.

The arrest of M. de Condé had alarmed all the leaders of the late faction, who hastened to secure their own safety. Bouillon, as we have stated, had already reached Charenton; and the Duc de Vendôme had fled in his turn on learning that all egress from the Louvre was forbidden, and that the outlets of the palace were strongly guarded. M. de Mayenne, who had hitherto remained in the capital, awaiting the progress of events, followed his example attended by a strong party of his friends. The Duc de Guise and the Prince de Joinville, alarmed lest they should be involved in the ruin of Condé through the machinations of Concini, with whom they were at open feud, hastened to Soissons, in order to join M. de Mayenne, whither they were shortly followed by the young Count and his mother; and, finally, the Duc de Nevers, who had indulged in a vain dream of rendering himself master of the Turkish empire through the medium of the Greeks, by declaring himself to be a descendant of the Paleologi, suddenly halted on his way to Germany, and declared himself determined to join the new faction of the Princes. These defections created a great void at the Louvre, but the Queen-mother disdained to express her mortification; and, on the contrary, affected the most entire confidence in the nobles who still maintained their adherence to the Crown.

She was well aware that Condé had lost much of his popularity by abandoning the interests of the people at the Treaty of Loudun, and that the Protestants similarly resented the selfishness with which he had sacrificed their cause to his ambition; while she had, moreover, ascertained that the flight of the Duc de Guise and his brother had been simply induced by misrepresentation, and that through the medium of the females of their family they might

Marie de Medicis

readily be recalled. These circumstances gave her courage; and when, on the morning of the 2nd of September, she came to the council of war, which was held in the Augustine Monastery and presided over by the Maréchal de Brissac, accompanied by her two sons, she remarked with undisguised gratification that more than two thousand nobles were already assembled. When the King, the Queen-mother, Monsieur, the great dignitaries, and the ministers had taken their seats, the doors were thrown open to all who chose to enter; and in a few moments the vast hall was densely crowded. Silence was then proclaimed; M. de Brissac declared that the session was open, and the President Jeannin forthwith commenced reading, in the name of the King, the celebrated declaration explaining the arrest of the Prince de Condé; proclaiming him a traitor, and, finally, promising a free pardon to all who had aided and abetted him in his disloyal practices, on condition of their appearing within fifteen days to solicit the mercy of his Majesty, in default of which concession they would be involved in the same accusation of *lèse-majesté*.

More than once, during the delivery of this discourse, many of the nobles who were attached to the faction of the Princes gave utterance to a suppressed murmur; but it was not until its close that they openly and vociferously expressed their dissatisfaction. Then, indeed, the hall became a scene of confusion and uproar which baffles all description; voice was heard above voice; the clang of weapons as they were struck against the stone floor sounded ominously; and the terrified young King, after glancing anxiously towards De Luynes, who returned his look by another quite as helpless, fastened his gaze upon his mother as if from her alone he could hope for protection. Nor was his mute appeal made in vain, for although an expression of anxiety could be traced upon the noble features of Marie de Medicis, they betrayed no feeling of alarm. She was pale but calm, and her eyes glanced over the assembly as steadily as though she herself played no part in the drama which was enacting before her. For a few moments she remained motionless, as if absorbed in this momentous scrutiny; but ultimately she turned and uttered a few words in a low voice to Bassompierre, who was standing immediately behind her; and she had no sooner done so than, accompanied by M. de Saint-Géran, the captain of the King's Guard, he left the hall. In an instant afterwards both officers re-appeared, followed by a company of halberdiers, who silently took up their position in the rear of the sovereign and his mother; and the Queen no sooner saw the gleam of their lances than she caused it to be intimated to the President Jeannin that she desired to address the meeting.

When her purpose was communicated to the assembly silence was by degrees restored; and then the clear, full voice of Marie de Medicis was heard to the furthest recesses of the vast apartment.

"Nobles and gentlemen," she said with a gesture of quiet dignity, "as Regent of France I have also a right to speak on an occasion of this importance; for since the death of Henry the Great, my lord and husband, it is I who have constantly borne the burthen of the Crown. You know, one and all, how many obstacles I have had to oppose, how many intrigues to frustrate, how many dangers to overcome. An intestine war throughout the kingdom; disaffection alike in Paris and in the provinces; and amid all these struggles for the national welfare, I had to combat a still more gnawing anxiety. I had to watch over the safety of the King my son, and that of the other Children of France; and never, gentlemen, for one hour, did my dignity as a Queen cause me to forget my tenderness as a mother. I might have been sustained in this daily struggle—I might have found strong arms and devoted hearts to share in my toils, and in my endeavours—but that these have too often failed me, I need scarcely say. Thus, then, if any among you complain of the past, they accuse me, for the King my son having delegated his authority to myself can have incurred no blame, nor do I wish to transfer it to another. Every enterprise which I have undertaken has had the glory and prosperity of France as its sole aim and object. If I have at times been mistaken in my estimate of the measures calculated to ensure so desirable a result, I have at least never persisted in my error; I have surrounded myself with able and conscientious counsellors; MM. de Villeroy and de Jeannin were chosen by the most ancient and noble families in the kingdom—the Cardinal de la Valette and the Bishop of Luçon-Richelieu are my advisers—the estimable Miron, Provost of Paris, in

Marie de Medicis

conjunction with Barbin represent the *tiers-état*—while as regards the people, I have ever been careful to mete out justice to them with an equal hand."

Marie paused for an instant, and she had no sooner done so than loud shouts echoed through the cloistral arches, as the crowd vociferously and almost unanimously responded, "You have—you have. Long live the Queen!"

"Nor did I limit the sacred duties of my mission here," pursued the Regent; "I had work to do without as well as within the kingdom; and it has not been neglected. I undertook and accomplished a successful negotiation for the marriage of the King my son with the Infanta of Spain; our ancient rival England has become our ally; Germany has learnt to fear us; and the Princes of Italy have bowed their heads before our triumphant banners. Have I not then, gentlemen, consulted in all things the honour of France, and increased her power? Have I not compelled respect where I have failed to secure amity? Can you point to one act of my authority by which the interests of the nation have been compromised, or her character tarnished in the eyes of foreign states? I boldly await your answer. Thus much for our external relations, and now I appeal to your justice; I ask you with equal confidence if, when within the kingdom faction after faction was detected and suppressed, I yielded to any sentiment of undue vengeance? Has not every outbreak of unprovoked disaffection tended to exhibit the forbearance of the King my son and my own? Need I recall the concessions which we have made to those who had sought to injure us? Need I ask you to remember that we have bestowed upon them governments, titles, riches, high offices of state, and every honour which it was in our power to confer? What more then could you require or demand, gentlemen? And yet, when the King my son has pardoned where he might have punished, you have responded by seditious shouts, by wilful disrespect, and even by attempts against his royal person! It was time for him to exert his prerogative, gentlemen,—you have compelled him to assert his power, and yet you murmur! Now, with God's help, we may hope for internal peace. France must have lost her place among the European nations had she been longer permitted to prey upon her own vitals. One individual alone could have condemned her to this self-slaughter, and we have delivered her from the peril by committing that individual to the Bastille."

As the Queen-mother uttered these words her voice was drowned in the universal burst of fury and violence which assailed her on all sides; nobles, citizens, and people alike yelled forth their discontent, but the unquenchable spirit of Marie de Medicis did not fail her even at this terrible moment. Rising with the emergency, she seemed rather to ride upon the storm than to quail beneath it; her eyes flashed fire, a red spot burned upon her cheek, and scorn and indignation might be read upon every feature of her expressive countenance. When the tumult was at its height she rose haughtily from her seat, and striking her clenched hand violently upon the table before her, she exclaimed in a tone of menace: "How now, Counts and Barons! Is it then a perpetual revolt upon which you have determined? When pardon and peace are frankly offered to you, and when both should be as welcome to all good Frenchmen as a calm after a tempest, you reject it? Do you hold words less acceptable than blows? Do you prefer the sword to the hand of friendship? Be it even as you will then. If friendship does not content you we will try the sword, for clemency exerted beyond a certain limit degenerates into weakness. You shall have no reason to deem your rulers either feeble or cowardly. You have here and now defied me, and I accept the defiance. Do you desire to know how I respond? It is thus. In the name of the King my son and in my own, in the name of my offended dignity and in the name of France, I, in my turn, declare the most stringent and unsparing war against rebellion, be it the work of whom it may. Neither high blood nor ancient title shall suffice to screen a traitor; war, war to the death, shall be henceforward my battle-cry against the malcontents who are striving to decimate the nation; and do not delude yourselves with the belief that I shall be single-handed in the struggle, for I will call the people to my aid, and the people will maintain the cause of their sovereigns. We will try our strength at last, and the strife will be a memorable one; our sons shall relate it with awe and terror to their descendants, and it will be a tale of shame which will cleave to your names for centuries to come. Ah, gentlemen, the rule of a woman has rendered you over-bold; and you have forgotten that there have been women who have wielded a sceptre of iron. Look to England—is there no sterner lesson to be learnt there? Or think you that Marie de Medicis fears to emulate Elizabeth? You have mistaken both

yourselves and me. My forbearance has not hitherto grown out of fear; but the lion sometimes disdains to struggle with the tiger, not because he misdoubts his own strength, but because he cares not to lavish it idly. I also feel my strength, and when the fitting moment comes, it shall be put forth. To your war-cry I will answer with my war-cry; to your leaders I will oppose my leaders; and when you shout Condé and Mayenne! I will answer triumphantly Louis de France and Gaston d'Orléans! Draw the sword of rebellion if it be too restless to remain in the scabbard; you will not find me shrink from the flash of steel; and should you take the field I will be there to meet you. Rally your chiefs; the array can have no terrors for me, prepared as I am to confront you with some of the best and the bravest in all France. Deny this if you can, you who seek to undermine the throne, and to sacrifice the nation to your own ambitious egotism, and I will confound you with the names of Guise, Montmorency, Brissac, Sully, Bassompierre, Lesdiguières, Marillac, and Ornano; these, and many more of the great captains of the age, will peal out my war-cry, and rally round the threatened throne of their legitimate sovereign. My son will be in the midst of them; and mark me well, gentlemen, the struggle shall no sooner have commenced than every pampered adventurer who has poisoned the ear of the monarch, and steeled his heart against his mother, shall be crushed under her heel; and should he dare to raise his head, I will assign to him as his armour-bearer the executioner of Paris." Never before had the Regent evinced such an amount of energy; never before had she so laid bare the secret workings of her soul. The adherents of the Princes trembled as they discovered with how formidable an enemy they should be called thenceforward to contend; while the majority of the nobles who were faithful to the royal cause, and above all those whose names she had so proudly quoted, uttered loud acclamations of delight and triumph.

Bewildered by the daring of his mother, Louis once more sought for support from his favourite, but De Luynes was in no position to afford it. The allusion to himself with which Marie de Medicis had concluded her harangue was too palpable to be mistaken, and he felt that should she maintain her purpose he was lost. Even Richelieu, as if crushed beneath the impassioned eloquence of the Regent, sat with drooping head and downcast eyes; and meanwhile Marie herself, after having glanced defiantly over the assembly, calmly resumed her seat, and desired that the business of the meeting might proceed.

Before the sitting closed it was determined that the army should be placed upon the war footing, and that a levy of six thousand Swiss should immediately be made; and this arrangement completed, the Queen-mother proceeded to attempt by every means in her power a reconciliation with the Guises.

For this purpose she despatched four nobles in whom she could confide to Soissons, to negotiate with the Princes, nor was it long ere they ascertained that individual jealousy had tended to create considerable disunion among them; and that each appeared ready, should any plausible pretext present itself, to abandon the others. Under these circumstances it was not difficult to convince the Duc de Guise and his brother that no hostile design had ever been entertained against them, and to induce them to admit their regret at the hasty step which they had taken, together with their anxiety to redeem it. The Duc de Longueville was equally ready to effect his reconciliation with the Court; and having arranged with the royal envoys the terms upon which they consented to return, they were severally declared innocent of all connivance with the rebellious Princes. The Duc de Nevers, however, refused to listen to any compromise with the Crown; and, in defiance of the royal command, continued his endeavours to possess himself of the fortresses of Champagne, which were not comprised in his government.

The persevering disaffection of M. de Nevers occasioned the disgrace of Du Vair, who betrayed an indisposition to proceed against him which so irritated Marie de Medicis that she induced the King to deprive him of the seals, and to bestow them upon Mangot, making Richelieu Secretary of State in his place; that wily prelate having already, by his great talent and ready expedients, rendered himself almost indispensable to his royal patroness. The arrest of the Prince de Condé had restored the self-confidence of Concini, who shortly afterwards returned to Court and resumed his position with an arrogance and pretension more undisguised than ever. The Maréchale, however, had never recovered from the successive shocks to which she had been subjected by the death of her child and the destruction of her

house; but had fallen into a state of discouragement and melancholy which threatened her reason. For days she shut herself up in her apartments, refusing to receive the most intimate of her friends, and complaining that she was bewitched by those who looked at her. Her domestic misery was, moreover, embittered by the public hatred, of which, in conjunction with her husband, she had become more than ever the object. It would appear that the injury already inflicted upon the Italian favourites had stimulated rather than satiated the detestation of the people for both of them. Every grievance under which the lower orders groaned was attributed to the influence of Concini and his wife; they were accused of inciting the Queen-mother to the acts of profusion by which the nation was impoverished; while every disappointment, misfortune, or act of oppression was traced to the same cause. Many affected to believe that Marie was the victim of sorcery, and that such was the real source of the influence of Leonora; and thus the heart-broken mother and unhappy wife, whose morbid imagination had caused her to consider her trials as the result of magical arts, was herself accused of having employed them against her royal benefactress.

The nomination of Richelieu as Secretary of State had been effected through the influence of Concini, who in vain endeavoured to persuade him to resign the bishopric of Luçon, as incompatible with his new duties. The astute prelate had more extended views than those of his patron; nor was it long ere he succeeded in arousing the jealousy of the Maréchal, and in convincing him, when too late, that he had, while endeavouring to further his own fortunes, only raised up a more dangerous and potent enemy than any to whom he had hitherto been opposed. Richelieu had no sooner joined the ministry than he made advances to the ancient allies of Henri IV, whom he regarded as the true friends of France; and for the purpose of conciliating those whose support he deemed most essential to the welfare of the kingdom, he hastened to despatch ambassadors to the Courts of England, Holland, and Germany, who were instructed to explain to the several monarchs to whom they were accredited the reasons which had induced Louis XIII to arrest the Prince de Condé, and to assure them that the measures adopted by the French Court were not induced, as had been falsely represented, by any desire to conciliate either Rome or Spain. To this assurance he subjoined a rapid synopsis of the means employed by the Queen-mother to ensure the peace of the kingdom, and the efforts made by the Prince to disturb it; and, finally, he recapitulated the numerous alliances which had taken place between the royal families of France and Spain during several centuries as an explanation of the close friendship which existed between the two countries. Meanwhile considerable difficulty was experienced in the equipment of the army which had been raised. The royal treasury was exhausted, and in several provinces the revolted nobles had possessed themselves of the public monies; financial edicts were issued which created fresh murmurs among the citizens; the Princes assumed an attitude of stern and steady defiance; and the year 1616 closed amid apprehension, disaffection, and mistrust.

CHAPTER IX

1617

In the month of January the Comte d'Auvergne, who had recently been liberated from the Bastille, was despatched at the head of fourteen thousand men against the insurgent Princes; and his departure was made a pretext for depriving the young King of the gentlemen of his household and of his bodyguard, an insult which he deeply although silently resented. He had been attacked in the November of the preceding year by an indisposition which for a time had threatened the most serious consequences, and from whose latent effects he had not yet recovered. As time wore on, moreover, he was becoming more and more weary of the insignificance to which he was reduced by the delegated authority of his mother; and had easily suffered himself to be persuaded by De Luynes that her repeated offers to resign it had merely been designed to make him feel the necessity of her assistance. As we have already shown, Louis XIII derived little pleasure from the society of his young and lovely wife; he made no friends; and thus he was flung entirely into the power of his wily favourite, who, aware that the King could hate, although he could not love, was unremitting in his endeavours to excite him against Marie de Medicis and her favourite. The infatuated Concini seconded his efforts but too well; for, unable to bear his fortunes meekly, he paraded his riches and his power with an insolence which tended to justify the aversion of his enemies. On one occasion, shortly after the dismemberment of his little Court, the monarch of France having refused to join a hunting-party organized by the Queen-mother, found himself entirely deserted save by De Luynes and a single valet; and overcome by mortification and melancholy, he leant his head upon his hand and wept bitterly. For some time not a sound was heard in the Louvre save the sighing of the wind through the tall trees of the palace-garden, and the measured tread of the sentinels, when suddenly a tumult arose in the great court; the trampling of horses, the voices of men, and the clashing of weapons were blent together; and dashing away his tears, Louis desired his favourite to ascertain the cause of the disturbance.

"It is the Maréchal d'Ancre, Sire, who has just alighted," said De Luynes as he approached the window.

In a few minutes the Italian was announced, and entered the royal apartment followed by a train of forty gentlemen all magnificently attired. At this spectacle Louis started from his seat; and with a bitter smile inquired of the arrogant Marquis his motive for thus parading before his sovereign a state which could only be intended as a satire upon his own privations.

To this question the vainglorious adventurer replied in a tone of affected sympathy and patronage which festered in the heart of the young King; assuring him that his followers were at his own cost, and not at that of the state; and concluding his explanation by an offer of pecuniary aid, and a company of his regiment of Bussy-Zamet, which he had just brought from Normandy. Justly incensed by such an insult, Louis commanded him instantly to quit his presence; and he had no sooner withdrawn, followed by his glittering retinue, than the young monarch sank back upon his seat, and uttered the most bitter complaints of the affront to which he had been subjected. "And to this, Sire," said De Luynes, as he stood beside his royal master—"to this insult, which is but the precursor of many others, you have been subjected by the Queen-mother."

"I will revenge myself!" exclaimed Louis with a sudden assumption of dignity.

"And how?" demanded the favourite emphatically. "You are called a King, but where are your great nobles? where are the officers of your household? where are your barons? So many princes, so many powers. France has no longer a King."

Marie de Medicis

"And my people?" shouted the excited youth.

"You have no people. You are a mere puppet in the hands of an ambitious woman and an unprincipled adventurer."

"A puppet!" echoed Louis haughtily. "Do I not wear the crown of France?"

"So did Charles IX," was the unmoved reply; "yet he died to make way for Henri III. Concini and his wife, Sire, come from the same country as Catherine de Medicis. Isabeau de Bavière was a mother, yet she preferred her lover to her son."

"Enough, enough, Sir," said Louis, clutching the hilt of his sword; "I will hear no more, lest it should make me mad!"

De Luynes bowed in silence; he knew that the poisonous seed was sown, and he was content to wait until it should germinate.

The pecuniary difficulties of the kingdom exercised no influence over the festivities of the Court; balls, banquets, and comedies took place in rapid succession; and the young Queen danced in a ballet which was the admiration of all the spectators; an example which was followed by the nobles of the royal household. Still, however, it was necessary to recruit the national treasury; and, accordingly, on the 10th of March a declaration was published by which the King confiscated all the property of the disaffected Princes, and made it forfeit to the Crown; while at the same time three separate bodies of troops attacked the rebels with complete success, and the royal arms were everywhere triumphant, when intelligence was forwarded to their leaders from the capital which induced an immediate cessation of hostilities.

We have seen the effect of the insolence of Concini, and the insidious inferences of De Luynes, upon the mind of the young King, who had only six months previously been taught a lesson of dissimulation on the occasion of the arrest of Condé; and consequently it can scarcely be subject of surprise that, wounded to the heart's core, he was easily persuaded to exert in his own cause the subtlety which he had evinced at the bidding of another. He was now between fifteen and sixteen years of age, and was deeply imbued by the idea that he possessed an unlimited control alike over the properties, the liberty, the honour, and the lives of his subjects; but he was still utterly incapable of fulfilling his duties as a sovereign. His conceptions of right and wrong were confused and unstable; and he willingly listened to the advice of those whose counsels flattered his selfishness and his resentment. De Luynes had skilfully availed himself of this weakness; and as he was all-powerful with his suspicious and saturnine master, who saw in every one by whom he was approached either an enemy to be opposed, or a spy to be deceived, he was careful to introduce to him none save individuals whose insignificance rendered them incapable of interfering with his own interests, and who might be dismissed without comment or danger whenever he should deem their absence desirable. Against this arrangement neither the Queen-mother nor her ministers entered any protest. Louis truly was, as his favourite had so insolently asserted, a mere puppet in their hands; and the consequence of this undignified neglect was fatal to the intellectual progress of the young sovereign. On the pretext of requiring assistance in training the royal falcons, De Luynes had presented to Louis two young nobles, MM. du Tronçon and de Marcillac, men of good birth, but who had become dishonoured by their own vices; the former being accused of having betrayed his master, and the latter his sisters in order to enrich himself; facts of which the favourite was, however, careful that the King should remain ignorant.

In addition to these disreputable adventurers, De Luynes also introduced to the intimacy of his royal patron Déageant, the principal clerk of Barbin, whom he had won over by promises of aggrandizement should he succeed in effecting the disgrace of Concini, which, as a natural consequence, must also involve that of his master; and, finally, a private soldier, and one of the gardeners of the palace. All these persons were instructed to excite the suspicions of the King against his mother and her ministers, a task in which it was by no means difficult to succeed; particularly when the treacherous Déageant had placed in his hands a number of forged letters, wherein Barbin, at the pretended instigation of Concini, was supposed to

Marie de Medicis

entertain a design against his life, in order not only to prolong the authority of the Queen-mother, but also to ensure the crown to her second and favourite son, Gaston d'Orléans.

Skilfully as De Luynes conducted this affair, and despite the natural dissimulation of Louis XIII, the reiterated assertions and cautions of his familiar associates did not fail to produce an involuntary effect upon his manner and deportment which aroused the suspicions of the Italian; who, with an infatuation almost incredible, instead of endeavouring to conciliate the young King, and to render himself less obnoxious to the people, resolved to make all bow before him, and to break the stubborn spirits that he failed to bend. In this desperate and insane policy he was, moreover, seconded by the counsels of Barbin, whose impetuous temper and anxiety to secure his own safety alike urged him to support any measure which promised to maintain the government in the hands of Marie de Medicis and her favourite, in whose ruin he could not fail to be involved. So intemperately, indeed, did he pursue his purpose, that even Marie herself became alarmed; her most faithful adherents were absent with the army, while she had daily evidence of the activity of her enemies; and more than once at this period she declared her determination to withdraw from all participation in state affairs, and to resign her delegated authority, in order that her son might rule as he saw fit. From this purpose she was, however, constantly dissuaded by Barbin. "Madame," he said on one occasion when the Queen-mother appeared more than ever resolved to follow out her determination, "if you once abandon the administration of government you will cut the throats of your children. Should you cease to rule they will be utterly lost."

No wonder that her tenderness as a mother, joined to her ambition as a Queen, induced Marie de Medicis to yield to the representations of one of her most trusted counsellors, even while the cloud was deepening around her. As the great nobles murmured at the insolence and tyranny of the audacious Italian, their murmurs were echoed by the curses of the people; and in every murmur and in every curse the name of the Queen-mother was coupled with that of Concini and his wife. Even the Maréchal himself at length betrayed tokens of alarm; he never ventured to traverse the streets of Paris without a numerous retinue, and even so attended he cowered beneath the menacing looks and gestures which he encountered on all sides. Again and again he urged Leonora to leave France; but he urged in vain; and finally he resolved to take measures for securing a safe retreat in his government of Normandy, should he be compelled to escape from the capital. As a preliminary and important step towards the accomplishment of this purpose, he caused the fortifications of Quilleboeuf to be put into a state of perfect repair, and endeavoured to purchase the governments of several other places upon the Loire and the Seine; which, had he been enabled to carry out his object, could not have failed to render him independent of the royal authority. He also lavished large sums on every side, in order to secure partisans; and so excited the apprehensions of the citizens that bitter complaints were made, and threats uttered against himself, his royal mistress, and the new ministry.

All these, many of which had been fomented by themselves, were faithfully reported by De Luynes and his agents to the young King, to whom they pointed out the probability of a general insurrection.

"What is to be done?" exclaimed Louis on one occasion; "the Maréchal d'Ancre has, as it would seem, undertaken the ruin of my kingdom, and yet I dare not expostulate with my mother, for I cannot encounter her rage."

This puerile avowal decided the measures of the confederates; and ere long they succeeded in convincing the King that it would be quite possible to accomplish the overthrow of Concini without exposing himself to the anger which he dreaded.

On the 17th of January a royal declaration was confirmed by the Parliament against the Duc de Nevers, who, although not yet in open revolt, was condemned as guilty of rebellion and *lèse-majesté*; and this premature act of severity caused general discontent throughout the capital. In vain did his sister the Dowager Duchess of Longueville and Bentivoglio the Papal Nuncio endeavour to effect his reconciliation with the Court. At the instigation of Richelieu, Concini, and Barbin, Marie de Medicis imperiously refused to revoke the sentence.

Marie de Medicis

"The period of forbearance is gone by," she said coldly in reply to the persevering representations of the prelate. "Indulgence has proved ineffectual hitherto; and it has consequently become imperative upon the King to adopt more rigorous measures. These gentlemen are enacting the petty sovereigns in their respective governments, but I shall take steps to repress their insolence. Things have now been pushed to extremity; and we must either crush these rebellious and restless spirits, or permit the royal authority to be wrested from the sovereign."

Still, aware of the fatal consequences which must result from the uncompromising condemnation of one of the first Princes in the land, Bentivoglio would not be discouraged; and on retiring from the presence of the Queen-mother he reiterated his expostulations to Concini and Richelieu. With them, however, the zealous Nuncio achieved no better success.

"His Majesty," said the Italian Marshal haughtily, "will ere long possess an army of eighty thousand infantry and four thousand horse; the Comte de Schomberg has received an order to import experienced troops from Germany; and I have determined to raise five thousand men at my own cost; being resolved to teach the French people how all the faithful servants of the Crown should feel it their duty to act on such an emergency."

The new Secretary of State followed in the track of his patron, and with equal explicitness: "The King, Monseigneur," he replied to the appeal of the Nuncio, "is resolved to be the ruler of his own nation; and his Majesty trusts, moreover, that should the Duc de Nevers and the other Princes openly take up arms, the Pope will excommunicate them as rebels to their sovereign."

In addition to the discontent created among the people by this ill-judged pertinacity on the part of Marie and her Government, a new cause of disaffection was elicited by the harshness with which the Queen-mother refused to comply with the demand made by the two Princesses of Condé, that the Prince should either be released from the Bastille, or put upon his trial, in order that he might prove his innocence of the crime of which he was accused. Compliance with this request would have placed Marie and her ministers in a position of such difficulty and danger that it was, moreover, refused with an abruptness which not only betrayed their alarm, but which also tended still further to aggravate the irritation of his friends; and thus at a moment when the interests of the young King required that none but conciliatory measures should be adopted, the reckless ambition of a few individuals threatened to shake the very foundations of his throne, and to reduce the nation to a state of anarchy and convulsion.

The time was ripe for the project of De Luynes. The royal forces were everywhere victorious against the insurgent nobles; and Concini openly attributed to his own counsels a success which promised to make him all-powerful at Court.

"You see, Sire," said the favourite, "that this arrogant Italian, not content with insulting your royal person, also claims the merit due to your brave army, and to your faithful generals. Will you continue to suffer this presumption to degrade you in the eyes of your people, and to undermine your authority over your barons? Take the reins of government into your own hands, and prove that you are a worthy descendant of St. Louis. Reform the Government, and you will soon restore tranquillity to France; but do not any longer submit to see a base-born foreigner openly play the sovereign at your very Court."

"Show me the means of doing this," was the sullen reply; "I am as anxious as yourself to escape my present state of slavery. Devise some sure method of ridding me of the thrall to which I have been so long condemned, and I will second your designs as earnestly as you can decide them."

"You have but to assert yourself, Sire, and to exert your authority." "Were I to do so," retorted Louis, "I should only incur the hatred and ill-offices of my mother, for I should forthwith visit my vengeance upon her favourite; but we have had brawls enough in France, and I am weary of all these conflicting murmurs. Induce the Maréchal and his wife to quit the country; let them carry away all their wealth, and even bribe them, by new gifts should it be

necessary. Impoverished as she is, France will still be able to find a few thousand crowns with which to purchase their departure."

Although this extraordinary leniency by no means fulfilled the wishes of De Luynes, he dared not venture further at the moment; and he accordingly induced the Bishop of Carcassonne to propose to the Queen-mother that she should herself suggest the return of Concini and Leonora to Italy. A year or two previously Marie de Medicis would have repelled such a proposition with anger and impatience, but she had begun to feel that her own authority had been invaded by the Maréchal; and she consented to act upon the advice of the prelate.

Heart-stricken by misfortune, the Maréchale listened without one expostulation to the order of her royal foster-sister; her ambition had long been crushed, and she pined for rest. Aware, moreover, that by obeying the wishes of the Queen-mother she should also fulfil those of her husband, she promised immediate compliance with the will of Marie, and forthwith commenced the necessary preparations. This unqualified acquiescence in the pleasure of the Queen did not, however, satisfy the views of De Luynes, who could not brook that the immense wealth of the Maréchal d'Ancre should pass into other hands than his own; and he consequently laboured to impress upon the King that the apparent obedience of Concini was a mere subterfuge, as he publicly boasted that France contained not a single individual who would dare to attempt anything to his prejudice.

"Convince him to the contrary, Sire," said one of his confidential friends to the young monarch. "Declare to the Queen-mother your determination to be governed no longer in your own kingdom, although you are still willing to be guided by her advice; and then command the instant departure of her dissimulating favourites. Do this, and you will not fail to be obeyed."

"Be not misled, Sire," said De Luynes in his turn, when this officious but well-meaning counsellor had withdrawn; "your Majesty will not be obeyed so readily as many would lead you to anticipate. Concini is too rapacious willingly to leave the country while there remains one jewel to be filched from your royal crown; and he is too ambitious to abandon without a struggle the factitious power which he has been permitted to exert."

"What is to be done then, if the Italian refuses to quit France? I am in no position to compel his obedience, nor am I inclined to issue an order which I cannot enforce."

"Sire," said De Luynes approaching the monarch, the querulousness of whose manner warned him that unless he caused him to fear for his personal safety Louis would rather retire from the struggle than brave the anger of his mother, of whom he even now stood as much in awe as he had done during his childhood, "I see that the moment is at length come in which I must peril my own security in order to ensure that of your Majesty. You have no longer an alternative if you desire to escape the machinations of the Maréchal d'Ancre. I have sure information that an attempt is about to be made to seize your person, and to take you out of the country."

"You rave, De Luynes!" exclaimed Louis, whose cheeks blanched at this unexpected announcement.

"Would that I did, Sire," was the reply; "but should you not adopt immediate measures for circumventing the traitor whom I have denounced to you at the hazard of my own life, you will find that I have only too much foundation for the assertion that I have made."

"In that case," vehemently retorted the young King, grasping the hilt of his sword, "it is indeed time that France should recognize her legitimate ruler, and that her monarch won his golden spurs. I will leave Paris, and place myself at the head of my army."

"Concini will then remain in undisputed possession of the capital," remarked De Luynes coldly. "What is my alternative, Albert?" demanded Louis, utterly discouraged. "Name it, and I will no sooner have become in fact as well as name the sovereign of France than you shall receive the *bâton* of a marshal,"

Marie de Medicis

"Commit M. d'Ancre to the Bastille, Sire. It is difficult to conspire within the gates of that fortress."

"Where shall I find an individual hardy enough to undertake such an enterprise?"

"I will present him to your Majesty within an hour, Sire."

"So be it, M. le Maréchal," said Louis as he turned away. "My mother had the courage to provide a lodging for the first Prince of the Blood in the same prison, and I do not see why I should shrink from compelling him to share his dungeon with the husband of Leonora Galigai."

While this plot was forming in the closet of the young King, Marie de Medicis was warned on her side that should she not adopt the most stringent measures to counteract the intrigues of De Luynes, she would soon lose all her authority over the mind of her son, who had latterly betrayed increased impatience of her control; and who was evidently desirous to emancipate himself from the thralldom to which he had hitherto so patiently submitted. Bassompierre among others, with his usual frankness, replied to his royal mistress, when she urged him to declare his sentiments upon the subject: "You have been well advised, Madame; you do not sufficiently consider your own interests; and one of these days the King will be taken from beneath your wing. His adherents have commenced by exciting him against your friends, and ere long they will excite him against yourself. Your authority is only precarious, and must cease whenever such may be the will of the sovereign. He will be easily persuaded to annul it, for we know how eagerly youth pants for power; and should his Majesty see fit one day to remove to St. Germain, and to command his principal officers, both Frenchmen and foreigners, no longer to recognize your rule, what will be your position? Even I myself, whose devotion to your Majesty is above suspicion, should be compelled to take my leave, humbly entreating your permission to obey the orders of the King. Judge therefore, Madame, if such must inevitably be the case with those who are deeply attached to your royal person, what may be the bearing of the rest. You would find yourself with your hands empty after a long regency."

Marie, however, refused to be convinced. She had become so habituated to the passive obedience of her son that she could not bring herself to believe that he would ever venture to resist her will; and thus she rejected the wholesome advice of those who really desired her own welfare and that of the country; and increased the exasperation of Louis and his followers by lavishing upon Concini and his wife the most costly presents, in order to reconcile them to their enforced separation from herself. The profuse liberality of the Queen-mother to her favourites sealed their death-warrant, as every increase of their already almost fabulous wealth only strengthened the determination of De Luynes to build up his own fortunes upon the ruin of those of his detested enemy; but after the first burst of resolution which we have recorded, Louis had once more relapsed into vacillation and inertness. He still wept, but he no longer threatened; and it became necessary yet further to excite his indignation and hatred of Concini, in order to induce him to follow up the design which he had so eagerly formed against his liberty.

Means were not wanting. The young King was reminded by those about him of the niggardly spirit in which the Italian had supplied his wants during his boyhood, after having obtained the sanction of the Regent to regulate the expenses of his little Court. How often he had been compelled to ask as a favour that which was his own by right, while Concini was himself daily risking thousands of pistoles at the gaming-table, all of which had been drawn from the royal treasury! How insolently the Maréchal had, upon an occasion when he was engaged at billiards with his Majesty, requested the royal permission to resume his plumed cap, and had replaced it on his head before that permission was expressed; with a hundred other trifling but mortifying incidents which made the blood of Louis boil in his veins, and placed him wholly in the power of his insidious associates.

In order to hasten the resolution of the King De Luynes next resolved to impress upon his mind that his former warning was about to be realized, and that ere long he would find

himself a prisoner in his own capital; while, with a view to render this declaration plausible, he took means to have it reported to Marie de Medicis that Louis was about to escape from Paris, to cast off her authority, and to form a coalition with the insurgent Princes. In consequence of this information the counsellors of the Queen-mother induced her to double the guard at the Louvre, and to prevent the King from passing the city gates, either for the purpose of hunting, or of visiting, as he was frequently in the habit of doing, the suburban palaces. This was a crowning triumph for the cunning favourite, who thus saw his royal master reduced to seek all his recreation in the gardens of the Tuileries; and he soon became convinced that his project had succeeded. For a few days Louis was too indignant to make any comment upon the treatment to which he was subjected, and he even affected to derive amusement from constructing miniature fortresses, bird-hunting, and other similar pursuits; but it was not long ere he became disgusted with these compulsory pastimes, and wandered moodily through the avenues of the gardens, communing with his own thoughts, and nursing the bitter feelings which were rapidly sapping his better impulses.

When he had thus convinced himself that the King's powers of endurance had reached their extreme limit, De Luynes and his confederates on one occasion entered his chamber in the evening, but instead of suggesting to the young monarch, according to their usual habit, some method of whiling away the time until he retired to rest, they approached him with a melancholy and almost frightened deportment which at once aroused alike his curiosity and his apprehension. "What is the meaning of your manner, gentlemen?" asked Louis. "What has occurred?"

His attendants glanced at each other, as if trusting that some one of their number would be bold enough to take the responsibility of a reply upon himself; but no one spoke.

"I have asked a question, and I demand an answer," said Louis with a threatening frown. "Do the very members of my household—those who call themselves my friends—forget that, spite of all my trials, and all my privations, I am still the King of France?"

"Sire," murmured the one upon whom his eye had rested as he spoke, "it is because we are devoted heart and soul to your Majesty that you see us in this mortal anxiety. In losing you we should lose everything; but since it is your command that we should tell you all, it is our duty to obey. The citizens of Paris are in a state of consternation. All your loyal subjects fear for your life. Tears and sobs are to be heard on every side. You are in the hands of Italians—of the countrymen and countrywomen of Catherine de Medicis; and everything is to be apprehended from people who know so well how to work out their ends by poison."

"Is it come to this?" gasped the young King as he sank back upon his chair. "Am I to die mocked as I have lived? A sovereign without a will, a king without a throne, a monarch without a crown? The tool of needy adventurers and intriguing women? the victim of treachery and murder?" and the credulous boy leant his head upon his hands, and wept.

Before the chamber of Louis was closed that night upon his confidential friends it was decided that the weapon of the assassin and the axe of the executioner should rid him of Concini and his wife; and that his mother should be banished from the Court.

When the King awoke on the following morning De Luynes was already at his bedside, in order to counteract by his specious arguments and gloomy prognostics any less violent and criminal decision at which his royal master might have arrived during the solitude and silence of the night; and ably did the tempter perform his task. An increase of devotion and respect was skilfully blended with an apparent anxiety and alarm, which flattered the self-esteem and vanity of Louis, at the same time that they renewed all the terrors of the previous evening. His feeble remonstrances were overruled; his filial misgivings were stifled; and the favourite at length quitted his presence satisfied that he would not seek to retract his orders.

The advice of De Luynes was not needed when he implored his Majesty to observe the greatest circumspection until the important design was carried out, for, naturally timid and suspicious, Louis was already an adept in dissimulation; and the idea instantly occurred to him that should Concini or Leonora once have cause to apprehend that he meditated their

destruction, his own life would pay the forfeit. De Luynes, however, strange as it may appear, was less discreet, and admitted so many persons to his confidence that rumours of their peril reached the ears of the Queen-mother and her favourites; but, unhappily for themselves, they despised both the King and his minion too much to attach any importance to the idea of danger from such a quarter. Satisfied that Louis still pursued his boyish sports, which as a measure of precaution he had resumed apparently with greater enthusiasm than ever, and that he could not leave the capital without the express permission of Marie de Medicis herself, they considered themselves safe; and thus lulled into a fatal security, took no measures to avert the impending catastrophe.

The mind is a species of moral daguerreotype; surround it with images of order, virtue, and beauty, enlighten it by the sun of truth, and every object will trace itself unerringly upon the surface, remaining engraven there for ever; but, on the other hand, if the accessories be evil, it will in like manner become invested with the attributes amid which it exists, and the luminous spark will be darkened by the pernicious atoms that have been suffered to collect about it.

Louis XIII of France was at this moment an illustration of the principle. His boyhood and his youth had alike been familiar only with intrigue, deception, jealousy, and falsehood. His habits were at once saturnine and selfish; his temper gloomy and distrustful, and his feelings cold and self-centred. His youth had already shadowed forth his manhood.

De Luynes was aware that he should experience little difficulty in finding the man he sought, when he assured his royal master that he knew one bold enough to attempt the life of Concini; his selection was indeed already made, and he had no misgiving of a refusal. The Baron de Vitry, captain of the bodyguard then on duty at the Louvre, and who was peculiarly obnoxious to the Italian favourite, returned his hate so openly that he refused to salute him as he entered and quitted the palace, and publicly declared that no command, come from whence it might, should ever compel him to do so. De Luynes no sooner felt that a man of this determination might be useful than he sought his friendship; and now that the conspiracy had become ripe, he sent to invite him to an interview, during which he assured him that the King had great confidence not only in his affection for his person, but also in his inclination to serve him when the opportunity should present itself; that he believed him capable of great deeds, and that he would confide his life to him.

De Vitry was a soldier of fortune, dependent upon his sword, and the little sentiment that he possessed was at once awakened by so unexpected a communication. As a natural consequence, therefore, he protested his readiness to risk life and limb at the pleasure of his Majesty; and declared that, whatever might be the nature of the service required of him, he would execute it without hesitation or remonstrance.

On receiving this pledge, De Luynes, after exacting an oath of secrecy and obedience, beckoned to his companion to follow him; and throwing open the door of the royal closet, which was never closed against him, he introduced De Vitry without further preamble into the presence of the King.

"M. de Vitry," said Louis, when the favourite had explained the errand of the captain of the royal guard, "I thank you for your zeal, and I have faith in its sincerity. The Maréchal d'Ancre has conspired against my life. He must sleep to-morrow night in the Bastille."

"He shall be there, Sire, should the fortress still possess a bolt to draw upon him, if it be your royal will that I accomplish his arrest."

"M. de Vitry, you will have earned a marshal's *bâton*."

"Sire!" exclaimed the soldier, dropping on his knee before the King, "I will obey you to the death."

"I must never again be insulted by his presence," said Louis, fixing his eyes, which flashed for an instant with a threatening light, full upon the upturned countenance of De Vitry. "Rise, Sir," he added as he turned suddenly away, "I have perfect confidence in your fidelity."

Marie de Medicis

"But—should he resist, Sire?" asked the new conspirator, anxious not to exceed his orders.

"Kill him!" replied De Luynes in a hoarse whisper. "Do you not yet understand how you are to earn your *bâton*?"

The two friends exchanged glances; and after a profound bow, De Vitry withdrew from the royal closet.

The indiscretion of De Luynes had been so great that a rumour of the perilous position of Concini did not fail to reach the ears of Richelieu. We have already stated that on his arrival at Court the Bishop of Luçon had been warmly patronized by the Italian favourite, who openly declared that he had found a man capable of giving a lesson *à tutti barboni*, thereby alluding to the ancient ministers of Henri IV; and that it was moreover through his agency that Marie de Medicis had appointed the wily prelate Secretary of State; but Richelieu was too subtle a diplomatist to allow a feeling of gratitude to interfere with his advancement; and he consequently no sooner ascertained beyond all possibility of mistake that his two patrons, the Queen-mother and her favourite, were about to succumb to the insidious attack of De Luynes, than, anxious to retain office, he hastened to despatch his brother-in-law, M. de Pontcourlay, to the latter, with instructions to offer his services, and to assure him that he had only consented to accept the charge which he then held in order that he might through this medium be enabled to devote himself to the interests of the King.

Anxious to strengthen his party, De Luynes received the advances of Richelieu with great courtesy, although he was far from desiring the co-operation of so dangerous an ally; and a day or two subsequently the treacherous prelate was introduced into the private closet of Louis; where, in addition to his previous professions, he went so far as to pledge himself to the young monarch that he would give him timely intimation of the most hidden designs of the Queen-mother and the Maréchal d'Ancre.

It was at length decided that Concini should die on Sunday the 23rd of April; but as the day approached Louis became terrified at his own audacity, and it required all the influence of De Luynes and his brothers to prevent his retracting the fatal order which he had given. He was too young coldly to contemplate treachery and murder, and withal so helpless in the event of failure, that his conscience and his timidity alike urged him to revoke the sentence of the unsuspecting victim; nor was he ultimately induced to persevere, until reminded by his insidious advisers that too many persons were now aware of his intentions for them to remain secret, should their execution be long delayed.

On this occasion, however, although every preparation had been made, Concini was saved by a mere accident. He chanced to be delayed as he was about to leave his house, and did not in consequence reach the Louvre until the King had quitted the palace in order to attend mass at the chapel of the Petit Bourbon. Instead, therefore, of proceeding in the first place to the apartments of his Majesty, as had been anticipated, the Maréchal no sooner ascertained that Louis was already gone than he hastened to pay his respects to the Queen-mother, for which purpose he took a different direction. This unexpected impediment greatly embarrassed the conspirators, who, secure of success, had displayed an extraordinary want of caution. In addition to his brother M. du Hallier, Vitry had assembled a great number of his friends in the court of the palace, who, although they all wore their cloaks, had nevertheless allowed it to be perceived that they carried pistols in their belts, contrary to the edict forbidding the use of such weapons within the limits of the royal residence. In compliance with the commands of Louis himself, moreover, the bodyguard were under arms; and the unwonted movement in the immediate vicinity of his apartments was so evident, and withal so threatening in its aspect, that a rumour soon spread through the palace that some serious enterprise was in contemplation.

And meanwhile the young monarch was on his knees before the altar of his God, praying, or seeming to pray; asking that his trespasses might be forgiven as he forgave those who trespassed against him; although he anticipated that before his return to his desecrated

Marie de Medicis

palace-home the deed of blood would be accomplished. Suddenly, however, his devotions were interrupted by the entrance of De Vitry into the chapel, who, approaching De Luynes, whispered to him the tidings of his disappointment. In another second the lips of the favourite touched the ear of his royal master, to whom he hurriedly murmured—

"Sire, the man you wot of is now in the apartment of the Queen-mother. What do you decide? All is in readiness."

"Touch him not in her presence as you value your lives," was the agitated reply; "we shall find him at the Louvre on our return."

A brief interval of suspense succeeded. The prelate who had officiated then uttered the final blessing; and as the carriage which contained the King and his favourite entered the palace by one gate, that of Concini quitted it by another. Inexperienced as he was, however, Louis at once perceived that he was no longer in a position to recede; and hasty orders were issued to Vitry and his friends to accomplish their fatal project on the following day, while the King at the same time secretly commanded that the light horse of his bodyguard, and the members of his household, should be in attendance at an early hour in the morning, as well as a coach and six, at the entrance of the grand gallery. The pretext for this arrangement was a hunting-party; but its actual intention was to ensure and protect the King's flight, should his purpose prematurely transpire or prove abortive. And meanwhile Marie de Medicis slept, wholly unsuspecting of the change which was about to be effected in her fortunes!

There is something singularly appalling in all the circumstances which formed the prelude to this contemplated tragedy. Hitherto the Queen-mother had created dangers for herself—had started at shadows—and distrusted even those who sought to serve her; while her son, silent, saturnine, and inert, had patiently submitted to the indignities and insults which had been heaped upon him, as though he were either unconscious or reckless of their extent; and the Italian adventurer had braved his enemies, and appeared to defy fate itself. Now, however, when the blow was about to be struck, when the ball and the blade were alike ready to do their deadly office, all the principal personages in the bloody drama had suddenly assumed new characters. Marie slept; the boy-King had become the head of a conspiracy; and the Maréchal d'Ancre, enriched and ennobled beyond the wildest dreams of his ambition, was preparing to quit the country of his adoption, and to seek rest and peace in his own land. Another month, perhaps another week, and he would have left France, probably for ever.

History presents few such anomalies; and it appears scarcely credible that so ill-organized a plot, hatched, moreover, under the very eyes of those who were to become its victims, and revealed to upwards of a score of persons, many of whom were incited to join it from merely venal motives, should ever have attained its accomplishment. The fiat had, however, gone forth; and the unfortunate Concini, whose tragical fate compels sympathy despite all his faults, entered the court of the Louvre at ten o'clock in the morning of the 24th of April 1617, there to meet his death.

An hour or two after dawn one of the gentlemen of the royal bedchamber announced that the King having been indisposed throughout the night, the great gates of the Louvre were to remain closed, and the public excluded, in order that his Majesty might not be disturbed. This order did not, however, affect the Maréchal d'Ancre, as he was no sooner seen to approach, followed by a numerous retinue of gentlemen, and attended by several of his friends, than the bolts were withdrawn, and he was permitted to pass the barrier, which was instantly closed again, to the exclusion of the greater number of his suite. A man who had been stationed over the gate then waved his hat three times above his head, upon which De Vitry, who had until that moment been seated in one of the windows of the guard-room calmly conversing with the officers on duty, immediately rose, and drawing his cloak closely about him, hurried down the staircase, at the foot of which he was joined as if accidentally by Du Hallier and others of the conspirators, who, apparently engaged in conversation, slowly approached their intended victim. Among the persons who surrounded Concini there chanced to be several who were acquainted with De Vitry, and greatly to his annoyance he was compelled to allow the Maréchal to pass on while he returned their greetings; in a few

moments, however, he again found himself at liberty, when he discovered that amid the crowd he had lost sight of the Italian.

"Where is he?" he inquired hurriedly of one of his confederates.

"Yonder," was the reply; "he has stopped at the foot of the bridge to read a letter."

De Vitry sprang towards his prey; and as Concini, absorbed in his occupation, still read on, he felt the grasp of a strong hand upon his arm, and on looking up he saw the Captain of the Guard standing at his side. Before he had time to inquire the meaning of this affront, De Vitry had already uttered the ominous words, "I arrest you in the King's name."

"Arrest me!" exclaimed the Maréchal, with astonishment, as he clutched the hilt of his sword.

"Yes, you," replied De Vitry haughtily; and while he spoke he made a signal, which was instantly responded to by the simultaneous report of three pistol-shots. As the sounds ceased Concini dropped upon his knees, and fell against the parapet of the bridge. Several weapons were then thrust into his body; and finally De Vitry, with wanton and revolting cruelty, gave him so violent a kick that he extended his body at full length upon the pavement, where it was immediately pilfered of every article of value; among other things, diamonds of great price and notes of hand to a large amount were abstracted from the pockets of his vest.

A few of his followers endeavoured to interpose; but in a second or two all was over, and they were warned by the bystanders instantly to sheathe their swords, and to beware of opposing the orders of the King. They had scarcely had time to obey this bidding when Louis presented himself at the window of a closet adjoining the guard-room, to which, from its height, he was obliged to be lifted by M. d'Ornano; there, by the advice of those about him, the young King appeared with a smile upon his face; and as the members of the cabal raised a cry of "Vive le Roi!" he shouted to his Captain of the Guard, "I thank you, Vitry; now I am really a King." Then showing himself, sword in hand, successively at each window of the guard-room, he cried out to the soldiers who were posted beneath, "To arms, comrades, to arms!"

Meanwhile De Vitry, by the direction of De Luynes, proceeded to the hall occupied by the bodyguard of the Queen-mother, and demanded their weapons, which they refused to deliver up without an express order to that effect from their own officers; upon which the latter were commanded in the name of the King to withdraw their men, and to remain in the antechamber of their mistress. The royal guards then took possession of all the approaches to the Louvre; and horsemen were despatched with instructions to traverse the streets of the capital, and to apprise the citizens of the death of Concini. A dense crowd soon collected in the court of the Louvre, and cries of "Vive le Roi!" resounded on all sides.

A murder had been committed, and the ovation was one which would only have befitted a victory. Louis XIII had proclaimed himself a King, and the hand with which he grasped his sceptre was steeped in blood. Louis "the Just"—we append to his baptismal appellation that which was gravely conferred upon him on this occasion by both clergy and laity—stood an undisguised assassin and a moral matricide before the people who were about to be subjected to his rule.

Within an hour not only was the Queen-mother a prisoner in her own apartments, but the seals were restored to M. du Vair, and Barbin was in the Bastille *in the most rigorous confinement*. These precautionary measures taken, Louis proceeded to the grand gallery leaning upon the arm of De Luynes; and on perceiving M. de Brienne, who with many other nobles had hastened to present his respects and congratulations (!) to the young monarch, he was so little able to control his delight that, without awaiting the salutation of the Count, he exclaimed triumphantly, "I am now a King, and no one can take precedence of me."

Shortly afterwards the King encountered the Bishop of Luçon-Richelieu, whose confident deportment betokened his conviction of a gracious reception, as he prepared to pay his court in his turn; but the compliments of the prelate were abruptly broken in upon by an imperative command to quit the palace, and the announcement of his discontinuance in office.

No wonder that Richelieu murmured under his breath at this unlooked-for severity; for he had in truth that very morning striven to merit the royal smile—striven against conscience, however, and all the holiest and most sacred feelings of humanity. One of the friends of Concini, alarmed by the ominous proceedings at the Louvre, and instinctively persuaded that the life of the Italian was threatened, had hurriedly despatched a letter to Richelieu, in which he stated his reasons for the apprehensions he expressed; and urged the prelate, in memory of the many services for which he was indebted to the intended victim, to interpose his influence in his behalf, and to endeavour to avert the blow. The Bishop, who had not yet left his bed, glanced over the missive, thrust it beneath his pillow, desired the messenger to withdraw, and remained quietly in his chamber until he was apprised by the tumult without that all was over. Then, and not till then, he hastened to the Louvre; where we have already stated the nature of his reception.

As the throng of nobles increased, and crowded about the King so as considerably to inconvenience him, he was lifted upon a billiard-table, from which extraordinary eminence he received their compliments and congratulations upon the murder to which he had been accessory only an hour before; and which the First President of the Parliament of Paris (whose extreme haste to pay his court to his new master was such that, being unable immediately to procure a carriage, he proceeded to the Louvre on foot) designated *his happy deliverance*. Nothing, in short, but plumed hats sweeping the marble floor, flexile forms bending to the earth, and lips wreathed in smiles, was to be seen in the kingly hall in which Henri IV had loved to discuss grave topics with his sturdy minister, the Duc de Sully, and which Marie de Medicis, in her day of pride and power, had enriched with the glorious productions of her immortal *protégé*, Rubens the painter-prince, as she was wont to call him. None cared to remember at that moment that Henry the Great was in his grave, and that his royal widow had been sacrificed to the insatiable ambition and the quenchless hate of a low-born minion.

But it is now time that we should return to the Queen-mother.

Alarmed by the report of firearms within the boundary of the palace, Marie de Medicis, who had not yet completed her toilet, desired Caterina Selvaggio to throw open one of the windows, and to demand the cause of so singular and unpardonable an infraction of the law. She was obeyed; and the Italian waiting-woman no sooner perceived De Vitry advancing below the apartments of her royal mistress than she inquired of him what had occurred.

"The Maréchal d'Ancre has been shot," was his abrupt reply.

"Shot!" echoed Caterina; "and by whom?"

"By myself," said De Vitry composedly; "and by the command of the King."

"Madame!" exclaimed the terrified attendant, as she rushed to the side of the Queen-mother, "M. le Maréchal has been killed by order of his Majesty."

Marie de Medicis started from her seat; her cheeks were blanched, her lips quivered, and she wrung her hands convulsively, as she gasped out, "I have reigned seven years. I must now think only of a crown in heaven."

Her attendants, stupified with terror, rapidly gathered round her; and ere long she learnt that her guards had been disarmed, and replaced by those of the King. She listened vaguely to each successive report, and paced the room with rapid but uncertain steps. At length she exclaimed vehemently, "I do not regret that my son should have taken the life of Concini, if he believed it necessary to the safety of his kingdom; but his distrust of myself in concealing such a project from my knowledge is more than I can bear."

When the first violence of her emotion had subsided she sank into a seat, and with clasped hands and drooping head appeared to be absorbed in deep and bitter thought; for at intervals the blood mounted to her brow and burned there for a time, after which she again became pale as ashes, and as motionless as a corpse. She was still in this attitude when one of her confidential servants imprudently approached her, and inquired how the melancholy event was to be communicated to the Maréchale d'Ancre? "Perhaps," he incautiously suggested,

Marie de Medicis

"your Majesty will condescend to acquaint her with it yourself." Marie de Medicis suddenly raised her hand, swept back her dishevelled hair from her face, and fixing her flashing eyes upon the officious gentleman, passionately replied, "I have other things to attend to at this moment. If no one can tell the Maréchale that her husband has been killed, *let them sing it to her*. Let me never again hear the name of those people. I told them long ago that they would do right to return to Italy. Yes," she continued, more particularly addressing the Dowager Duchess of Guise, the Princesse de Conti, and the other ladies who were standing near her, "they have at last accomplished my ruin. I foresaw it; I warned them, but they would not be convinced. I told Concini that he had no time to lose, but with his habitual self-sufficiency he declared repeatedly that the King became more courteous to him every day. I was not deceived, however; I charged him not to trust to appearances, for that Louis never said all he thought; he disregarded my words, and he has now involved me in his own destruction."

After this outburst of temper no one ventured to intrude even a remark upon the Queen-mother, who once more fell into a deep reverie, from which she, however, ultimately aroused herself to demand M. de Bressieux. The equerry immediately approached. "Go, sir," she said, "to his Majesty, and request that he will grant me an interview."

Her command was obeyed, and in a few moments De Bressieux found himself in the presence of the King, to whom he delivered his message.

"I am occupied at present," was the cold reply; "and the visit of the Queen must be delayed until a better opportunity. Tell her, however, from me that I shall always honour her, and that I feel towards her all the sentiments of a good son; but God willed that I should be born a King, and I am resolved henceforth to govern for myself. It is desirable that the Queen should have no other guards but mine. Let her know that such is my will."

Marie de Medicis listened incredulously when, on his return to her apartment, the equerry announced the failure of his mission. She would not comprehend that the stripling who had until that day shrunk before her frown could thus suddenly have acquired the necessary courage to brave her authority; and once more M. de Bressieux was instructed to urge her request upon the King. As he reached the royal anteroom her envoy encountered De Luynes, who dreaded nothing so much as a meeting between the mother and son, which could scarcely fail to prove fatal to himself; and he accordingly reported the return of the applicant in a manner which induced Louis to exclaim impatiently, "If he is here by desire of the Queen his mistress, tell him that there is nothing to apprehend, as I shall treat her well."

Still Marie de Medicis would not be discouraged. She felt that in order to avert the ruin which impended over her she must put every instant to its use; and accordingly M. de Bressieux was a third time despatched to solicit in still more urgent terms that she might be permitted to see his Majesty, were it only for a few moments. But, unfortunately for the agonized Queen, the triumphant favourite was as fully aware as herself of the value of time at so critical a juncture; and he had accordingly profited so well by the opportunities which he was enabled to command, that on this last occasion the Marquis was rudely ordered to abstain from all further intrusion upon his Majesty unless he wished to repent his pertinacity within the walls of a prison.

Convinced at last that there was no hope through her own agency of effecting her object, the Queen-mother next endeavoured to secure its accomplishment through the medium of her daughter-in-law, the two Princesses, and the Duc d'Anjou; but when she summoned them to her apartment, she was informed that each and all had been forbidden to hold any intercourse with herself until the pleasure of the King should be made known.

The despair of the unhappy Marie was at its height; and as she paced her apartment, and approached a window looking upon the gardens she discovered that a bridge which she had caused to be constructed for the purpose of reaching them without being compelled to traverse the galleries of the palace, was already in process of demolition; while she was also made aware that every other avenue leading to her apartments was strictly guarded, and thus she saw herself a prisoner in her own palace and entirely at the mercy of her son's advisers.

Marie de Medicis

Even yet she struggled against so cruel a conviction; and, eager to test its truth, sent to desire the presence of one of her confidential friends. Her messenger was not, however, permitted to accomplish his errand, but returned with the heart-sickening intelligence that thenceforward her Majesty would not be permitted to hold any communication, save with the members of her own immediate household, without the express sanction of the King.

While the Queen-mother was still writhing under this new indignity, the unfortunate Leonora, who had been apprised of the murder of her husband, rushed into the apartment, and flinging herself at the feet of her royal foster-sister, implored her protection for herself and her young son; but sudden adversity had steeled the heart of Marie de Medicis, and sternly upbraiding her former favourite as the cause of her own overthrow, she refused to afford her any aid, and commanded her instantly to retire. The wretched woman obeyed without comment or remonstrance; and having regained her own apartment, which was immediately contiguous to that of the Queen, she hastened to conceal the Crown jewels which were in her keeping between the mattresses of her bed, with the exception of the rings, which were of great value, and which she habitually wore. This task accomplished, she threw herself upon her miserable couch to await in trembling and in tears the next act of the frightful tragedy in which she was called upon to play so conspicuous a part. Her suspense was not of long duration, as only a few minutes had elapsed when a tumult was heard without, amid which cries of "Vive le Roi!" "Vive M. de Luynes!" and "Death to the Italian!" were distinctly audible.

Leonora bounded from her recumbent position like a lioness at bay. Her parted lips were bloodless, her breath came quick and hard, and her heart heaved by its violent pulsations the rich velvet of the robe in which she was attired.

"My child!" she at length gasped out, as her attendants gathered about her—"save my child! He at least is guiltless."

The appeal was not made in vain. M. du Rouvray took her little son, the Comte de la Péna, by the hand, raised him in his arms that his lips might once more touch those of his mother, and then, without uttering a syllable, led him from the apartment. In another instant the Norman noble was once more at her side. "The child is in sure hands," he said hurriedly; "and now, Madame, to provide for your own safety. Follow me—you have no time to spare."

It was, however, already too late; for as Du Rouvray ceased speaking, De Vitry, still reeking with the blood of Concini, stood upon the threshold of the chamber, attended by a troop of halberdiers.

"You are my prisoner, Madame," he exclaimed harshly: "prepare to accompany me to the Bastille."

"I am ready, Sir," replied the Maréchale, with the composure of utter despair, "All is as it should be. The murderer of the husband is well fitted to be the gaoler of the wife."

The rings belonging to the Crown were then removed from the fingers of the Marquise; and upon her refusal to reveal where the remainder of the jewels were secreted, her apartments were strictly searched; and not only were the royal ornaments carried off by De Vitry and his companions, but also every other article of value which fell into their hands. While this unmanly outrage was going on around her, the Maréchale d'Ancre passively permitted her women to fasten her mantle, and to adjust her mask and hood; her thoughts were evidently elsewhere. Within a few yards of where she was then seated, and within hearing of the tumult occasioned by the reckless insolence of the men-at-arms by whom she was surrounded, her foster-sister, the playmate of her girlhood, the friend of her youth, and the protectress of her latter years—whose tears she had so often wiped away, whose sorrows she had so often soothed, and whose hopes and fears she had equally shared throughout so long a period—remained cold and unmoved by her misery. It was a bitter pang: and drops of anguish, wrung from the deepest recesses of a bursting heart, fell large and heavy upon the cheek of the new-made widow and the abandoned favourite, and moistened her clasped hands. None, however, heeded her agony; each of her attendants, whatever might have been the previous attachment of all to her person, was absorbed by her own terrors; while the strangers who had

invaded her privacy were eager, under the specious pretext of performing their duty to the King, to avail themselves to the uttermost of so favourable an opportunity of furthering their individual interests.

At length all was over: every cabinet and chest had been ransacked to its deepest recesses; every article of use or ornament had been displaced in search of plunder; and the wretched Leonora was warned that it was time to depart. She rose silent and rigid; and as De Vitry preceded her from the room, his guards closed up behind her. A carriage was in waiting at the foot of the staircase by which she descended; the twilight was rapidly deepening into night, and her melancholy path was lighted at intervals by the torches of the numerous attendants who were hurrying through the corridors in the service of their several employers. The long dark shadows of the Louvre lay heavy on the dull pavement of the court, save where they were broken at intervals by the resinous flambeaux which glared and flickered against the walls of the building. All looked wild, and sad, and strange; and not one kindly accent fell upon the ear of the unhappy captive as she was hurried onward. A few harsh words were uttered in a tone of authority: she was lifted into the conveyance which had been prepared for her: the cavalcade slowly traversed the enclosure; and then as the iron gates of the palace were passed, the horses were lashed into a gallop; and in less than an hour the life-long companion of Marie de Medicis, husbandless, childless, and friendless, was an occupant of the gloomy prison-chamber which had recently been vacated by the Prince de Condé.

The noise created by the entrance of the new prisoner, the clashing of arms, the grating of the heavy portcullis, as it groaned and strained in its ascent, the dull fall of the drawbridge, the voices of men, and the rattling of wheels, awakened the Prince; who, with the natural weariness of a captive, had already retired to rest. Summoning an attendant he demanded to know the cause of the disturbance.

"It is M. de Vitry, Monseigneur," was the reply; "who has just transferred the Maréchale d'Ancre to the safe keeping of the governor."

"Good!" said the Prince, as he once more settled himself to sleep; "I have now one enemy the less."

This rapid succession of misfortunes produced an extraordinary effect upon the sensitive organization of Leonora Galigai. As we have already hinted, she had for a considerable period suffered under mental hallucination; and the disease had latterly fastened so tenaciously upon her system that she had even shunned the presence of the Queen, believing that every eye which rested on her produced some baneful result; while her very attendants were dismissed from her presence when they had terminated their duties, and she thus remained hour after hour in solitude, brooding over the sickly fancies of her disordered brain. The sight of her husband's murderer had, however, instantly and for ever restored the healthful tone of her mind. She did not weep, for she had already exhausted all her tears; she asked no mercy, for she was aware that, whatever might be her fate, she was alike prejudged and pre-condemned; but she resigned herself passively into the hands of her persecutors, with a Spartan firmness which she maintained to the last hour of her existence.

Who shall venture to follow her to her prison-cell, and to trace the tide of back-flowing thought which rolled like a receding wave from the present to the past? Now, indeed, she left little behind her to regret. From the husband to whom she had once been devoted with a love which blinded her to all his errors and to all his egotism, she had, during the last two years, been almost utterly estranged; her first-born and idolized daughter was in her grave; the royal friend and almost relative, to whom she had clung from her youth up, had refused even a tear to her sufferings, or a shelter to her peril; her hoarded wealth was in the hands of her enemies; and of all that she once boasted there remained only her son. And what might be his fate?

But memory held wider stores than these; and who can doubt that throughout that first long night of captivity they were probed to their very depths! What palace-pageants—what closet-conspiracies—what struggles for pre-eminence and power—what heart-burnings at defeat, and exultation at success—must have swept hurricane-like across her awakened soul, to

Marie de Medicis

be forgotten in their turn as she recalled the childish sports of her early and hopeful years, under the sunny sky and among the orange-groves of her native Florence, where, with her royal playmate, she chased the hours along as though they were made only for the happy!

Did she sleep the weary and outworn sleep of the wretched while those sweet and soothing visions were still busy at her heart? And if so, breathes there one who would have roused her, whatever may have been her faults, from such a slumber?

CHAPTER X

1617

On the return of De Vitry from the Bastille he found the hôtel of the Maréchal d'Ancre entirely pillaged, not even excepting the chamber of the little Comte de la Péna, whose escape having been prevented, he was also placed under arrest, and left until the following morning without clothes, food, or bed. On the morrow, however, the Comte de Fiesque, touched by the extreme beauty and desolate condition of the child, and probably anxious to secure one friend to him in his necessity, became answerable for his safe keeping; and, wrapping him in the cloak of one of his lackeys, he carried him to the Louvre, and introduced him to the young Queen, informing her Majesty that no one at Court could dance a *branle* in such perfection. Anne of Austria was enchanted with the beauty of the boy, who had just attained his twelfth year, and whose intellect was as remarkable as his person; but giddy, thoughtless, and ever eager for amusement, the girl-Queen, overlooking the fatal circumstances in which he was placed, immediately commanded that he should exhibit his talent; and the poor fatherless child, whose whole career had been blighted only a few short hours before, was compelled to this unseemly display; after which he was regaled with sweetmeats, and returned to the custody of his gaolers, by whom he was shortly afterwards imprisoned in the castle of Nantes.

While this incredible scene was being enacted in an apartment of the palace, another of a far more terrible nature was to be witnessed in the streets of Paris; but before we describe this, we must explain all that had passed since the murder of the Maréchal d'Ancre. As we have already stated, the body was pillaged where it lay; and then, as no further booty could be anticipated, it was carried into a small closet attached to the common guard-room, where it remained until nightfall, when a coarse sheet, for which fifty sous were given, was folded about it, and it was buried without any religious ceremony under the organ of the church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois near the Louvre. A priest who attempted to chant a funeral-hymn as it was laid in the earth was compelled to desist, in order that the place of burial might not be known; and the flags which had been raised were so carefully replaced that it was only by secret information that the spot could possibly have been discovered. This information was however given; and early in the morning the pavement was torn up, and a rope fastened round the neck of the corpse, which was then dragged through the streets by the infuriated mob; and the desecrated remains of the recently powerful favourite were hung by the feet to a gibbet, dismembered in the most brutal manner, and finally burned.

At the close of this tragedy the Baron de Vitry received the wages of his brutality, and found himself before sunset a Marshal of France: while Du Hallier his brother became his successor as Captain of the Royal Guard; and Persan, the husband of his sister, who had also assisted in the massacre of Concini, was recompensed by the lieutenancy of the Bastille, and entrusted with the safe keeping of the Prince de Condé. On the same day it was publicly proclaimed in the streets of Paris that all the relatives and adherents of the Maréchale d'Ancre were forthwith to leave the capital, and that the Sieur de Vitry had acted throughout the late execution by the express command of the King; the ministers who had recently held office under the Queen-mother were dismissed, and those whom she had displaced were restored to power; De Luynes was formally invested with the confiscated property of Concini; and a new Government was organized which had for its leading object the subversion of all previously concerted measures.

The death of Concini no sooner became known in the provinces than the Duc de Mayenne resigned Soissons and all the other towns and fortresses throughout his government

into the hands of the King. Both parties suspended hostilities; and the royal troops and those of the insurgents drank and feasted together in a general rejoicing. This example was followed by the army in Champagne; and on every side the rebel Princes declared their readiness to offer their submission to the King. The moment was a perilous one for De Luynes, but to Louis it afforded only triumph and exultation; and ere long the self-exiled nobles reappeared in the capital, where they were graciously received. On the 12th of May a declaration was registered by the Parliament in which their past offences were pardoned, and they were assured that thenceforward they would be held as good and loyal subjects to the Crown; while no single exception was made save in the person of the Prince de Condé, who was still retained a prisoner in the Bastille, and who appeared to be totally forgotten by his former adherents.

Rendered confident by this increase of strength, Louis remained inflexible to the tears and prayers of his mother, and readily suffered himself to be persuaded by those about him that she had, in conjunction with Concini, determined to take his life by poison in order to place the Duc d'Anjou upon the throne. In vain did the estimable Marquise de Guercheville throw herself at his feet, and offer the most solemn assurances of the innocence of her unhappy mistress: she was listened to with impatience, and dismissed with an abruptness which left no room for hope. Meanwhile the captivity of Marie de Medicis became each day more irksome, through the unrestrained insolence of De Vitry, who caused her apartments to be searched by the officers under his command, her chests to be emptied, and even her bed to be displaced. The Queen devoured her mortification, and bore the insult in silence; but Madame de Guercheville could not restrain her indignation, and insisted upon learning the reason for such an outrage.

"I am ordered to ascertain, Madame," was the reply of the individual to whom she addressed herself, "if there be not a cask of powder in these apartments destined to destroy the King who sleeps above."

"Let them obey their orders," said Marie coldly; "their employers are capable of even more than this."

As she learnt each successive arrival at Court, the unfortunate Princess trusted from day to day that her position would be ameliorated through the influence of some of her former friends; but until the Duc de Rohan reached the capital none of the great nobles appeared to remember her existence. Well might the Duke exclaim when he learnt how utterly friendless she had become in her adversity, "There are few generous and bold enough to cleave to the misfortunes of those whom they honoured in their prosperity." He was himself, however, one of those noble exceptions; and although he excited the undisguised displeasure of De Luynes, he persisted in demanding the royal sanction to pay his respects to the Queen-mother; an example which was subsequently followed by Bassompierre, who, being unable to obtain the permission which he sought, availed himself of the medium of the Queen's tailor to offer his assurances of devotion and fidelity to her person, through the Duchesse de Guise and the Princesse de Conti.

Weary of her utter isolation in a palace of which she had so lately been the undisputed mistress, and where she had received the homage of all by whom she was approached; heart-sick and disgusted with [pg 440] the ingratitude of those whose fortunes had been her own work; and pining for that rest which she could never hope to find amid the persecutions to which she was daily subjected, Marie de Medicis at length resolved to retire to Moulins in the province of Bourbon, which was one of her dower-cities; and she accordingly sent to request the consent of the King to her departure.

This was precisely what De Luynes had hoped; and his exultation was consequently great. Her exile by the command of her son might have excited a murmur, and he had therefore forbore from advising such a step; but when it could be publicly asserted that the Queen-mother was about to leave the Court for a few months by her own express desire, not even those who still remained faithful to her cause would be enabled to resent her absence. Her demand under such circumstances could not fail to prove successful; and it was conceded by Louis himself with the greater alacrity that her presence as a prisoner in the Louvre was

Marie de Medicis

irksome and painful to a youth whose conscience was not yet totally seared; and who professed, even while exposing her from hour to hour to the insults of his hirelings, to feel towards her "all the sentiments of a good son."

The contemplated retirement of Marie de Medicis from the capital soon became publicly known, and at once decided the measures of Richelieu. He himself informs us that immediately after his cold reception by the King he despatched his valet to assure the Queen-mother of his sympathy in her sorrows, and of his anxiety to serve her; nor could he fail to believe that such an assurance at such a moment had produced the desired effect, unconscious as the unfortunate Marie must necessarily have been of the circumstances which had induced him to feel for her reverses when all the other members of the Court were intent only upon winning the good graces of the monarch and his favourite. The time was now come, as he at once saw, to profit by so signal a proof of policy and forethought; and Richelieu was prepared to use it with the craft and cleverness which were destined to shape out his future fortunes. To his active and ambitious spirit a residence in the capital in the character of a deposed minister was impossible; while he equally deprecated the idea of burying himself in his diocese among the marshes of Lower Poitou. He resolved, therefore, to share the exile of the Queen-mother, and by this display of devotion to gain her confidence; while, at the same time, he communicated his intention to De Luynes in a manner which ensured its sanction. Few words were needed. Ere the conference was at an end the favourite was aware that no *safer* person could be admitted to the privacy of Marie de Medicis; while Richelieu had, on his side, been careful to avoid any acknowledgment of the real motive by which he was influenced. "You incur no risk by acceding to his request, Sire," said De Luynes in a subsequent interview with the King; "M. de Luçon will understand how to calm the mind of the Queen-mother, and to advise her as we could wish. He may be the means of establishing a good understanding between you; and even should he fail to do this, it will be easy to compel him to reside in his diocese, or to banish him to a distant province, should your Majesty not be satisfied with his conduct."

"It must not be expected," gravely observed Richelieu in his turn, while negotiating the arrangement, "that I should act as a Court spy when I am admitted to the confidence of the Queen; nor that I should report all which may take place; but to this I will pledge myself—that I will immediately retire to Luçon should she refuse to be guided by my advice, or adopt any resolutions inimical to the interests of the King."

It would have been unreasonable to require more, and with a thrill of pleasure to which she had been long a stranger, the beguiled Queen learnt that the Bishop of Luçon-Richelieu had received the royal permission to devote himself to her fallen fortunes. This was, indeed, more than she had ever ventured to hope, for she was capable of appreciating to the utmost the talents of the individual who thus, as she fondly believed, sacrificed his own interests to her necessities; and she consequently lost no time in making him the medium of her communications with the King. Before her departure she was anxious to secure such terms as might tend, in some degree, to diminish the bitterness of her exile; and she accordingly availed herself of the services of her new adherent to convey her wishes to Louis. These were that she might be permitted to reside for some days at Blois, until the castle of Moulins, which had been uninhabited for a considerable time, could be prepared for her reception; that she might be informed of the number and identity of those who would be allowed to follow her in her retreat; that she might retain unlimited authority in the place of her residence; that she should be immediately informed whether it were the pleasure of the King that she should be left in possession of the whole of her revenues, or restricted in her income, in order that she might be prepared to regulate the expenses of her household accordingly; and, finally, that her son would accord her an interview before her departure.

In reply to these demands, Louis, after having conferred with his favourite, replied that, had circumstances permitted such a measure, he should not, during the last few days, have deprived himself of the happiness of her society, of which he had deeply felt the privation; but that since it was her wish to retire from the Court, she was at perfect liberty to reside at Moulins, or in any other city which she thought proper to select, and to include in her suite all

the individuals whom she might be desirous of retaining about her person: that she was fully authorized to exert the most absolute authority, not only in the city, but throughout the province in which it was situated; and that so far from seeking to diminish her resources, although they greatly exceeded those of any previous Queen-Dowager of France, he would willingly augment them should she deem it necessary, even to his own inconvenience; while as regarded her desire for a parting interview, he could not, on his side, suffer her to leave the capital without assuring her in his own person of his anxiety for her happiness.

Despite these professions, however, it was agreed on both sides that each party should previously arrange, and submit to the other, the substance of all that was to pass between them; and in consequence of this extraordinary arrangement Richelieu was desired by the Queen-mother to compose her address to the King, which having been submitted to the Council and approved, the reply of Louis was in like manner prepared by the ministers. A flight of stairs alone separated the mother and the son: the footsteps of the stripling monarch could be heard in the apartment of Marie as he passed from one room to the other; and were not the subject too sad for ridicule, it would be difficult to suppress a smile at these puerile and undignified formalities. No political negotiation was ever conducted, however, with more circumspection and mutual distrust; every detail of the interview was regulated beforehand; the two principal actors pledged themselves to say no more than was set down for them; and each committed to memory the harangue which was to be pronounced. The Princesses were to pay their parting respects to the Queen-mother so soon as she should have assumed her travelling-dress, but the nobles and officers of the Court were only to be permitted to salute her after she had taken leave of the King; a privilege from which, at her express request, De Vitry and his brother were, however, excluded.

On the 4th of May, the day fixed for her departure from the capital, Marie caused her ladies to dress her with extraordinary care, but at the same time with extreme simplicity; the slighted mother and the humbled Queen yet entertained a hope that the sight of her mourning attire and subdued deportment might produce their effect upon her son; and as, at the appointed hour, she left her chamber, and with words of gratitude and affection joined her attendants, there was a faint smile upon her lips, and a tremulous light in her dark eyes which betrayed her secret trust. The members of her household were assembled in one of those noble halls which were enriched by the grand creations of Jean Goujon, and the magnificent tapestried hangings that were subsequently destroyed during the Revolution; they were grouped together near the door by which she entered, and, despite every effort which she made to overcome her emotion, Marie de Medicis could not suppress a sigh as she marked how small a space they occupied in that vast apartment which had so lately been thronged with princes and nobles, all professedly devoted to her cause. Suddenly, as she was exchanging a few words with the Marquise de Guercheville, the royal bodyguards appeared upon the threshold; and a page, advancing one step into the hall, announced—"The King!"

At the same instant Louis XIII appeared, with the Duc d'Anjou on his right hand, leaning upon his favourite, preceded by Cadenet and Brantès, and followed by the Prince de Joinville and Bassompierre. As he entered the Queen-mother rose and curtsied profoundly, while the ladies and gentlemen of her household imitated her example, as they retired a pace or two behind her. Hitherto the Queen-mother had exhibited the most perfect composure, but she no sooner found herself once more in the presence of her son than she burst into a passionate flood of tears, which she attempted to conceal as she approached him by spreading her fan before her face. Louis moved forward in his turn, still clinging to De Luynes, but no trace of emotion was visible in his countenance, which was cold, and almost careless in its expression.

"Sir," said the unhappy Queen so soon as she had recovered her composure, "the tender care with which I watched over your youth, the efforts which I made for the preservation of your kingdom, the dangers which I braved, and which I might have avoided had I been induced to hazard the safety of your crown, will justify me before God, and prove that I have never had any other view than that of securing your welfare. I have repeatedly entreated that you would be pleased to take the reins of government into your own hands, and relieve me

from so heavy a responsibility, but you considered my services to be necessary, and commanded their continuance. I have obeyed you, both because I was bound to respect your will, and because I felt that it would have been cowardly to abandon you when you were threatened with danger. If I have failed to meet your wishes, or have contravened them, I can only entreat of you to pardon me; and to believe that had you explained your pleasure it should have been fulfilled. I rejoice that you are now about to govern your kingdom in your own person; and I pray God to grant you every prosperity. I thank you for the concessions which you have made; and I trust that you will henceforward act towards me like a good son and a good sovereign; while I, on my side, pledge myself that I shall ever continue to be your very humble and very obedient mother and servant."

"Madame," replied Louis in a cold and constrained tone, while the Queen was still struggling to suppress her tears, "I am convinced that you have always acted with the greatest zeal and affection. I am perfectly satisfied, and beg to thank you. You have expressed a wish to retire to Blois, and I have consented to that wish. Had you remained near me you should still have retained that share in the government which you have so long held; and you are still at liberty to do so, whenever you may desire it. Rest assured that I shall never fail to love, honour, and obey you as my mother upon every occasion; and that I shall continue throughout my life to be your very humble son."

This notable oration had been delivered by the young King with all the monotonous intonations of a studied recital, and was terminated by a sigh of relief as he saw himself near the conclusion of the comedy. It had been arranged that so soon as he ceased speaking the Queen should stoop forward to embrace him; but in the excess of her agitation the outraged mother disregarded the instructions which she had previously received, and in an accent of heart-broken anguish she exclaimed: "I am about to leave you, Sir; do not deny my last prayer. Release my faithful Barbin, and suffer him to share my exile."

Louis, unprepared for this request, was uncertain how he should reply, and glanced uneasily from De Luynes to Richelieu.

"Do not refuse me this, Sir," urged Marie once more; "it is the only boon I ask—perhaps," she added after a moment's pause, "the last I shall ever ask of you,"

Still Louis remained silent, with his cold stern eyes riveted upon her agitated countenance.

The unfortunate Queen could not mistake the meaning of that fixed and passionless look: her lip quivered for an instant, and then she bent her stately head and slightly touched the forehead of her son. Louis replied to the embrace by a profound and silent bow, and turned away hurriedly, as if weary of the scene in which he had played so undignified a part. As he moved aside, De Luynes approached the Queen-mother; and having bent his knee, and kissed the hem of her robe, he uttered a few words in so low a voice that they were inaudible to those who stood behind her. In reply she was overheard to say that she had solicited his Majesty to allow Barbin to follow her to Blois, and to continue his duties as superintendent of her household; and that she should consider herself greatly indebted to the kindness of the favourite if he would exert his influence to that effect. De Luynes was about once more to speak, when the voice of the King was heard loudly calling for him; and putting forward as an excuse the impossibility of compelling his Majesty to wait, he once more bowed to the ground, and made his retreat.

When she saw him disappear in the crowd Marie de Medicis gave free vent to the emotion which she had so long partially controlled; and as the other great nobles of the Court successively bent before her, she remained with her face buried in her handkerchief, sobbing audibly, and apparently unconscious of their homage. Ten minutes afterwards she descended the great staircase, and took her seat in the coach which was to convey her to Blois, accompanied by the Princesses and all the principal ladies of the Court, who were to attend her to the city gates. An immense crowd had collected on the quay of the Louvre to see her pass; but, contrary to the apprehensions of her friends, not a word of insult or reproach was uttered.

There was something so appalling even to the most reckless in her sudden fall; something so sad in this gorgeous procession which seemed rather to mock than to honour her misfortunes; so sharp and bitter a lesson in the spectacle of a Princess lately all-powerful thus driven from her palace-home to immure herself in a fortress, and this too in broad daylight, under the eyes of her subjects, and in the streets of the capital, that she excited the involuntary sympathy even of her enemies.

This sympathy was, however, unfelt by her son; who no sooner became aware that she was about to enter her carriage than he hurried to the balcony of the Queen's apartment, whence he attentively watched the departure of the *cortège*, manifesting the most lively interest in the preliminary arrangements; and as the last equipage disappeared, he returned to the room saying gaily: "Now then, gentlemen, we will start for Vincennes." Some minutes afterwards, the palace resounded with the voices of ushers, pages, and men-at-arms; a dozen carriages rolled into the Court; the King paid a farewell visit to his dogs, his birds, and his wife; and then, desiring that the Queen and her ladies should follow him on the morrow, he left orders that the Louvre should be minutely searched throughout, in order to ascertain beyond all possibility of doubt that no gunpowder had been concealed within the edifice for the purpose of effecting his destruction; after which he sprang into his coach, with an undisguised cheerfulness which left no doubt that his affected respect and attachment for his mother were by no means incompatible with a hearty sense of relief at his emancipation from her control.

The Maréchale d'Ancre had been committed to the Bastille on the 29th of April, lightly dressed, despoiled of all her ornaments, and without the most trifling pecuniary resource; so thoroughly destitute, indeed, of the common necessaries of life that she was indebted to Madame Persan, the wife of the lieutenant of the fortress, for a couple of changes of body-linen. Even the Prince de Condé, who was professedly her enemy, was deeply moved when he ascertained her pitiable condition. "It was not to Leonora that political crimes should be attributed," he said, with an indignation which did honour to his heart; "but to the insatiable ambition of her husband."

Her only attendants were an Italian maid and her apothecary, whose constant care was required from the precarious state both of her bodily and mental health; but she nevertheless maintained a self-command and composure which astonished all by whom she was approached. She uttered no complaint; exhibited no resentment; and in reply to the condolences of her gaolers, simply replied: "I must have patience; my enemies are powerful, the Queen-mother is absent, and no doubt I shall be compelled to leave France. I will retire with my son to Florence; we have still the means of subsistence, and I must endeavour to forget the past."

Some days subsequently her women succeeded in conveying to her a few changes of apparel and two hundred crowns in money; but when, on the 11th of May, she was transferred to the prison of the Conciergerie, these effects were in their turn stolen from her, and she once more found herself totally penniless. In addition to this misfortune she was apprised that she could no longer be permitted to retain her attendants, as the regulations of a felon prison did not admit of such an indulgence; and on hearing this, she said with a cry of agony: "I am lost!"

The Court remained a fortnight at Vincennes, after which the King returned to the Louvre. There, instead of endeavouring, according to the sage advice of his ministers, to render the absence of his mother unfelt by the adoption of measures calculated to prove that he was equal to the responsibility which he had been so eager to assume, he soon returned to the puerile amusements he had latterly affected to despise; and spent the day in colouring prints, beating a drum, blowing a bugle, or making *jets d'eau* with quills. On one occasion when Bassompierre was complimenting him upon the facility with which he acquired everything that he desired to learn, he replied with great complacency: "I must begin again with my hunting-horn, which I blow very well; and I will practise for a whole day."

"Be careful, Sire," was the reply of the courtier; "I would not advise your Majesty to indulge too much in such a diversion, as it is injurious to the chest; and I have even heard it

Marie de Medicis

asserted that the late King Charles IX burst a blood-vessel on the lungs from his abuse of that instrument; an accident which terminated his life."

"You are wrong, Sir," said Louis with one of his cold saturnine looks; "it was his quarrel with Catherine de Medicis which caused his death. If he had not followed the bad advice of the Maréchal de Retz, and resided with her subsequently at Monceaux, he would not have died so young."

Bassompierre was silenced; and thenceforward resolved never again to mention the name of the Queen-mother in the presence of his royal master. Meanwhile it was universally anticipated that as all the other Princes had been restored to favour, M. de Condé would be liberated; but such a measure by no means accorded with the views of De Luynes, who, aware of the influence of the noble prisoner, felt himself too weak to cope openly with the first Prince of the Blood; and, consequently, the only benefit which Condé derived from the death of the Maréchal d'Ancre was a mitigation of the extreme vigilance with which he had hitherto been guarded. The conduct of the Princess his wife was at this juncture above all praise. She had, from the first period of his imprisonment, been persevering in her efforts to accomplish his liberation; and having failed to do this, had solicited the permission of the King to share his captivity; but, by the advice of his favourite, Louis had hitherto resolutely refused to accede to such an arrangement; although he might justly have been struck by the heroism of a sacrifice which in her case was heightened tenfold by the fact that, despite the jealousy which he had constantly exhibited, M. de Condé had made no secret of his utter indifference to his wife, and would never forgive her relations with Henri IV. After the departure of the Queen-mother, however, De Luynes judged it expedient to accept the offer of the Princess; and she was accordingly informed that she might proceed to the Louvre, where the King would grant her an audience. She had no sooner received this permission than she hastened, accompanied by the Duchesse d'Angoulême her sister, to throw herself at the feet of the young sovereign; where, bathed in tears, she sobbed out her acknowledgment of the indulgence extended to her, and implored him to extend his clemency to the Prince her husband. "But should you unhappily consider it expedient to detain him in the Bastille, Sire," she concluded with deep emotion, "I entreat of your Majesty to allow me to share his prison."

"Madame," replied Louis, "it was already my intention so to do. I am sincerely attached to M. de Condé, and to all his house; and every attention shall be paid to him until my government is perfectly established. I greatly regret that at the present moment I am prevented by circumstances from restoring him to liberty; but assure him from me that I will cause his liberation at the earliest opportunity."

Again and again did the delighted Princess utter her thanks; and after having been graciously dismissed by the King, she lost not a moment in proceeding, armed with the royal authority, to the Bastille, where, having constituted herself a prisoner, she hastened to impart her hopeful tidings to the Prince.

Despite the assurances which she had received, however, from the lips of Louis himself, four more weary months were passed by M. and Madame de Condé in the fortress, in that daily and hourly fever of expectation which is more agonizing than utter despair; and even at the close of that dreary time, instead of the liberty for which the husband and wife alike panted, an order arrived at the Bastille for the transfer of the deluded and unhappy couple to the Castle of Vincennes, which was communicated to them as a signal mark of the royal clemency; and in that citadel they were detained until the autumn of 1619. The result of Madame de Condé's admirable self-abnegation was, however, a source of triumph for her woman-heart, as the Prince was not proof against so unequivocal a demonstration of attachment, and thenceforward evinced towards her a tenderness which amply repaid her sacrifice.

Shortly after the transfer of Madame d'Ancre to the Conciergerie she was put upon her trial; but as her mental hallucination, together with her estrangement from her husband, rendered it probable that sufficient proof of political delinquency could not be adduced against her to justify an extreme sentence, and as her escape from the scaffold must necessarily tend to render his tenure of the confiscated property of Concini (of which he had already obtained the

reversion) difficult, if not impossible, De Luynes did not hesitate to tamper with her judges, and to induce them, alike by bribes and threats, to accomplish her death. For this purpose a second charge was coupled with that of *lèse-majesté*, which was brought conjointly against herself and her murdered husband. She was accused of sorcery as well as of conspiring against the state; of casting alike nativities to compass the destruction of the King, and cannon for the service of the disaffected Princes; together with a host of other crimes, none of which could be proved against her. So palpable, indeed, was the motive of her persecutors, that it excited the popular indignation; and the masses, who had so recently execrated the name of the unfortunate woman, began, ere the conclusion of her trial, to look upon her only as the victim of De Luynes. "You will see," said some of the citizens, as they learnt with what dignified calmness and logical precision she refuted the several charges brought against her, "that here the case of the Duc de Biron will be reversed—like her he was the victim of policy, but he died like a woman, while she will meet her fate like a man."

And they were correct in their conclusion. Whatever might have been her faults while she continued the favourite of fortune, Leonora Galigai was grand in her adversity; and one of her judges was so much overpowered by his conviction of her innocence, that on recollecting the pledge which he had given to De Luynes to decide upon her guilt, he fainted and was carried from the Court. When accused of treason against the state, the prisoner replied by reminding her accusers of her total estrangement from her husband during the last two years, throughout which period he had been all-powerful with the Queen-mother, and her own consequent loss of influence; and when questioned as to the nature of the sorcery by which she had so long governed her royal mistress, she answered that it was simply the magic exercised by a strong mind over a weak one. To the other charges she responded with equal composure and conclusiveness; and many among them were of so puerile a character that, despite the fearful position in which she was placed, she could not suppress a smile of mingled pity and amusement.

She was foredoomed, however; and on the 8th of July the sentence was pronounced. It was in truth a frightful one! Both the husband and the wife were declared guilty of *lèse-majesté* divine and human; and she herself was condemned to lose her head, and to be afterwards burned; their house was to be levelled with the ground; their property, not only in France, but also all that they possessed at Rome and Florence, was to be confiscated to the Crown; and their son deprived of his rank, and rendered incapable of holding any office in the kingdom.

When this sentence was declared the wretched woman, who had never anticipated a more severe fate than exile, exclaimed in a piteous voice: "Oimè poveretta!" but shortly recovering herself, she resumed the same calm courage which she had previously evinced.

Perhaps the most merciful portion of her sentence was that which condemned her to suffer on the same day; and for this she was undoubtedly indebted to the impatience of De Luynes, who did not feel himself secure of the succession until she should have ceased to breathe. The revelations which she had made of the extent of her wealth during the preliminary examinations in the prison had sealed her fate, as they so far exceeded all his anticipations that they silenced every throb of compunction and negated every other feeling; and they thus at least spared her a night of agony during which she might have brooded over the miserable prospects of her idolized son.

It is painful to reflect upon the position which the Marquise had filled, and to see her thus shaken and withered both in mind and body; abandoned by the protectress to whom she had clung so long and so confidingly; widowed by violence; separated from her only surviving child; and compelled to drain her cup of bitterness to the very dregs. Not a pang was, however, voluntarily spared to her. She might, in consideration of her rank as the wife of a Marshal of France, and out of respect for the Queen-mother, of whom she had not only been the foster-sister but also the familiar friend, have been conveyed to the place of execution in a covered carriage, and thus have been in some degree screened from the public gaze; but no such delicacy was observed. The criminal's cart, with its ghastly faggot for a seat, was her ordained conveyance; but her step did not falter as she stepped into the vehicle which had been

previously tenanted by the vilest and most degraded culprits. Never had there been seen so dense a crowd in the Place de Grève; and as she glanced hurriedly around, unaware of the popular reaction of feeling, she covered for an instant panic-struck, and murmured helplessly: "Oh, what a multitude to gaze upon a miserable woman!"

Not a word, not a gesture of vengeance or of hate, escaped, however, from the populace. Her deportment had been so dignified, her courage so great, her piety so perfect, that those who were once her bitterest enemies looked on her through their tears. Her charities had been unremitting and extensive; and those whom she had aided in their necessities had thronged, through a morbid and mingled feeling of gratitude and awe, to see her die.

Her head fell—her body was burned—and her ashes were scattered to the wind.

De Luynes had, as we have stated, constituted himself her heir; but it was not without difficulty that he succeeded in appropriating the principal portion of the coveted wealth of his victims. Du Vair, with a firmness for which the favourite was not prepared, refused for a considerable time to countersign the letters of consignment which had been granted by the King to that effect; declaring that as the property of Concini and his family had been confiscated to the Crown, it could not be otherwise disposed of. This difficulty was, however, surmounted after the fashion of the period, and the signature of the scrupulous minister was purchased by the rich bishopric of Lisieux; after which De Luynes himself negated the destruction of the magnificent hôtel of the Maréchal, to which he transferred his own establishment, and then proceeded to enforce his claims upon the funded property in Rome. This pretension was, however, opposed by the Pope, who declared that all monies confiscated within the Roman states must necessarily revert to himself; and Louis XIII, after having in vain endeavoured to induce the Sovereign-Pontiff to rescind this declaration, found himself ultimately compelled to make a donation of the five hundred thousand francs claimed by his favourite to the cathedral of St. Peter's.

The Grand Duke of Tuscany, in his turn, refused to recognize the right of De Luynes to the funds which had been entrusted to him by the Maréchal d'Ancre, but from a higher and a holier motive; as the young Comte de la Péna was no sooner set at liberty, with an injunction immediately to leave France, than he received him with all the sympathy due to his unmerited misfortunes, and put him in possession of this remnant of his inheritance. Thenceforward the son of Concini remained in Italy until the year 1631, when he fell a victim to the plague. Before we quit the Court to follow exclusively the fortunes of Marie de Medicis, it is necessary that we should record three circumstances of social interest which occurred during the year 1617. The first in order is the death of the President de Thou, one of the most able and upright ministers, and, perhaps, the most conscientious historian that France had ever known. He expired on the 7th of May. The next, in point of chronology, is the marriage of De Luynes, who—having obtained the most absolute power, not only over the King personally, but also over all state affairs—being anxious to strengthen his position yet more by a great alliance, after having for a time contemplated an union with the daughter of the Duc de Vendôme, ultimately entered into a negotiation for the hand of Mademoiselle de Montbazon. This negotiation proved successful; and through her means he became closely connected with the most ancient and powerful families in the kingdom. The marriage took place on the 13th of September, and the bride was admitted to the honours of the *tabouret*; while in order to render him more acceptable to the haughty houses into which the favour of his sovereign had thus afforded him ingress, the exulting favourite was elevated to a duchy-peerage, and took his seat in the Parliament. The last circumstance to which allusion has been made is the death of M. de Villeroy, who terminated his life at the ripe age of seventy-four years on the 30th of December. As we have already stated, he was possessed of little education, had no taste for either literature or art, but was singularly upright and shrewd in the management of public business; while he was, moreover, so thoroughly disinterested, that in the midst of all the cupidity which at that period disgraced the Court of France, after having been fifty-one years in office, he died with the mere addition of two thousand livres *per annum* to his patrimonial income.

In order to enlist popular opinion in his favour, De Luynes had, as we have seen, induced the King to recall the old ministers to power; and the people, still remembering the wisdom which they had displayed during their administration, welcomed with joy the reappearance of Sillery, Villeroy, and Jeannin in the Council; but although the favourite ostensibly recognized their privileges, he was far from intending to permit their interference with his own interests; and so thoroughly did he enslave the mind of the young King, that while Louis, like a schoolboy who had played truant, and who was resolved to enjoy his new-found liberty to the uttermost, was constantly changing his place of abode, and visiting in turn St. Germain, Fontainebleau, Villers-Cotterets, and Monceaux, without one care save the mere amusement of the hour, De Luynes was multiplying his precautions to prevent a reconciliation between the mother and the son; an event which must, as he believed, whenever it should occur, prove the ruin of his own fortunes. For this purpose, so soon as he saw a cloud upon the brow of the royal stripling, he hastened to devise for him some new and exciting pursuit, which might tend to deaden his remorse for the past, and to render him more conscious of the value of that moral emancipation which he had purchased at so fearful a price; but ere long even this subtle policy failed to dissipate the apprehensions of the favourite. Like all persons who occupy a false position of which they fully appreciate the uncertain tenure, he became suspicious of all around him; and would not allow any individual, whatever might be his rank, to approach the King without his knowledge, nor to attempt to converse with him in private. Thus, therefore, while Louis fondly believed that he had indeed become a monarch in fact as well as name, he was in reality more enslaved than ever.

Enriched by the spoils of Concini and his wife, De Luynes next caused himself to be appointed lieutenant of the King in Normandy; and this was no sooner done than he entered into a negotiation for one of the principal governments in the kingdom. He appeared suddenly to have forgotten that one of the most cogent reasons which he had so lately given for the necessity of sacrificing the Maréchal d'Ancre and his wife was the enormous wealth of which they had possessed themselves at the expense of the state. His ambition as well as his avarice became insatiable; and not contented with pushing his own fortunes to a height never before attained by a mere petty noble, he procured great advantages for his brothers, and lodged them in his apartments in the Louvre. But while Louis remained unconscious or careless of the new bondage into which he had thus fallen, the courtiers and the people were alike less blind and less forbearing. With that light-heartedness which has enabled the French in all ages to find cause for mirth even in their misfortunes, some wag, less scrupulous than inventive, on one occasion, under cover of the darkness, affixed above the door leading to the rooms occupied by the brothers a painting which represented the adoration of the Magi, beneath which was printed in bold letters, "At the sign of the Three Kings"; a practical jest which afforded great amusement to the Court.

At this period Louis XIII, still a mere youth, and utterly inexperienced in those great questions of public policy which determine the prosperity or the peril of a nation, resolved upon a measure which Henri IV himself had not ventured to undertake. The Roman Catholic religion had been abolished in Béarn by Jeanne d'Albret, his grandmother, and the property of that church seized in virtue of an Act passed at the assembly of the States; and now, on the demand of his clergy, he determined to issue a decree ordaining the restitution of all the ecclesiastical property, and the re-establishment of the Roman faith. This was, of course, resisted by the Protestants, as well as the annexation of the principality of Béarn to the Crown of France; but the advisers of the young King considered the opportunity to be a favourable one for effecting both measures; and they easily persuaded him to persevere in his purpose. The edict was consequently published; and its effects were destined to be painfully felt by the reformed party throughout the remainder of his reign.

The people, on their side, had not forgotten the promises which they had received of a reform in the government, and De Luynes still continued to give them hopes of their accomplishment; but as no measures to that effect were taken, they, at this period, demanded a new assembly of the States-General. They were, however, induced to modify this demand; and a meeting of the *Notables* was finally conceded, which was to take place at Rouen on the

Marie de Medicis

24th of November, in the presence of the sovereign. This assembly was accordingly held, but thanks to the influence of De Luynes produced none of the results which had been anticipated.

A few days before the departure of Marie de Medicis from Paris the King of Spain declared war against the Duke of Savoy, who immediately appealed to France for aid, which was in the first instance refused; but, on the representations of the Maréchal de Lesdiguières, it was finally accorded, and troops were raised which proceeded to Piedmont under the command of that general.

Such was the general aspect of the Court and kingdom of France at the close of the year 1617; of which we have considered it necessary to sketch the principal features, in order to remind the reader of the exact position of the country at the period of the Queen-mother's exile. Henceforward we shall principally confine ourselves to following her in her banishment.

BOOK III
MARIE DE MEDICIS AS EXILE

CHAPTER I

1618

It will be remembered that Marie de Medicis left the capital under a pledge from her son himself that she was at perfect liberty to change her place of abode whenever she should deem it expedient to do so; and that her sojourn at Blois was merely provisional, and intended as a temporary measure, to enable her to establish herself more commodiously in her own castle of Monceaux. Anxious for her absence, De Luynes had induced the King to consent to her wishes; but she had no sooner reached Blois than he determined that she should be compelled to remain there, as he dreaded her influence in a province of which she was the absolute mistress; and, accordingly, she had no sooner arrived in the fortress-palace on the Loire than he began to adopt the necessary measures for her detention. Within a week she was surrounded by spies; a precaution which would appear to have been supererogatory so long as Richelieu remained about her person, as his first care on reaching Blois was to write to the favourite to repeat his offers of service; and he himself informs us that "from time to time he sent him an exact account of the Queen's proceedings;" while so much anxiety did he evince to retain the confidence of the Court party that when Marie, desirous of repaying the sacrifice which she believed him to have made in following her fortunes, appointed him chief of her Council, he refused to accept this office until he had written to obtain the sanction of the King; and publicly declared that he would not occupy any official situation whatever in her service until he ascertained the pleasure of his Majesty.

These servile scruples did not, however, as he himself admits, suffice to set at rest the suspicions of De Luynes, whose knowledge of the Bishop's character by no means tended to inspire him with any confidence in his professions; while the Queen-mother, on her side, had soon cause to apprehend that the motives of Richelieu for his self-banishment were far less honourable than those which she had been so eager to attribute to him. Certain projects which she was anxious to keep profoundly secret became known to the favourite; and her natural distrust, coupled with this fact, induced her to be gradually less communicative to the intriguing prelate. Her spirits, moreover, gave way under the successive mortifications to which she was subjected; and combined with her somewhat tardy but deep regret at the fate of the Maréchal d'Ancre were fears for her own safety, which appeared to be daily threatened.

Her residence at Monceaux was soon in readiness for her reception; but when she apprised the King of her intention of removing thither, she received an evasive reply, and was courteously but peremptorily advised to defer her journey. Marie de Medicis from that moment fully comprehended her real position; but with a tact and dissimulation equal to that of Louis himself, she professed the most perfect indifference on the subject, and submitted without any remonstrance to the expressed wish of her son. This resignation to his will flattered the vanity of Louis, and quieted the fears of his favourite; but it by no means deceived the subtle Richelieu, who, aware of the inherent ambition of Marie de Medicis, at once felt convinced that she was preoccupied with some important design, and consequently indisposed to waste her energies upon questions of minor moment. At short intervals she addressed the most submissive letters to the King, assuring him of her devoted attachment to his interests, and her desire to obey his wishes in all things; but these assurances produced no effect upon the mind of Louis, whose ear was perpetually poisoned by the reports which reached him through the creatures of De Luynes, who never failed to attribute to the cabals of the Queen-mother all the Court intrigues, whatever might be their origin or character. Like herself, however, he was profuse in his professions of regard and confidence in her affection for his

person and zeal for his interests, at the very time when she could not stir a yard from the fortress, or even walk upon the ramparts, without being accompanied by a number of armed men, denominated by De Luynes, with melancholy facetiousness, a guard of honour. Nevertheless Marie retained the most perfect self-command; but she was fated to undergo a still more bitter trial than she had yet anticipated; for so little real respect did her son evince towards her that he entered into a negotiation for the marriage of his sister the Princesse Christine with the Prince of Piedmont without condescending to consult her wishes upon the subject; thus at once disregarding her privileges as a mother and as a Queen.

Superadded to this mortification was a second little less poignant. As the great nobles whom she had helped to enrich during her period of power resumed their position at Court, she anticipated from day to day that they would espouse her cause, and advocate her recall to the capital; but with the single exception of the Duc de Rohan, not one of the Princes had made an effort in her behalf; and the generous interference of the latter had, as she was aware, excited against him the animosity of De Luynes; while, on the contrary, the favourite showed undisguised favour to all who abandoned her cause.

At the close of the year 1617 the Duc de Rohan had proceeded to Savoy, and the Duc de Bouillon to Sedan; but the Ducs de Sully and d'Epéron still remained in the capital, where the latter again displayed as much pomp and pretension as he had done under the Regency; and at the commencement of 1618 he had a serious misunderstanding with Du Vair, the Keeper of the Seals, upon a point of precedence. Irascible and haughty, he resented the fact of that magistrate taking his place on all occasions of public ceremonial immediately after the Chancellor Sillery, and consequently before the dukes and peers; and on Easter Sunday, when the Court attended mass at the Church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois in state, he seized him roughly by the arm, and compelled him to give way. The King, indignant at so ill-timed a burst of passion, hastened to interfere, and spoke sharply to the Duke, who did not condescend to justify himself, but assumed an attitude of defiance, never subsequently leaving his hôtel without the attendance of a numerous suite of gentlemen ready to defend him in case of attack; while in addition to this breach of etiquette, M. d'Epéron loudly complained of the bad faith of De Luynes, who had promised, in order to induce his return to Court, to obtain a cardinal's hat for his third son the Archbishop of Toulouse, without, however, having subsequently made a single effort to redeem his pledge. So bitterly, indeed, did he inveigh against the favourite that he began to apprehend the possibility of an arrest; yet still he lingered in the capital, as if unwilling to retreat before an enemy whom he despised.

Among the individuals who had followed the Queen-mother into exile was a certain Abbé Rucellaï, a Florentine, who having failed to obtain advancement at the Court of Rome, had passed over to France in the hope of furthering his fortunes in that kingdom. His anticipations appeared for a time likely to be realized, as he was warmly welcomed on his arrival by his countryman Concini; but the assassination of the favourite having blighted all his prospects, he resolved upon revenge, and as a first step offered his services to Marie de Medicis, by whom they were accepted. The Queen-mother had no sooner formed her little Court than the Abbé proceeded to lay the foundations of his plot, which was based upon her return to power, and which he was well aware must involve the ruin of De Luynes; while at the same time he felt satisfied that he should be amply recompensed by Marie herself for his services. No opposition had been made to the self-banishment of Rucellaï by the Court party, as he was well known to be in infirm health and of effeminate habits; and to exhibit in every phase of his character the very reverse of a conspirator. He had, moreover, made friends during his residence in Paris; and, through the interest of Zamet, had obtained the Abbey of Signy in Champagne, which, together with his family inheritance, secured to him an annual income of twenty thousand crowns. This revenue he spent in the most liberal manner, and soon became very popular from the suavity and refinement of his manners, and his extreme generosity. An affair of gallantry had, however, involved him in a quarrel with the nephew of the Duc d'Epéron; who, espousing the cause of his relative, in his turn excited the hatred of the Abbé.

Marie de Medicis

Rucellai had been but a short time at Blois before he felt that he could carry out his plans with greater facility in the capital than while subjected to the constant surveillance of the Court spies by whom Marie de Medicis was surrounded; and he accordingly obtained permission to return to Court, De Luynes being easily induced to believe that his application was caused by his weariness of the monotony of Blois, and his desire to participate once more in the gaities of Paris. The fact, however, was far otherwise. The thirst for vengeance had produced a singular effect upon the Florentine; and although he still affected to enact the sybarite, in order to mislead those whom he sought to ruin, he became suddenly endued with a moral energy as well as a physical strength of which no one had believed him to be possessed. Neither fatigue, danger, nor difficulty sufficed to paralyze his exertions; and if he was one hour at the feet of a Court beauty, he was busied the next in the most subtle and well-devised attempts to win over one or other of the great nobles to the cause of the exiled Queen.

He experienced little difficulty in his undertaking; all the Princes desiring the ruin of De Luynes and the return of the Queen-mother; but when he urged that an endeavour should be made to effect her escape, to secure her safety in a fortified town, and then to take up arms against the favourite, he failed in finding one individual bold enough to venture on so extreme a step, although all were ready to volunteer their support when her flight should have been accomplished. In this extremity Rucellai cast his eyes upon the Duc de Bouillon, whose courage was undoubted, and upon whose spirit of intrigue he calculated with confidence; but in order to win over the Marshal it was necessary that he should communicate with him personally, and he accordingly caused rumours to be spread which excited the apprehensions of the ministers, and totally misled them as to his real designs, while at the same time they induced De Luynes to issue an order for his immediate departure from the capital. The Abbé complied with apparent reluctance; and then lost no time in hastening to Signy, whence he proceeded with all speed to Sedan.

Here, however, contrary to his expectations, he was doomed to disappointment; for while Bouillon expressed the greatest devotion for Marie de Medicis, and asserted his wish for her restoration to power, which he coupled with the remark that "the Court was still the same wine-shop as ever, although they had changed the stamp of their cork," he pleaded his age and his infirmities as a pretext for declining to enter into the conspiracy which was about to be organized for her release; while, at the same time, he suggested that no individual could be found more eligible to secure the success of such an enterprise than M. d'Epéron. "He is both proud and daring," he said in conclusion; "address yourself to him. This is the best advice which I can offer to the Queen-mother."

Of this fact the Abbé was himself persuaded; but two circumstances appeared to present insurmountable obstacles to his success with the haughty Duke. In the first place he had withdrawn from the Court greatly incensed against Marie de Medicis, who had sacrificed his interests to those of the Prince de Condé and the Maréchal d'Ancre; and in the next he was the declared enemy of Rucellai himself. The position of the Abbé was perplexing, as he well knew that M. d'Epéron never forgave an injury inflicted upon him by an inferior; but the crisis was one of such importance that the Florentine resolved to make any concession rather than abandon his design. He was aware that, however hostile the Duke might be to himself personally, his hatred of De Luynes far exceeded any feeling of animosity which he could possibly entertain towards a man whom he considered as a mere adventurer; and the ambition of the Abbé determined him to sacrifice his pride to the necessities of the cause in which he laboured. Having therefore decided upon making his own feelings subservient to the success of his enterprise, he returned without hesitation to Paris, but he had still a great difficulty to overcome; as, until the Duke should be made fully aware of the nature of his mission, he could not venture to intrude upon his privacy, although the moment was singularly favourable. M. d'Epéron had incurred the displeasure of the Court by his quarrel with Du Vair, and his open defiance of the favourite; his sons were equally incensed by the disappointment to which the Archbishop of Toulouse had been latterly subjected, and had been as unguarded as himself in their expressions of disgust; but still Rucellai was aware that he must exert the utmost precaution in order not to excite the resentment of the man upon whose co-operation he founded all his hopes of ultimate success; and after having carefully considered the best

Marie de Medicis

method of effecting his purpose, he decided upon inducing the Queen-mother to cause a letter to be forwarded to the Archbishop of Toulouse, wherein he was requested to negotiate an interview between his father and the Abbé. The young prelate willingly undertook the task assigned to him; but whether it were that the Duke still resented the conduct of Marie de Medicis, or that he feared to compromise himself still further with the Court, he merely answered with some impatience, "I am about to retire to Metz: I will not listen to any propositions from the Queen until I am in my own government;" a reply which did not, however, tend to discourage the persevering Florentine.

When the details of this attempt were communicated to her Marie hastened to forward to M. d'Epéron a watch superbly ornamented with diamonds, requesting him at the same time to confide to her the nature of his intentions; but he again refused to give any explanations until he should have left the capital.

The journey of the Duke was not long delayed. His position became daily more untenable; and on the 6th of May he quitted Paris, without even venturing to take leave of the King.

Rucellai no sooner learnt that M. d'Epéron had reached Metz than he prepared to follow up the negotiation. He had afforded an asylum at Signy to Vincenzo Ludovici, the secretary of the Maréchal d'Ancre, who had been sent to the Bastille at the period of his master's murder, where he had remained until after the execution of Leonora Galigai, when an order was forwarded for his release. This man, who was an able diplomatist, and had great experience in Court intrigue, possessed the entire confidence of his new patron, who hastened to despatch him to the Duc d'Epéron with a letter of recommendation from the Queen-mother, and full instructions for treating with the haughty noble in her name. Ludovici acquitted himself creditably of his mission; and although M. d'Epéron at first replied to his representations by an indignant recapitulation of the several instances of ingratitude which he had experienced from the late Regent, he nevertheless admitted that he still felt a sincere interest in her cause. This concession sufficed to encourage the envoy; and after a time the negotiation was opened. Vincenzo promised, in the name of the Queen, money, troops, and fortresses; and, moreover, such advantageous conditions that the Duke finally consented to return a decisive answer after he should have had time to consider the proposals which had been made to him.

Had M. d'Epéron followed the advice of his sons, the Marquis de la Valette and the Archbishop of Toulouse, the enterprise might at once have been accomplished. His vanity was flattered by the consciousness that his services were not only essential but even indispensable to the Queen-mother; but he had outlived the age of enthusiasm, and past experience had made him cautious. He therefore declined giving any definitive answer until he had ascertained who were the great nobles pledged to the faction of the Queen-mother, and the amount of money which she was prepared to disburse for the expenses of a civil war.

The agent of Rucellai was ready with his reply. He informed the Duke that the House of Guise, M. de Montmorency, the Maréchal de Bouillon, and several others were prepared to join him so soon as he should have declared openly in her favour; while Marie de Medicis was prepared to advance considerable sums whenever they should be required.

Upon receiving this assurance M. d'Epéron hesitated no longer. He had utterly forfeited his position at Court, while he had reason to apprehend that De Luynes contemplated the confiscation of all his offices under the Crown, and the seizure of his numerous governments; a circumstance which determined him openly to brave the displeasure of the King, and to espouse the interests of his mother.

Throughout the whole of this negotiation Ludovici had been careful not to betray to the Duke the fact that Rucellai had organized the faction of which he was about to become the leader; but he had no sooner pledged himself to the cause than it became necessary to inform him of the circumstance. His anger and indignation were for a time unbounded; he was, however, ultimately induced to consent to an interview with the Abbé, who on his arrival at

Marie de Medicis

Metz soon succeeded in overcoming the prejudices of the offended noble, and in effecting his reconciliation with the Maréchal de Bouillon. A common interest induced both to bury past injuries in oblivion; and it was not long ere the Florentine was enabled to communicate to Marie de Medicis the cheering intelligence that the Cardinal de Guise, M. de Bouillon, and the Duc d'Epéron had agreed to levy an army of twelve thousand infantry and three thousand horse in the province of Champagne, in order to create a diversion in case the King should march troops towards Angoulême, whither it was resolved that she should be finally conveyed after her escape from Blois; as well as to defend the Marquis de la Valette if an endeavour were made to drive him out of Metz, while his father was absent with the Queen-mother.

On receiving this intelligence Marie forwarded to Rucellai the sum of two hundred thousand crowns, of which he transferred a portion to the Cardinal de Guise and the Maréchal de Bouillon; and every precaution was taken to ensure the success of the enterprise.

Despite all the caution which had been observed, however, these transactions had not taken place without exciting the attention and suspicions of the Court; and notwithstanding all his anxiety to secure the confidence and goodwill of the favourite, Richelieu had been one of the first to feel the effects of the hatred conceived against those who under any pretext adhered to the interests of the Queen-mother. It is true that on leaving Paris he had pledged himself to watch all her proceedings, and immediately to report every equivocal circumstance which might fall under his observation, but his antecedents were notorious, and no faith was placed in his promise. De Luynes and the ministers were alike distrustful of his sincerity; and only a few weeks after his arrival at Blois an order reached him by which he was directed to retire forthwith to his priory at Coussay near Mirabeau, and to remain there until he should receive further instructions. In vain did Marie de Medicis--who, whatever might be her misgivings as to his good faith, was nevertheless acutely conscious of the value of Richelieu's adherence--entreat of the King to permit his return to Blois; her request was denied, and the Bishop had no alternative save obedience; nor was it long ere De Luynes induced Louis to banish him to Avignon.

The annoyance of the Queen-mother upon this occasion was increased by the fact that Richelieu was replaced at her little Court by M. de Roissy, who was peculiarly obnoxious to her. Her representations to this effect were, however, disregarded; and she was compelled to receive him into her household. If the statement of his predecessor be a correct one, the unfortunate Marie had only too much cause to deprecate his admission to her circle, as thenceforward her captivity became more rigorous than ever, no person being permitted to approach her without his sanction; while her favourite attendants were dismissed by his orders (among others Caterina Selvaggio, who had accompanied her from Florence and to whom she was much attached), and replaced by others who were devoted to the interests of De Luynes. It is, however, difficult to believe that this account was not exaggerated, from the extremely bitter spirit evinced by the writer; who probably endeavoured to minimize in so far as he was able his own false behaviour towards his royal mistress and benefactor, by an overwrought account of the increased insults to which she was subjected after his departure.

This much is nevertheless certain, that the unfortunate Queen was treated with a severity and disrespect which determined her to proceed to any extremity rather than submit to a continuance of such unmitigated mortification. Indignant at the prolonged imprisonment of Barbin, and the harsh treatment endured by the few who still adhered to her cause, she at length openly resisted the tyranny of her gaolers; upon which De Luynes, perceiving that the mission of De Roissy had failed, despatched the Maréchal d'Ornano to Blois, with express orders to leave untried no means of intimidating her into submission; a task which he performed with such extreme rudeness, that in the course of the interview he so far forgot himself as to menace her with his hand, and to tell her that should she undertake anything inimical to the interests of the favourite, she should be exhausted "until she was as dry as wood." This insult, however, only tended to arouse the proud spirit of the outraged Princess, who indignantly exclaimed: "I am weary of being daily accused of some new crime. This state of things must be put an end to; and it shall be so, even if I am compelled, like a mere private individual, to submit myself to the judgment of the Parliament of Paris."

Marie de Medicis

The new attitude thus assumed by the Queen-mother alarmed De Luynes, whose increasing unpopularity induced him to fear that the Princes, who did not seek to disguise their disgust at his unbridled arrogance, would be easily persuaded to espouse her cause. He therefore endeavoured to excite her apprehensions by affecting to accomplish a reconciliation with M. de Condé, for which purpose he repeatedly despatched Déageant to Vincennes in order that she might suppose the negotiation to have commenced; but all these artifices failed to shake the resolution of Marie de Medicis.

This display of firmness augmented the dismay of De Luynes and the ministers, who then conjointly endeavoured to compel her to ask the royal permission to retire to Florence; for which purpose they treated her with greater rigour than before. Several troops of cavalry were garrisoned in the immediate environs of Blois; she was not permitted to leave the fortress; and orders were given that she should not, under any pretext, be allowed to receive visitors without the previous sanction of the favourite. Still the spirit of Marie remained unbroken; and it was ascertained that, despite all precautions, she pursued her purpose with untiring perseverance. It thus became necessary to adopt other measures. Cadenet, the brother of De Luynes, was accordingly instructed to proceed to her prison, and to inform her that the King was about to visit her, in order to make arrangements for her liberation; but the Queen had been already apprised of his intended arrival, as well as of the motive of his journey, and the fallacy of the promises which he had been directed to hold out; and consequently, after coldly expressing her sense of the intended clemency, and the gratification which she should derive from the presence of her son, she dismissed the messenger as calmly and as haughtily as though she had still been Regent of the kingdom.

De Luynes and his adherents felt that hitherto nothing had been gained; and they next determined to enlist the services of her confessor, the Jesuit Suffren, who had, as they were aware, great influence over her mind. Suffren declared himself ready to do all in his power to meet the wishes of the King and his ministers, and to induce his royal penitent to submit patiently to her captivity, should he be convinced that in so acting he was fulfilling his duty towards both parties; and for the purpose of a thorough understanding on this point, he suggested that an accredited person should be named with whom he might enter into a negotiation. De Luynes immediately appointed for this office another Jesuit called Ségueraud, and the two ecclesiastics accordingly met to discuss the terms upon which Suffren was to offer the desired advice to the Queen-mother; but he had no sooner ascertained that an unqualified concession was demanded on her part without any reciprocal pledge upon that of her enemies, than he conscientiously declined to give her any such counsel, and the parties separated without coming to an understanding.

This failure no sooner reached the ears of Arnoux, the King's confessor, than he volunteered to renew the negotiation, under the impression that he should be more successful than his colleague; an offer which was eagerly accepted by De Luynes, who procured for him an autograph letter from Louis XIII, which he was instructed to deliver personally into the hands of Marie. In this letter the King stated that having been informed of the wish of the Queen-mother to make a pilgrimage to some holy places, he hastened to express his gratification at the intelligence; and to assure her that he should rejoice to learn that she took more exercise than she had lately done for the benefit of her health, which was to him a subject of great interest; adding, moreover, that should circumstances permit, he would willingly bear her company; but that, in any case, he would not fail to do so in writing, as he desired that wherever she went she should be received, respected, and honoured like himself.

Habituated as she was to these wordy and equivocal communications, the Queen-mother, aware that her every word and gesture would be closely scrutinized by the reverend envoy, concealed her indignation, and affected to experience unalloyed gratification from this display of affection on the part of her son; a circumstance of which Arnoux availed himself to impress upon her mind the certainty of an approaching and complete reconciliation with the King, provided she should express her willingness to comply with his pleasure in all things, and pledge herself not to form any cabal against his authority, or to make any attempt to leave Blois until he should sanction her departure; and it would, moreover, appear that the Jesuit

was eloquent, as he ultimately succeeded in overcoming the distrust of his listener. If Suffren, who had become weary of the monotony of Blois, and of the insignificance to which his royal penitent was reduced by her enforced exile, was desirous to see her once more resume her position at Court, Arnoux was no less anxious on his part to secure her continued absence, as he apprehended that her return to the capital would involve his own dismissal, from the fact of his having owed his appointment to De Luynes; while whatever may have been the arguments which he advanced, under cover of a sincere and earnest wish to see the mother and the son once more united by those natural bonds which had been for some time riven asunder, it is certain that he finally effected his object, and induced the unfortunate Princess to give full credence to his assurances of attachment towards herself, and his pious wish to accomplish a reconciliation which was the ardent desire of her own heart; and accordingly, before the termination of the interview, Marie de Medicis pledged herself to all that he required.

"I do not, Madame," said the subtle Jesuit, on receiving this assurance, "doubt for a single instant the sincerity of your Majesty; but others may prove less confiding than myself. I would therefore respectfully urge you to furnish me with some document which will bear testimony to the success of my mission, and demonstrate the excellent decision at which you have arrived. Do this, and I will guarantee that you shall obtain from the King your son all that you may desire."

Marie yielded; and her insidious adviser lost no time in drawing up an act by which the imprudent Queen bound herself by a solemn oath to submit in all things to the will and pleasure of the sovereign; to hold no intelligence with any individual either within or without the kingdom contrary to his interests; to denounce all those who were adverse to his authority; to assist in their punishment; and finally, to remain tranquilly at Blois till such time as Louis should see fit to recall her to the capital. She was, moreover, induced to consent to the publication of this document; and thus armed the astute Jesuit returned to Court, where he received the acknowledgments of De Luynes, coupled with renewed promises of favour and support.

Aware of the deep devotional feelings of the Queen-mother, De Luynes never for an instant apprehended that she would be induced to infringe an oath by which she had invoked "God and the holy angels"; and he consequently regarded her captivity as perpetual; but he forgot, when arriving at this conclusion, that although he had, through the medium of one Jesuit, succeeded in persuading her to consent to her own ruin, there still remained about her person a second, whose individual interests were involved with her own, and who would, in all probability, prove equally unscrupulous. Such was, in fact, the case; Suffren, to whose empire over the mind of Marie we have already alluded, did not hesitate (when as days and weeks passed away, and no effort was made towards her release, she began to evince symptoms of impatience, and of regret at the act into which she had been betrayed) to assure her that an extorted oath, however solemn, was not valid; and to impress upon her that she was not justified before her Maker in depriving herself of that liberty of action which had been His gift; a pious sophism which could not but prove palatable to his persecuted mistress. Together with this consoling conviction, she soon perceived, moreover, that she had at least derived one benefit from her imprudence, as the Court party, confiding in her word, made no attempt to prevent the realization of the design which she had affected of a devotional pilgrimage; and which was sanctioned by the letter of the King.

Anxious, however, to destroy any latent hope in which she might still indulge of a return to power, De Luynes resolved to effect the ruin of all who had evinced any anxiety for her restoration; and there was suddenly a commission given to the Council, "to bring to trial the authors of the cabals and factions, having for their object the recall of the Queen-mother, the deliverance of the Prince de Condé, and the overthrow of the State." The first victims of this sweeping accusation were the Baron de Persan, the brother-in-law of De Vitry, and De Bournonville his brother, who were entrusted with the safe keeping of Barbin in the Bastille, and by whom he had been indirectly permitted to maintain a correspondence with his exiled mistress; together with the brothers Siti, of Florence, and Durand, the composer of the King's ballets. The result of the trial proved the virulence of the prosecutors, but at the same time

revealed their actual weakness, as they feared to execute the sentence pronounced against the three principal offenders; and were compelled to satiate their vengeance upon the more insignificant and less guilty of the accused parties.

M. de Persan was simply exiled from the Court; De Bournonville was sentenced to death, but not executed; while Barbin only escaped the scaffold by a single vote, and was condemned to banishment; a sentence which the King subsequently aggravated by changing it to perpetual imprisonment. The three pamphleteers, for such were in reality the brothers Siti and Marie Durand, whose only crime appeared to have been that they had written a diatribe against De Luynes, did not, however, escape so easily, as the two former were broken on the wheel and burned in the Place de Grève, while the third was hanged.

Such a wholesale execution upon so slight a pretext aroused the indignation of the citizens, and excited the murmurs of the people, who could not brook that the person of an ennobled adventurer should thus be held sacred, while the widow of Henry the Great was exposed to the insults of every time-serving courtier. Nor were the nobles less disgusted with this display of heartless vanity and measureless pretension. The Ducs de Rohan and de Montbazon, despite their family connexion with the arrogant favourite, had already openly endeavoured to effect a reconciliation between Louis and the Queen-mother; and the other disaffected Princes no sooner witnessed the effect produced upon the populace by the cruel tyranny of De Luynes, than they resolved to profit by this manifestation, and to lose no time in attempting the deliverance of the royal prisoner.

Instant measures were taken for this purpose; and meanwhile the favourite, lulled into false security, was wholly unconscious of this new conspiracy, believing that by his late deed of blood he had awed all his adversaries into submission.

CHAPTER II

1619

The Duc d'Epéron, to whom had been confided the important task of effecting the escape of the Queen-mother from her fortress-prison, had discussed all the necessary measures with the Abbé Rucellai, who had, as we have stated, acquired his entire confidence; and his first step was to request permission of the King to leave Metz (where he had been ordered to remain for the purpose of watching the movements in Germany), and to proceed to Angoulême. But as he was aware that this permission would be refused, he did not await a reply, and commenced his journey on the 22nd of January (1619), accompanied by a hundred gentlemen well armed, forty guards, and his personal attendants; taking with him the sum of eight thousand pistoles together with the whole of his jewels. In consequence of the amount of his baggage he was not enabled to travel more than ten leagues each day; but as no impediment presented itself, he arrived safely at Confolens in Poitou, where he was joined by his son the Archbishop of Toulouse, who was awaiting him in that city with the principal nobles of his several governments.

Meanwhile Rucellai had entrusted one of his lackeys with letters for the Queen-mother, in which he informed her of the day of the Duke's intended departure from Metz; but this man, convinced by the earnest manner in which his master enjoined him to take the greatest precautions in the delivery of his despatches, that the packet in his possession was one of importance, instead of proceeding to Blois, hastened to the capital, and offered to some of the followers of De Luynes to put a secret into the possession of their master, provided he were well recompensed for his treachery. The favourite was duly informed of the circumstance, but prosperity had rendered him incautious, and he neglected to avail himself of the intelligence; suffering several days to elapse before he made any inquiry as to the nature of the communication which had thus been volunteered. Fortunately for the Queen-mother, one of her own adherents was less dilatory; and having ascertained that the confidential lackey of Rucellai had arrived in Paris, he caused him to be found, and took possession of the letters before they could be transferred to the hands of her enemy. As, however, he in his turn delayed to forward them to Marie de Medicis, she became alarmed by the silence of the Duc d'Epéron, and believed that her friends had abandoned her to her fate; a conviction which reduced her to despair. Her hopes had latterly been excited; the representations and arguments of Suffren, seconded by her own desires, had quieted the scruples of her conscience; and this new check was bitter in the extreme. A thousand fears assailed her; treachery and hatred enveloped her on all sides; and superadded to her own ruin, she was forced to contemplate that of all who had adhered to her fallen fortunes; when, precisely as she was about to abandon all hope, Du Plessis, the confidant of M. d'Epéron, arrived at Blois with the welcome intelligence that the Duke was awaiting her at Loches, very uneasy on his side at the non-receipt of her reply to his letters.

The appearance of the messenger quieted the apprehensions of Marie, but she still remained in a position of considerable perplexity from the fact that all her most devoted adherents were absent negotiating with the great nobles on her behalf, having found their mission one of far greater difficulty than the profuse professions of the latter had led her to anticipate. The Duc de Bellegarde, her relative, had written to dissuade her from placing herself in the hands of a noble whose arrogance could not fail to disgust those who desired to serve her. "As for myself, Madame," he concluded, "I am quite ready to receive your Majesty in

Marie de Medicis

my government of Burgundy, but I cannot offer my services in any part of the kingdom which is subject to the authority of M. d'Epéron."'

Such an assurance alarmed the Queen-mother, who had great reason to fear that the same objection would be even more stringently urged by others less interested in her safety; but she had now gone too far to recede. The Duke had already incurred the risk of the King's displeasure by leaving Metz without the royal permission; he was at that moment anticipating her arrival at Loches, whence he was to conduct her to the château of Angoulême; and finally, she felt all the force of the arguments of Du Plessis, who reminded her that every moment was precious, as from hour to hour the enterprise might become known to the favourite, and consequently rendered abortive.

Hasty preparations were made; and during the night of the 21st of February she escaped by a ladder from the window of her closet, attended only by the Comte de Brienne, a single waiting-woman, and two individuals of her household. It was not, however, without considerable difficulty that she accomplished this portion of her undertaking, as at the last moment it was discovered that, from her great bulk, the casement would scarcely admit the passage of her person. Despair nevertheless made her desperate; and after several painful efforts she succeeded in forcing herself through the aperture; but her nerves were so much shaken by this unlucky circumstance, that when she had reached the platform, whence a second ladder was to conduct her to the ditch of the fortress, she declared her utter inability to descend it; and she was ultimately folded in a thick cloak, and cautiously lowered down by the joint exertions of her attendants. The Comte de Brienne and M. du Plessis then supported her to the carriage which was in waiting at the bridge; and Marie de Medicis found herself a fugitive in her son's kingdom, surrounded only by half a dozen individuals, and possessed of no other resources than her jewels.

The fugitives travelled at a rapid pace until they reached Montrichard, where the Archbishop of Toulouse, the Abbé Rucellai, and several other persons of note had assembled to offer their congratulations to the Queen. Relays of horses were also awaiting her; and after a brief halt the journey was resumed. At a short distance from Loches she was met by the Duc d'Epéron at the head of a hundred and fifty horsemen; hurried greetings were exchanged, and without further delay the whole party entered the town; where the first act of Marie de Medicis, after she had offered her acknowledgments to her liberators, was to address a letter to the King, wherein she set forth her reasons for leaving Blois without his permission, in terms as submissive as though he had not broken his faith towards herself; coupled with assurances of her affection for his person, and her zeal for his welfare.

Nothing, perhaps, is more painfully striking than the mutual deception practised by mother and son throughout the whole correspondence consequent on their separation. The abuse of terms was so open and so palpable, and the covert rancour so easily perceptible in both, that it is impossible to suppress a feeling of disgust as the eye rests upon the elaborately-rounded periods and hollow professions with which their several letters abound.

Marie remained two days at Loches, in order to await those of her attendants who were to rejoin her upon the instant; and then proceeded, still under the escort of the Duc d'Epéron, to Angoulême; where she was shortly afterwards joined by several disaffected nobles who had retired from the Court, unable to brook the authority of the favourite; while, anxious to retain the confidence of those who were personally attached to her, although they had declined to join her faction, she despatched a confidential messenger to the capital with numerous letters, and among others one to the Maréchal de Bassompierre, in which she explained the motives of her flight.

Paris had, meanwhile, been a scene of constant festivity. The dissipations of the Carnival, and the Fair of St. Germain, had occupied the time and thoughts of the whole Court; while the Louvre had put forth all its magnificence in honour of the nuptials of the Princesse Christine and the Prince de Piedmont; as well as those of Mademoiselle de Vendôme, the natural sister of the King, and the Duc d'Elboeuf. Ballets, balls, and banquets were given by all the great nobles; fireworks and illuminations amused the populace; and finally, the young

sovereign became so thoroughly weary of the tumult about him that he retired to St. Germain-en-Laye, in order to escape from it, and to obtain the rest which he was not, however, destined to find even there; for he had no sooner arrived than he was followed by a courier charged with despatches announcing the escape of the Queen-mother.

Alarmed by the intelligence, Louis immediately returned to the capital and summoned his Council, before whom he laid the letter written by Marie at Loches, and a second also addressed to himself by M. d'Epéron, in which, with consummate sophistry, the Duke endeavoured to justify his share in her flight. Nor was De Luynes less terrified than his royal master by this sudden transition of affairs; and he consequently laboured to impress upon the King and his ministers the absolute necessity of refusing to hold any intercourse with the Queen-mother until Louis should be in a position to compel her obedience to his will, and to reduce the insurgent nobles who had openly declared in her favour to complete submission. The letters which were laid before the Council containing, moreover, a demand for the reform of the government, every individual holding office under the Crown had a personal interest in supporting this advice; and it was consequently resolved that Louis should affect to believe that his mother had been forcibly removed from Blois by the Duc d'Epéron, and that a large body of troops should be forthwith assembled for her deliverance, under the command of the Duc de Mayenne, from whom it was known that she had parted on bad terms.

So extreme a resolution no sooner became known, however, than it created general dissatisfaction. The unnatural spectacle of a son in arms against his mother inspired all right-minded people with horror; and when the King a few days subsequently proceeded to the Parliament to verify some financial edicts (the enormous recent outlay of the Court having exhausted the royal treasury) he was coldly received, and instead of the loyal acclamations with which he had hitherto been greeted, he heard on all sides murmured expressions of discontent and impatience. These manifestations of popular disaffection alarmed the ministers, and a new council was held, at which it was determined that before proceeding to the *ultima ratio regum* a negotiation should be attempted with the emancipated Princess; and for this purpose the Comte de Béthune and the Abbé Bérulle were despatched to Marie de Medicis with full powers to conclude a treaty between herself and the King.

The first suggestion offered to the Queen-mother by the royal envoys was her abandonment of M. d'Epéron; but she indignantly refused to adopt so treacherous a line of policy, declaring that she would listen to no compromise which involved a disavowal of her obligations to one whom she justly considered as her liberator.

"Moreover, Messieurs," she said proudly, "even were I capable of such an act of treachery, I am unable so to misrepresent the conduct of the gallant Duke, who holds in his possession not only the letter of the King, wherein he gives me full authority to leave Blois, and to proceed whithersoever I may see fit in the interest of my health, but also one which I myself addressed to him from Blois entreating his assistance in my escape from that fortress, and his escort to Angoulême. I request, therefore, that as loyal gentlemen you will refrain from accusing M. d'Epéron of an act of violence which the respect due to the mother of his sovereign would have rendered impossible on his part. I am here because I was weary of the constraint and insult of which I had been so long the victim; and I am ready to accept the whole responsibility of the step which I have seen fit to take."

As the determined attitude of the Queen-mother rendered all further discussion upon this point at once idle and impolitic, De Luynes resolved to induce her to come to terms with the King without any allusion to M. d'Epéron; and for this purpose the Archbishop of Sens was directed to act in concert with the two original envoys, and to endeavour to convince her that a prolonged opposition to the will of the sovereign could only terminate in her own destruction. Still, however, Marie remained firm, rejecting the conditions which were proposed to her as unworthy alike of her rank and of the position she had hitherto held in the kingdom; and the month of March went by without the attainment of any result. De Luynes, irritated by a pertinacity which threatened his tenure of authority, renewed his entreaties for the formation of a strong army with which he could secure the overthrow of the Due

Marie de Medicis

d'Epéron; and at the same time he suggested to Louis the recall of the Bishop of Luçon, who had once more offered his services as a negotiator between the contending parties.

The young King, who saw only through the eyes of his favourite, was induced to comply with both proposals; and Marie de Medicis no sooner ascertained that the royal troops were about to march upon Angoulême, than she made preparations for defence. In order to do this more effectually she addressed autograph letters to the Ducs de Mayenne and de Rohan, to the Maréchal de Lesdiguières, and to several other great nobles, soliciting their support in the impending struggle; but with the sole exception of M. de Rohan, they all returned cold and negative replies, informing her that the duty which they owed to the King would not permit them to comply with her request; after which they forwarded her letters to the Court, together with the answers which they had made, thus purchasing their safety at the expense of their honour. The Duc de Rohan, on receiving her application, also declined to assist her, it is true; but he did so loyally and respectfully, assuring her Majesty that he greatly regretted she should so long have delayed requesting his co-operation, as he would have served her zealously and faithfully, whereas he was now no longer in a position to espouse her interests, the King having commanded him to remain in his government of Poitou in order to maintain peace in that province, a duty which his honour consequently enforced upon him; but declaring at the same time that even while obeying the commands of her son, he would not undertake anything inimical to her own interests, and entreating her to effect an understanding with the sovereign in order to avert the evils of a civil war, and to ensure to herself the liberty and safety which could alone enable her to rally about her person all those who were sincerely desirous of serving her.

Although touched by the manliness and dignity of this reply, the Queen-mother bitterly felt the loss of such an ally; nor were her disappointment and mortification lessened when she discovered that the Maréchal de Schomberg, anxious to convince Louis of the extent of his zeal, and so to possess himself of the royal favour, had formed the design of blowing up the powder-magazine of Angoulême, and thus terminating the negotiation by a *coup de main* of which she and her adherents were destined to be the victims. The project was indeed discovered and defeated, but the impression which it left upon her mind was one of gloom and discouragement.

We have already seen that the Duc de Mayenne had protested to Rucellai his attachment to the cause and person of Marie; yet he did not hesitate to accept the command of the army which was organized against her, and to march upon the province of Angoumois at the head of twelve thousand men. The position of the Queen--mother was critical. She issued continual commissions for the levy of troops, but she was unable to furnish the necessary funds for their support, and in this difficulty she resolved to appeal to the Protestants who were at that time holding their General Assembly at La Rochelle. She was aware that they were inimical to De Luynes, and she trusted that they might consequently be induced to join her own faction. Once more, however, she was doomed to disappointment. They were dissuaded from such a project by Du Plessis; and M. d'Epéron, after the most strenuous efforts, could not succeed in raising more than six thousand foot and one thousand horse with which to make head against the royal army.

Moreover, Schomberg, Lieutenant of the King in Limousin under M. d'Epéron, who was the governor of the province, declared against him, and took the town of Uzerche which was feebly garrisoned, while the Duke was engaged in checking the advance of Mayenne; nor was it long ere intelligence arrived at Angoulême that Boulogne-sur-Mer had opened its gates to the royal forces, and thus revolted against the authority of Epéron, who was also governor of Picardy.

These disasters were a source of great anxiety to Marie de Medicis, who began to apprehend that should the Duke be in like manner despoiled of his other fortified cities he would no longer be in a position to afford her any protection; but fortunately De Luynes had also taken alarm. The citizens made no attempt to conceal their dissatisfaction, the populace openly murmured in the streets, and the favourite had not yet had time to forget the popular

vengeance which had been wreaked upon the wretched Concini; no wonder therefore that he trembled for himself. Richelieu had been, as already stated, recalled from his exile at Avignon, and the moment was now arrived in which his services were essential to De Luynes, by whom he was forthwith despatched to Angoulême, on the understanding that the King had perfect confidence in his fidelity, and placed implicit reliance on his desire to prove his affection to his person. The astute prelate required no further explanation as to what was required of him; he was aware that his compulsory absence had caused his services to be more than ever coveted by the Queen-mother, and he lost no time in setting forth upon his treacherous errand, furnished with a letter to Marie, below which Louis wrote with his own hand: "I beg you to believe that this document explains my will, and that you cannot afford me greater pleasure than by conforming to it."

The effect of Richelieu's presence at the Court of the Queen-mother soon became apparent. He had so thoroughly possessed himself of her confidence that she suffered him to penetrate even to the inmost recesses of her heart; and great and dignified as she could be under excitement, we have already shown that Marie de Medicis never had sufficient strength of character to rely on herself for any lengthened period. Exhausted by the violence of the sudden emotions to which she was often a prey, all her energy deserted her after the impulse had passed away, and she gladly clung to the extraneous support of those who professed to espouse her interests. Richelieu had studied her temperament, and understood it. Before he had been many days at Angoulême the Duc d'Epéron and his son became aware that they no longer possessed the same influence as heretofore, while the Abbé Rucellai, indignant at the coldness with which his advice was received and his services were requited, withdrew in disgust, accompanied by several of her most attached servants; among others the Marquis de Thémines, who, shortly afterwards, irritated by a reverse of fortune which he had not foreseen, sought a pretext of quarrel with Henri de Richelieu, the elder brother of the Bishop of Luçon, whom he challenged and left dead upon the field. Thus the unhappy Queen now lay wholly at the mercy of her insidious counsellor; while he, on his part, acted with so subtle a policy that his services were alike essential to both parties, and he saw himself in a position to profit by the projected reconciliation, in whatever manner it might be ultimately accomplished.

Meanwhile the Archbishop of Sens, the Comte de Béthune, and the Abbé de Bérulle, in conjunction and with the assistance of Richelieu, were still proceeding with the negotiation; and, finally, the King, anxious to terminate the affair, gave a commission to the Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld to conclude the treaty. The conditions were easily agreed upon, as Marie was enslaved by the influence of Richelieu, and disheartened by the lukewarmness of her former friends, while Louis was weary of a contention which made him hateful in the eyes of all Europe, and which fettered his movements without adding to his renown.

On the 30th of April the necessary documents were accordingly signed, and by these the Queen-mother was authorized to constitute her household as she should deem fitting, to reside wherever she thought proper, and to preserve all her revenues intact; while, in consideration of these privileges, she consented to exchange her government of Normandy for that of Anjou. She was, moreover, to receive six hundred thousand livres for the liquidation of her debts; and M. d'Epéron fifty thousand crowns to indemnify him for the loss of the town of Boulogne, and with his adherents to be declared exonerated from all blame, and permitted to retain possession of their offices under the Crown; and, finally, to the demand made by the Queen-mother that she should be placed in possession of the city and castle of Amboise, or, failing that, of those of Nantes, the Abbé de Bérulle was authorized to inform her on the part of the King that "in addition to the government of Anjou, the town and fortress of Angers, and the Ponts de Cé, he was willing to give her, in lieu of what she asked, the city and castle of Tours, together with four hundred men for the protection of those places, a company of gendarmes, and a troop of light-horse, in addition to her bodyguards; the whole to be maintained at his own expense."

This treaty was no sooner completed than Marie de Medicis wrote to her son to express the joy which she experienced at their reconciliation; and she entrusted her letter to the Comte de Brienne, with instructions to deliver it into the hands of the King, who had removed with

his Court to Tours, ostensibly for the purpose of a more speedy meeting with the Queen-mother. The result proved, however, that Marie could not have selected a worse messenger, as De Brienne, who was young and arrogant, soon gave offence both to Louis and his favourite. Having declared that he would not, under any circumstances, show the most simple courtesy to De Luynes, he did not remove his hat when he met him in the royal ante-room; a want of respect which excited the displeasure of the monarch, who was easily led to believe that he had been instructed by his mistress to affect this contempt towards an individual with whom he himself condescended to live on the most familiar terms; and, consequently, when De Brienne next presented himself to receive the reply of his Majesty to his despatches, he was desired not to thrust himself into the presence of the King, who would select an envoy less wanting in reverence to his sovereign when he should deem it advisable to forward his own missive to Angoulême. The ill-advised equerry of Marie was therefore compelled to retire without his credentials, and the Queen-mother was subjected to the mortification of offering an ample apology to Louis, through the medium of the messenger whom he in his turn despatched to her, for the arrogance and discourtesy of her follower.

Meanwhile Marie de Medicis once more saw herself at the head of a Court nearly equal in numbers and magnificence to that of the King himself, and daily presided over festivities which satisfied even her thirst for splendour and display. It sufficed that any noble felt himself aggrieved by the presumption, or disappointed by the want of generosity of the favourite, to induce him to offer his services to the Queen-mother, who welcomed every accession of strength with a suavity and condescension rendered doubly acceptable from the contrast which it exhibited with the morose indifference of the King, and the insolent haughtiness of De Luynes. Thus constant arrivals afforded a pretext for perpetual gaieties; and the Duc d'Epéron received the new allies of his royal mistress with a profusion and recklessness of expenditure which excited universal astonishment.

De Luynes had considered it expedient to offer his congratulations to the Queen-mother and M. d'Epéron upon the reconciliation which had taken place, and in order to evince his respect for Marie had caused M. de Brantès his brother to accompany the Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld to Angoulême for this purpose, where both were received with a splendour, and feasted with a pomp and elegance, to which they had been long unaccustomed at the Court of Paris.

All these entertainments were, however, surpassed by those given by the Duke on the occasion of a visit paid to her Majesty by Victor Amédée de Piedmont, her new son-in-law, and his brother Prince Thomas of Savoy, who had obtained the sanction of the King to proceed to Angoulême to offer their respects to their illustrious relative. The two Princes were met beyond the gates of the city by M. d'Epéron at the head of a party of mounted nobles attired in their state dresses, and apartments furnished in the most costly manner were prepared for them in the episcopal palace, to which they were conducted amid the firing of cannon, the sounds of martial music, and the acclamations of the citizens; rushes and green boughs were strewn along their path, the balconies of the houses were draped with tapestry and coloured cloths, and a banquet had been prepared which was presided over by the Queen-mother. The town of Angoulême was meanwhile alive with excitement and delight until nightfall, when the streets were brilliantly illuminated, and the joyous multitude were entertained by the munificence of the Duc d'Epéron with a brilliant display of fireworks which continued until midnight. Nothing, in short, evinced to the august visitors any symptom of a reverse of fortune, such as they had been led to expect, in the position and circumstances of Marie de Medicis. They had merely exchanged one scene of royal display for another; and when, upon the morrow, they were invited to attend a hunt which had been organized in their honour, their surprise and gratification were too evident for concealment.

That the Queen-mother deeply felt the extent of the sacrifice made by M. d'Epéron in her cause can admit of no doubt, for she was aware that he was rapidly exhausting his resources in order to uphold her dignity; and it is equally certain that she, on her side, was unwearied in her efforts to ensure to him the gratitude and respect of her royal guests; an attempt in which she so fully succeeded that on the return of the two young Princes to the

capital, the admiration which they expressed both of the Queen and her deliverer excited the displeasure of De Luynes, who could ill brook the rivalry of a man whom he at once feared and hated. It was rumoured that this visit of the royal brothers to Angoulême had been authorized by Louis at the suggestion of the favourite, who had laboured to convince them of his anxiety for the return of Marie to the Court, and had solicited their assistance in impressing upon her the sincerity of his professions. Be this as it may, however, it is at least certain that if the Princes lent themselves to his views, they failed in producing the desired effect upon her mind; as, despite the invitation of the King that she should approach nearer to Tours in order to facilitate their projected interview, she constantly excused herself upon the most frivolous pretexts, and continued to reside at Angoulême without making the slightest preparation to obey his summons.

This reluctance on her part to conclude a reconciliation, of which she had hitherto expressed herself so desirous, excited the surprise and apprehension of the Court, who sought a solution of the mystery from the Bishop of Luçon; but the wily Richelieu was careful not to betray that they were his own counsels which regulated the conduct of the Queen-mother. He had well weighed his position, and he felt that it was not yet sufficiently assured to enable him to oppose his influence to that of De Luynes. He aspired to a seat in the Council, and in order to attain it he must render himself more necessary to the favourite than he had hitherto been enabled to do; a fact to which he was keenly alive. Should the mother and the son meet at that moment, he was aware that the excitable temperament of Marie could not fail to betray her into the power of De Luynes, and with her would fall his own fortunes; whereas time must necessarily calm her first exultation and render her more tenacious of her power. Thus, then, Richelieu jealously watched every change in her mood, excited her distrust, aggravated her animosities, and, finally, convinced her that her strength existed only in opposition to the King's will. Marie, naturally suspicious, lent herself readily to this specious reasoning; she had sufficient knowledge of the character of her son to feel that his eager desire to obliterate the past was produced by no feeling of affection towards herself, but might simply be attributed to his anxiety to weaken a faction which had become formidable, and by depriving her adherents of a pretext for opposing his authority, to rid himself of a danger which augmented from day to day. Too readily the prey of her passions, Marie de Medicis exulted in this conviction; and had Louis and his ministers been wise enough to accept her reluctance as a refusal to return to Court, and abandoned all attempts to change her determination, it is probable that this simulated indifference, and the powerlessness to which it must ere long have reduced both herself and her followers, would have caused her immediate compliance; but, bent upon compelling her obedience, they, by successive endeavours to overcome her disinclination to resign the comparative independence to which she had attained, only played into the hands of the astute Bishop, by strengthening her resolution to resist.

Shortly after the departure of the Princes of Savoy, the Capuchin Father Joseph du Tremblay, the confidential friend of Richelieu, was ordered to proceed in his turn to Angoulême, and to endeavour to induce Marie de Medicis, with whom the courtly monk was known to be a favourite, to resume the position to which she was entitled as the widow of one sovereign and the mother of another; and as a preliminary step, to meet the King according to his expressed wish, before his return to the capital. This was, however, only another false step on the part of De Luynes, as the reverend father felt by no means disposed to thwart the measures of the man to whom he looked for his own future advancement; and his mission, in consequence, so signally failed that the suspicions of the Court party were once more aroused against Richelieu, although they were unable wholly to fathom the depth of his subtle policy. These suspicions were, moreover, strengthened by the fact that a new letter, addressed by the King to his mother, full of the most pressing entreaties that she would divest herself of her distrust, and confide in his affection (which letter was delivered to her by the Duc de Montbazon, the father-in-law of De Luynes), produced no better result. In vain did the Duke represent the earnest desire of Louis to terminate a state of things so subversive of order, and so opposed to all natural feeling, and assure her of the sincerity with which his Majesty invited her to share his power; Marie, prompted by the astute prelate, refused to yield.

Marie de Medicis

"I am not invited to return to Court," she said bitterly; "I am to be constrained to do so; but I will consent only upon one condition. Let the Duc de Mayenne be my surety that I shall be treated as becomes my dignity, both by the King and his favourite, and I will again enter the capital. Without this safeguard I will not place myself in the power of an adventurer."

Mayenne refused, however, to offer any such pledge, declaring that it would not become him to interfere in any misunderstanding between the sovereign and his mother; and Marie de Medicis thus saw herself under the necessity of seeking some other method of evading compliance. A pretext was soon found, however; and when next urged upon the subject, she declared that her disinclination to involve the Court in new difficulties must prevent her reappearance in the royal circle until the question of precedence was clearly established between herself and the Queen-consort.

Anne of Austria had not failed, from her first arrival in France, girl as she was, to express great contempt for the House of Medicis, and to assert the superiority of her own descent over that of her mother-in-law; an assumption which had aroused all the indignation of Marie, who had revenged herself by constantly speaking of Anne as "the little Queen"; an insult which was immediately retorted by her daughter-in-law in a manner that was keenly felt by the haughty Italian, puerile and insignificant as it was. On every occasion Louis terminated the letters that he addressed to her by subscribing himself "your very humble and obedient son," and Marie insisted that his wife should follow his example; but Anne refused to make such a concession, declaring that as the Queen-mother merely signed herself "your very affectionate mother," she would, on her side, do no more than subscribe herself "your very affectionate daughter." Nor was this the only subject of dispute, for Anne of Austria also insisted that as reigning Queen she had a right to precedence over a Princess, who, although she had formerly occupied the throne, had, by the death of her husband, degenerated into a subject; nor could she be convinced to the contrary even by past examples. In vain did Louis insist that his young wife should yield, and rebuke her when she was wanting in respect to the widowed Queen; the Spanish pride of Anne was proof against his displeasure, and it was found impossible to reconcile their conflicting claims.

In the month of August the King conferred the promised *bâton* of Maréchal de France upon Charles de Choiseul, Marquis de Praslin, and Jean François de la Guiche, Sieur de Saint-Géran.

The contention between Anne of Austria and her royal mother-in-law remained undecided; and the position which the latter was to occupy at the Court was consequently not clearly defined. She had obtained no single advantage for which she had striven; no guarantee upon which she had insisted; and, nevertheless, on the 19th of August, she left Angoulême for the capital with a suite of ten coaches, each drawn by six horses, and an escort of five hundred horsemen. The Duc d'Epéron bore her company to the extreme frontier of his government, where they parted with mutual manifestations of affection and goodwill. As the Duke, who had alighted from the carriage where he had hitherto occupied a place beside her Majesty, stood near the door expressing his last wishes for her prosperity, and was about to raise her hand to his lips, Marie, who was drowned in tears, drew a costly diamond from her finger, which she entreated him to wear as a mark of her gratitude for the signal services that he had rendered to her in her need; and then throwing herself back upon her cushions she wept bitterly.

Well might she weep! She left behind her those who had rallied about her in her misfortunes; and she was going forth into an uncertain future, of which no human eye could penetrate the mysteries. The die was, however, cast; and as a last demonstration of his respect and regard for her person M. d'Epéron had instructed his son the Archbishop of Toulouse to follow his royal mistress to Court; while he himself saw the brilliant train depart, impoverished it is true by his uncalculating devotion to her cause, but proud and happy in the conviction that without his aid she would still have been a captive.

The retinue of the Queen-mother comprised the ladies of honour, the Duc de Montbazon, the Bishop of Luçon, and several other individuals of note; and thus attended she reached Poitiers, where the carriages of the King were awaiting her arrival, and relays of horses

were provided to expedite her journey to Tours. From Poitiers she despatched Richelieu in advance to announce her approach to Louis; and on his return to report the completion of his mission, he was eloquent on the subject of the graciousness of his reception both by the King and the favourite.

As she drew near the city Marie was met by the Cardinal de Retz and the Père Arnoux, accompanied by a numerous train of gentlemen, by whom she was conducted to the Château de Montbazou, where she was to pass the night; and on the following morning the newly-made Duc de Luynes arrived to pay his respects to the mother of his sovereign. The Queen devoured her mortification, and received her unwelcome guest with great affability; but he had not been long in her presence ere he renewed all her suspicions of his duplicity.

The Prince de Condé, who feared that a reconciliation between Louis and the Queen-mother would militate against his release, had exerted himself to the utmost to procure his liberty before they should have time to meet; and aware that it was only through the influence of De Luynes that he could accomplish his object, he did not hesitate to bribe the favourite by an offer of the hand of his sister Eléonore de Bourbon, the widow of Philip, Prince of Orange, for his brother Cadenet. De Luynes was dazzled: an alliance with the first Prince of the Blood exceeded all his hopes; while the liberation of M. de Condé, was, moreover, essential to his own interests; as should he secure the friendship of so powerful a noble, he would be better able to oppose not only the Duc d'Epéron, but also all the leaders of the Queen-mother's faction. It was, however, no part of his policy to betray his consciousness of this necessity to the illustrious captive; whose imprisonment he nevertheless rendered less irksome by according to him sundry relaxations from which he had hitherto been debarred. A serious indisposition by which M. de Condé was at this period attacked, moreover, greatly assisted his projects; and the medical attendants of the Prince having declared that they entertained but slight hopes of his recovery, De Luynes hastened to entreat of the King that he would hold out to the invalid a prospect of deliverance, which could not fail to produce a beneficial effect upon his health. Nor did he experience any difficulty in inducing Louis to comply with his request, as personally the King bore no animosity to the Prince, whose arrest had not been caused by himself. The royal physicians were forthwith despatched to Vincennes, with orders to exert all their skill in alleviating his sufferings; and a few days subsequently the Marquis de Cadenet followed with the sword of the Prince, which he was commissioned to restore to its owner, accompanied by the assurance that so soon as his Majesty should have restored order in the kingdom, he would hasten to set him at liberty; but that, meanwhile, he begged him to take courage, and to be careful of his health.

Cadenet was welcomed as his brother had anticipated; and was profuse in his expressions of his own respect and regard for the illustrious prisoner, and in his protestations of the untiring perseverance with which the favourite was labouring to effect his release; while Condé was equally energetic in his acknowledgments, declaring that should he owe his liberty to De Luynes, he would prove not only to the latter, but to every member of his family, his deep sense of so important a service.

Relying on this assurance, the favourite, whose greatest anxiety was to prevent a good understanding between the King and his mother, had no sooner concluded the compliments and promises to which Marie had compelled herself to listen with apparent gratification, than he hastened to inform her of the pledge given by Louis to terminate the captivity of M. de Condé; craftily adding that his Majesty had hitherto failed to fulfil it, as he desired to accord this signal grace to the Prince conjointly with herself. Marie de Medicis, however, instantly comprehended the motive of her visitor; and was at no loss to understand that the liberation of a man whom she had herself committed to the Bastille, and whom she had thus converted into an enemy, was intended as a counterpoise to her own power. This conviction immediately destroyed all her trust in the sincerity of her son and his ministers; and, unable to control her emotion, she shortly afterwards dismissed De Luynes, and retired to her closet, where she summoned her confidential friends, and declared to them that she was resolved to return with all speed to Angoulême without seeing the King.

Marie de Medicis

From this dangerous determination she was, however, with some difficulty dissuaded. They, one and all, represented that she had now gone too far to recede; and reminded her that she was surrounded on every side by the royal troops, while she was herself accompanied only by the members of her household, who would be unable to offer any resistance should an attempt be made to impede her retreat; and that, consequently, her only safe plan of action was passively to incur the danger which she dreaded, to dissimulate her apprehensions, and to watch carefully the progress of events.

Marie could not, in fact, adopt a wiser course. The Duc de Mayenne, who had espoused the royal cause against Epernon, was indignant at the ingratitude and coldness with which his services had been requited, and did not seek to disguise his discontent; while the nobles of Guienne, by whom he had been followed, were in an equal state of irritation. This circumstance was favourable to the Queen-mother, who lost no time in persuading the Duke to make common cause with her against the favourite; a proposition to which, excited by his annoyance, he at once acceded; convinced that the projected reconciliation could not, under existing circumstances, be of long duration.

On the 5th of September Marie de Medicis accordingly left Montbazon for Consières, where she was to have her first interview with the King; and having ascertained upon her arrival that he was walking in the park of the château, she hastily alighted and went to seek him there, followed by the Ducs de Guise, de Montbazon, and de Luynes, the Cardinal de Retz, and the Archbishop of Toulouse, by whom she had been received, as well as by a dense crowd of spectators who had assembled to witness the meeting. The crowd was so great that it became necessary to clear a passage before the King could approach his mother, to whom he extended his arms, and for a few moments both parties wept without uttering a syllable. This silence was, however, ultimately broken by Louis, who exclaimed in a voice of deep emotion: "You are welcome, Madame. I thank God with all my heart that He has fulfilled my most ardent wish."

"And I have henceforth nothing more to desire," replied Marie; "I shall now die happy since I have had the consolation of once more seeing you, Sire, and of embracing my other children. I have always loved you tenderly; and I entreat of you to do me the justice to believe that I have the most sincere attachment to your person, and every anxiety to promote the welfare of your kingdom."

It is painful to reflect that these expressions, so natural from the lips of two individuals thus closely allied, who had been long at variance, and had at length met in amity, should have been the mere outpourings of policy; and yet, it is equally impossible not to be struck by their hollowness and falsehood; Louis being, at that very moment, endeavouring to undermine the influence of his mother by estranging from her cause all those who still clung to her waning fortunes; while Marie was labouring with equal zeal to strengthen her position, by attracting to her faction all the discontented nobles whose individual vengeance could be gratified by opposing in her name, and apparently in her interests, the projects of those who had blighted their own prospects, or wounded their own pride.

When both parties had become more calm, Louis gave his hand to his mother and conducted her to the château, where they remained together for the space of three hours awaiting the arrival of the young Queen, the Princess of Piedmont, and Madame Henriette, who ultimately reached Consières, accompanied by all the Princesses, and great ladies of the Court, occupying a train of upwards of fifty coaches; and the ceremonial of reception had no sooner terminated than the king proceeded on horseback to Tours, followed by the whole of this splendid retinue. The two Queens occupied the same carriage, and were lavish in their expressions of mutual regard and goodwill; but the comedy was imperfectly acted on both sides, although neither affected to doubt the sincerity of the other. It was necessary that the piece should be played out, and the performers were skilful enough to bring it to a close without openly betraying the distastefulness of their task.

At the supper which followed the arrival of the Court at Tours every mark of respect was shown to the Queen-mother. She was seated at the right hand of Louis, while Anne of Austria

occupied a place upon his left. The Prince of Piedmont presented the *serviette*, and persisted in remaining standing, and bareheaded, although Marie desired a stool to be placed near her, and entreated him to seat himself. It is consequently needless to add that she was overwhelmed with adulation; and that the courtiers vied with each other in demonstrations of delight.

The twelve succeeding days were passed in a series of *fêtes*, of which Marie de Medicis was the heroine; but it nevertheless became evident ere the close of that period that all parties were fatigued by the efforts which they were making to conceal their real sentiments; and a return to the capital was no sooner mooted than the Queen-mother openly declared that she would not be carried to Paris in triumph, but would defer her entrance into that city until after her visit to Angers. This resolution deeply offended the King, who, on taking leave of her, at once proceeded to Compiègne, while the Prince and Princess of Piedmont departed for Turin, and Marie removed to Chinon, where she remained for a few days in order to give the magistrates of Angers time to complete the preparations for her reception. At the Ponts de Cé she was met by the Maréchal de Bois-Dauphin at the head of fifteen hundred horsemen; and thus escorted she reached the gates of the city, where she was magnificently received, and welcomed with acclamations.

De Luynes, alarmed by the protracted sojourn of the Queen-mother at Angers, and her resolute refusal to return to the capital, became more than ever anxious to effect the liberation of M. de Condé; an anxiety that was moreover heightened by intelligence which reached the Court that a deputation from the Protestants, who were then holding their Assembly at Loudun, had waited upon her Majesty, for the purpose of expressing their joy at her arrival and sojourn in Anjou, and of communicating to her the demands which they were about to make to the King.

It is true that Marie, although she did not disguise her gratification at this mark of respect, was prudent enough not to advance any opinion upon the claims which they set forth, and restricted herself to offering her acknowledgments for their courtesy, coupled with the assurance that they should find her a good neighbour; but even this reply, guarded as it was, did not satisfy the Court, who pretended to discover a hidden meaning in her words, and decided that she should have referred the deputation to the King, in order to place herself beyond suspicion. Nor were they less disconcerted on learning that all the nobility of the province were constant visitors at her Court; and that she had established herself in her government so thoroughly that she evidently entertained no intention of abandoning her post.

As each succeeding day rendered the position of the Queen-mother more threatening towards himself, the favourite resolved towards the middle of October to effect the instant release of the Prince de Condé; and he accordingly obtained the authority of the King to proceed to Vincennes, with full power to open the gates of the fortress, and to liberate the prisoner; while Louis himself proceeded to Chantilly, the château of the Duc de Montmorency, who had married the sister of the Prince, to which residence De Luynes was instructed to conduct the emancipated noble.

It is sickening to be compelled to recapitulate the constant result of such events in that age of servility and moral degradation. The favourite, who by a word could have liberated the first Prince of the Blood from the Bastille before he was transferred to the fortress of Vincennes, bowed his haughty head to the dust before him, and entreated his protection; while Condé, in his turn, on being introduced into the presence of the King, demanded pardon upon his knees for an offence of which he did not even know the nature; and which he could only estimate by the extent of the chastisement that had been inflicted on him. This idle ceremony accomplished, M. de Condé immediately found himself a member of the Privy Council; all the honours of his rank as first Prince of the Blood were accorded to him; and the King issued a declaration by which it was asserted that his recent captivity had been the act of "certain ill-advised persons who abused the name and authority of the sovereign."

This declaration excited the indignation of the Queen-mother and Richelieu, by whose advice the arrest of Condé had been determined; but while Marie loudly expressed her

displeasure, the more cautious prelate endeavoured to disguise his annoyance. He looked farther into the future than his impetuous mistress, and he saw that his hour of revenge had not yet come. De Luynes, anxious to appease the Queen, declared that the obnoxious declaration had not been submitted to him before its publication, and threw the whole blame upon Du Vair, by whom it was drawn up; conjuring her at the same time to return to the capital, where alone she could convince herself of his earnest desire to serve her.

The close alliance formed between Condé and the favourite sufficed, however, to deter Marie from making this concession; while many of those about her did not hesitate to insinuate that the respect with which the Prince affected to regard her person, and the desire that he expressed to see her once more at Court, was a mere subterfuge; and that his real anxiety, as well as that of De Luynes, was to separate her from the nobles of Anjou, and the friends whom she possessed in her own government, in order that she might be placed more thoroughly in their power. The Queen-mother was the more inclined to adopt this belief from the circumstance that, even while urging her return, Louis had given her to understand the inexpediency of maintaining so numerous a bodyguard, when she should be established in the capital, as that by which she had surrounded herself since her arrival at Angers; and this evident desire on the part of the King to diminish at once her dignity and her security, coupled with her suspicions of Condé and De Luynes, rendered her more than ever averse to abandon the safe position which she then occupied, and to enter into a new struggle of which she might once more become the victim.

On his return to Paris, after his interview with the Queen-mother, Louis bestowed the government of Picardy upon De Luynes, who resigned that of the Isle of France, which he had previously held, to the Duc de Montbazon his father-in-law. The two brothers of the favourite were created Marshals of France; Brantès by the title of Duc de Piney-Luxembourg--the heiress of that princely house having, by command of the King, bestowed her hand upon him, to the disgust of all the great nobles, who considered this ill-assorted alliance an insult to themselves and to their order--while Cadenet, in order that he might in his turn be enabled to aspire to the promised union with the widowed Princess of Orange, was created Duc de Chaulnes. The latter marriage was not, however, destined to be accomplished, Eléonore de Bourbon rejecting with disdain a proposition by which she felt herself dishonoured; nor can any doubt exist that her resistance was tacitly encouraged by Condé: who, once more free, could have little inclination to ally himself so closely with a family of adventurers, whose antecedents were at once obscure and equivocal. This mortification was, however, lessened to the discomfited favourite by the servility of the Archduke Albert, the sovereign of the Low Countries; who, being anxious to secure the support of the French king, offered to De Luynes the heiress of the ancient family of Piquigny in Picardy, who had been brought up at the Court of Brussels, as a bride for his younger brother. Despairing, despite all his arrogance, of effecting the alliance of Cadenet with a Princess of the Blood, the favourite gladly accepted the proffered alliance; and M. de Chaulnes was appointed Lieutenant-General in Picardy, of which province De Luynes was the governor, and where he possessed numerous fine estates.

CHAPTER III

1620

As no Chevaliers of the Order of the Holy Ghost had been created since the death of Henri IV, their number had so much decreased that only twenty-eight remained; and De Luynes, aware that himself and his brothers would necessarily be included in the next promotion, urged Louis XIII to commence the year (1620) by conferring so coveted an honour upon the principal nobles of the kingdom. The suggestion was favourably received; and so profusely adopted, that no less than fifty-five individuals were placed upon the list, at the head of which stood the name of the Duc d'Anjou. But although some of the proudest titles in France figured in this creation, it included several of minor rank who would have been considered ineligible during the preceding reigns; a fact which was attributed to the policy of the favourite, who was anxious to render so signal a distinction less obnoxious in his own case and that of his relatives; while others were omitted whose indignation at this slight increased the ranks of the malcontents.

Marie de Medicis, who had not yet forgiven the royal declaration in favour of the Prince de Condé, was additionally irritated that these honours should have been conceded without her participation; for she immediately perceived that the intention of the favourite had been to reserve to himself the credit of obtaining so signal a distinction for the noblemen and gentlemen upon whom it was conferred, and to render her own helplessness more apparent. As such an outrage required, however, some palliation, and De Luynes was anxious not to drive the Queen-mother to extremity, he induced the King to forward for her inspection the names of those who were about to receive the blue ribbon, offering at the same time to include one or two of her personal adherents should she desire it; but when, in running her eye over the list, Marie perceived that, in addition to the deliberate affront involved in a delay which only enabled her to acquire the knowledge of an event of this importance after all the preliminary arrangements were completed, it had been carefully collated so as to exclude all those who had espoused her own cause, and to admit several who were known to be obnoxious to her, she coldly replied that she had no addition to make to the orders of the King, and returned the document in the same state as she had received it.

The indignation expressed by the Queen-mother on this occasion was skilfully increased by Richelieu, who began to apprehend that so long as Marie remained inactively in her government he should find no opportunity of furthering his own fortunes; while, at the same time, he was anxious to revenge himself upon De Luynes, who had promised to recompense his treachery to his royal mistress by a seat in the Conclave; and it had been confided to him that the first vacant seat was pledged to the Archbishop of Toulouse, the son of the Duc d'Epéron. In order, therefore, at once to indulge his vengeance, and to render his services more than ever essential to the favourite, and thus wring from his fears what he could not anticipate from his good faith, he resolved to exasperate the Queen-mother, and to incite her to open rebellion against her son and his Government.

Circumstances favoured his project. The two first Princes of the Blood, M. de Condé and the Comte de Soissons, had at this period a serious quarrel as to who should present the finger-napkin to the King at the dinner-table; Condé claiming that privilege as first Prince of the Blood, and Soissons maintaining that it was his right as Grand Master of the Royal Household. The two great nobles, heedless of the presence of the sovereign, both seized a corner of the *serviette*, which either refused to relinquish; and the quarrel became at length so loud and so unseemly that Louis endeavoured to restore peace by commanding that it should

be presented by his brother the Duc d'Anjou. But although the two angry Princes were compelled to yield the object of contention, he could not reduce them to silence; and this absurd dissension immediately split the Court into two factions; the Duc de Guise and the friends of the favourite declaring themselves for Condé; while Mayenne, Longueville, and several others espoused the cause of the Comte de Soissons.

It is almost ludicrous to be compelled to record that out of a quarrel, originating in a servile endeavour on the part of the two principal nobles of a great nation to usurp the functions of a *maître-d'hôtel*, grew an attempt at civil war, which, had not the treachery of Richelieu nipped it in the bud, might have involved France in a sanguinary and unnatural series of conflicts that would have rendered that country a frightful spectacle to all Europe. Thus it was, however; for the Comtesse de Soissons, the mother of the young Prince, who was then only in his seventeenth year, eagerly seized so favourable an opportunity to weaken the party of the Prince de Condé, whose sudden influence threatened the future prospects of her son, by attaching to the cause of Marie de Medicis all the nobles who were opposed to the favourite, and consequently to the first Prince of the Blood by whom he was supported in his pretensions.

The ambition of the Countess was to obtain for her young son the hand of Madame Henriette de France, the third sister of the King; an alliance which she was aware would be strenuously opposed by Condé, and which she could only hope to accomplish through the good offices of the Queen-mother; and it was consequently essential that, in order to carry out her views, she should labour to augment the faction of Marie. Her efforts were successful; between the 29th of March and the 30th of June the Ducs de Mayenne and de Vendôme, the Grand Prior (the brother of the latter), the Comte de Candale, the Archbishop of Toulouse, and Henry of Savoy, Duc de Nemours, all proceeded to Angers; an example which was speedily followed by the Comte and Comtesse de Soissons, and the Ducs de Longueville, de Trémouille, de Retz, and de Rohan; who, one and all, urged Marie de Medicis once more to take up arms, and assert her authority.

These successive defections greatly alarmed the favourite, who became more than ever urgent for the return of the Queen-mother to the capital; but a consciousness of her increasing power, together with the insidious advice of Richelieu, rendered her deaf alike to his representations and to his promises. In this extremity De Luynes resolved to leave no means untried to regain the Duc de Guise; and for this purpose the King was easily persuaded to propose a double marriage in his family, by which it was believed that his own allegiance and that of the Prince de Condé to the royal cause, or rather to that of the favourite, would be alike secured. M. de Condé was to give his daughter to the Prince de Joinville, the elder son of M. de Guise; while the latter's third son, the Duc de Joyeuse, was to become the husband of Mademoiselle de Luynes. The marriage articles were accordingly drawn up, although the two last-named personages were still infants at the breast; but when he took the pen in his hand to sign the contract, De Guise hesitated, and appeared to reflect.

"What are you thinking of, Monsieur le Duc?" inquired Louis, as he remarked the hesitation of the Prince.

"I protest to you, Sire," was the reply, "that, while looking at the name of the bride, I had forgotten my own, and that I was seeking to recall it."

De Luynes bit his lips and turned away, while a general smile proved how thoroughly the meaning of the haughty Duke had been appreciated by the courtiers.

In addition to these comparatively unimportant alliances, two others of a more serious nature were also mooted at this period, namely, those of Monsieur (the King's brother) with Mademoiselle de Montpensier, the daughter of the Duchesse de Guise; and of Madame Henriette de France with the Comte de Soissons; a double project which afforded to the favourite an admirable pretext for despatching Brantès, the newly-created Duc de Luxembourg, to Angers, to solicit the consent of the Queen-mother, and to entreat her to reappear at Court and thus sanction by her presence the decision of the sovereign.

Marie de Medicis

"The King has determined wisely," was her reply; "and the affair can be concluded when I am once more in the capital. I feel satisfied that his Majesty will not decide upon either of the marriages during my absence; but will remember not merely what is due to me as a Queen, but also as a mother."

"Am I then authorized to state, Madame, that you will shortly arrive in Paris?" demanded the envoy.

"I shall immediately return, Sir," coldly replied Marie, "when I can do so with honour; but this can only be when the King shall have issued a declaration which may repair the injury done to my administration by that which he conceded to the Prince de Condé."

The Duke attempted to remonstrate, but he was haughtily silenced; and thus saw himself compelled to retire from the presence of the irritated Princess with the conviction that he had utterly failed to produce the effect anticipated from his mission.

As a last resource the Duc de Montbazou was once more despatched to the Queen-mother, with full authority to satisfy all her demands, whatever might be their nature; and also with instructions to warn her that, should she still refuse to obey the commands of the King, she would be compelled to do so; while, at the same time, he was commissioned to announce that Louis was ready to receive her at Tours as he had formerly done, in order to convince her of his anxiety to terminate their misunderstanding. This portion of his mission was, however, strongly combated alike by M. de Condé and the ministers, who saw in it a proof of weakness unworthy of a great sovereign; but the apprehensions of the favourite so far outweighed his sense of what was due to the dignity of his royal master, that he refused to listen to their representations, and Louis accordingly left the capital, and advanced slowly towards the province of Angoumois, awaiting the result of this new negotiation.

Marie remained inflexible; Richelieu had not yet accomplished his object; and the King, who had already reached Orleans, returned to Paris, to the great triumph of the Queen-mother's faction. Months were wasted in this puerile struggle, which contrasted strangely with the important interests which at that period occupied the attention of all other European sovereigns; and meanwhile the faction of Marie de Medicis became more formidable from day to day; until, finally, the Prince de Condé declared his conviction that stringent measures could alone secure to the monarch any hope of averting the serious consequences with which he was threatened by the disaffection of his most powerful nobles. De Luynes was quite ready to adopt this reasoning in order to ensure his own safety; but it met with earnest opposition from the Cardinal de Retz, Arnoux, and many others of the favourite's confidential friends, who dreaded that by the fall of Marie de Medicis, Condé, whose ambitious views were evident to all, would attain to a degree of authority and power against which they could not hope successfully to contend; and they accordingly counselled their patron rather to effect his own reconciliation with the exiled Queen, and by rendering himself necessary alike to the mother and the son, at once strengthen his own influence and weaken that of the first Prince of the Blood.

In accordance with this advice De Luynes entered into a negotiation with Marie, during the course of which the Marquis de Blainville was despatched several times to Angers, authorized to hold out the most brilliant promises should she consent to resume her position at the French Court. Unfortunately, however, the zealous envoy overacted his part by assuring her that De Luynes was strongly attached to her person, and anxious only to secure her interests; a declaration which instantly startled her suspicious temper into additional caution; but his next step proved even more fatal to the cause he had been deputed to advocate.

"I can assure you, Madame," he went on to say, encouraged by the attentive attitude of his royal auditor, "that M. le Duc has ever entertained the most perfect respect towards your Majesty. More than once, indeed, it has been suggested to him to secure your person, and either to commit you to Vincennes, or to compel your return to Florence; nay, more; a few of your most inveterate enemies, Madame, have not hesitated to advise still more violent measures, and have endeavoured to convince him that his own safety could only be secured by your destruction; but M. de Luynes has universally rejected these counsels with indignation

and horror; and this fact must suffice to prove to your Majesty that you can have nothing to apprehend from a man so devoted to your cause that he has undeviatingly made his own interests subservient to yours."

This argument, which, while it revolted her good sense, revealed to the Queen-mother the whole extent of the risk that she must inevitably incur by placing herself in the power of an individual who had suffered such measures to be mooted in his presence, produced the very opposite effect to that which it had been intended to elicit; and it was consequently with a more fixed determination than ever that Marie clung to the comparatively independent position she had secured, and thus rendered the negotiation useless.

The alarm of De Luynes increased after this failure, and having become convinced of the impolicy of provoking a second civil war, he continued his attempts at a reconciliation through other channels; but as each in turn proved abortive, he began to tremble lest by affording more time for the consolidation of the Queen's faction, he might ultimately work his own overthrow; and it was consequently determined that the advice of the Prince de Condé should be adopted. The delay which had already taken place had, however, sufficed to permit of a coalition among the Princes which rendered the party of the malcontents more formidable than any which had yet been opposed to the royal authority; and it was not without considerable misgivings that, early in July, De Luynes accompanied the King to the frontier of Normandy, where it had been decided that he should place himself at the head of his army.

Before leaving the capital it was considered expedient that Louis should attend a meeting of the Parliament, in order to justify the extreme step which he was about to take; and he accordingly presented himself before that body, to whom he declared the excessive repugnance with which he found himself under the imperative necessity of taking up arms against the Queen his mother, and excused himself upon the plea of her having headed the malcontents, by whom the safety of the throne and kingdom was endangered; and, this empty formality accomplished, little attention was conceded to the recommendation of the President and Advocate-General, who implored of his Majesty to adopt less offensive measures, and to avoid so long as it might be in his power an open war with his august parent. Louis had complied with the ceremony required of him; and while De Luynes was trembling for his tenure of power, the young sovereign was equally anxious to commence a campaign which promised some relief from the tedium of his everyday existence, and some prospect of his definitive release from the thralldom of the adverse faction.

The success of the royal army exceeded the most sanguine expectations of the young sovereign, and awakened in him that passion for war by which he was subsequently distinguished throughout the whole of his reign. The Duces de Longueville and de Vendôme, alarmed by a manifestation of energy for which they were not prepared, and fearing the effects of further resistance, scarcely made an effort to oppose him; and thus, in an incredibly short space of time, he possessed himself of Rouen, Caen, Alençon, and Vendôme; and advanced upon the Loire at the head of his whole army.

This unlooked-for celerity caused the greatest consternation in the party of Marie, who had anticipated that the conquest of Normandy would have occupied the royal forces during a considerable period, and relying on this contingency, had not yet completed the defences of Angers. The Queen herself, however, continued to refuse all overtures of reconciliation, and after having vainly demanded a month's truce, she turned her whole attention to the formation of such an army as might enable her to compete with that by which she saw herself assailed. Her forces already amounted to fifteen hundred horse and eight thousand infantry, and she was anticipating a strong reinforcement, which was to be supplied by the Duc de Rohan and the Comte de Saint-Aignan. Her first care was to garrison the town and citadel of Angers, in order to secure her personal safety; but this precaution did not satisfy the Duc de Mayenne, who urged her to retire to Guienne, where he had collected a force of ten thousand men, and thus to place herself beyond all possibility of capture. The Duc d'Epéron, on the other hand, who was jealous of the influence which such a step must necessarily give to his rival, strongly dissuaded the Queen from condescending to retreat before the royal army; and suggested that

Marie de Medicis

M. de Mayenne would more effectually serve her cause and uphold her honour by marching his troops to Angers, and thus strengthening her position. This suggestion, by whatever motive it were prompted, was one of sound policy; nor can there be any doubt that it would have been readily adopted by Marie de Medicis, had there not been a traitor in the camp, whose covert schemes must have been foiled by such an addition to the faction of his royal mistress.

That traitor was Richelieu, by whom every movement in the rebel army, and every decision of the Queen-mother's Council, was immediately revealed to De Luynes. The wily Bishop, faithful to his own interests, and lured onward by the vision of a cardinal's hat, no sooner saw the impression produced upon the mind of Marie by the proposal of Epernon than he hastened to oppose a measure which threatened all his hopes, and succeeded with some difficulty in persuading her that both these great nobles could more effectually serve her in their own governments than by adding a useless burthen to her dower-city, which was already gorged with troops, and which, in the event of a siege, might suffer more from internal scarcity than external violence.

Bewildered by the uncertainty of the struggle which was about to supervene, Marie de Medicis was readily induced to believe in the wisdom of securing two havens of refuge in case of defeat, and to renounce the peril of hazarding all at one blow. The arguments of Richelieu were specious; she had the most perfect faith in his attachment and fidelity; and thus, despite the most earnest remonstrances of her other counsellors, she decided upon following the suggestions of the man who was seeking to build up his own fortunes upon the ruin of her hopes.

Neither Richelieu nor De Luynes were deceived as to the feeling which thus induced them to make common cause. There was no affectation of regard or confidence on either side; their mutual hatred was matter of notoriety, but they were essential to each other. Without the aid of the favourite, the Bishop of Luçon could never hope to attain the seat in the Conclave which was the paramount object of his ambition; while De Luynes, on his side, was apprehensive that should the army of the King be defeated, his own overthrow must necessarily result, or that, in the event of success, the Prince de Condé would become all-powerful: an alternative which presented the same danger to his own prospects. Thus both the one and the other, convinced that by stratagem alone they could carry out their personal views, eagerly entered into a secret negotiation, which terminated in a pledge that Richelieu should succeed to a cardinalate provided he delivered up his too confiding mistress to the royal troops when they marched upon the Fonts de Cé.

This fortress, which protected the passage to Anjou, was only a league distant from Angers, where the Queen-mother had taken up her residence; and Richelieu, to whom its safety had been confided, no sooner effected a final understanding with De Luynes than he removed all the ammunition from the fortress, and placed his own relatives and friends in command of the garrison, with full instructions as to the part which they were to enact when confronted with the troops of the sovereign.

Although wholly unsuspecting of the treachery of which she was thus destined to become the victim, the alarm of the Queen-mother was excited by the rapid approach of her son, and she at length resolved to attempt a tardy reconciliation; for which purpose she despatched the Duc de Bellegarde, the Archbishop of Sens, and the Jesuit Bérulle to the King with an offer to that effect. Louis received her envoys with great courtesy, and declared himself ready to make every concession as regarded Marie personally, and even to extend his pardon to the Comte and Comtesse de Soissons; but he peremptorily refused to include the other disaffected nobles in the amnesty; when the Queen, on her side, declined every arrangement which involved the abandonment of her followers; and thus the negotiation failed in its object, while the royal army continued to advance.

On reaching La Flèche the King convened a council, at which it was proposed to besiege the city of Angers; but Louis, who was aware of the plot that had been formed between De Luynes and Richelieu, declared that his respect for his mother would not permit him to attack a town in which she had taken up her abode; while he even instructed the Duc de Bellegarde to

Marie de Medicis

propose to her fresh conditions of peace, and to assure her that his intention in approaching so near to her stronghold was simply to secure an interview, and to induce her to return with him to the capital.

This assurance produced the desired effect upon Marie de Medicis, who was becoming alike wearied and disgusted by the perilous position in which she had been placed by the unexpected energy of her son; and she consequently hastened to sign the treaty. But the concession came too late. On the previous day, Bassompierre, Créquy, and several other officers of rank marched to Sorges, within a league of the Fonts de Cé, at the head of their men, for the mere purpose of skirmishing; they, however, met with no opposition, and they finally reached the bridge, where five thousand troops of the Queen-mother were entrenched. These they attacked; and at the third charge the whole body fled in such confusion that the royal forces entered with them pell-mell into the city. The command of the fort had been given to the Duc de Retz, who, apprised by the Cardinal his uncle that the Queen-mother had been betrayed, hastily effected his escape, and the castle was surrendered at the first summons. In vain did the Duc de Bellegarde represent that the town had been taken after the Queen had signed the treaty of reconciliation, and complain that this outrage had been committed subsequently to the conclusion of a peace proposed by the sovereign; the Prince de Condé, desirous of mortifying Marie de Medicis, only replied that the messenger should have made greater haste to deliver so important a document, as the King's officers were not called upon to divine the nature of the Queen's decision.

On the following day Louis himself entered Ponts de Cé, where he was surprised to find the shops open, and the inhabitants as quietly pursuing their avocations as though no rumour of war had reached their ears. The shouts of "Vive le Roi!" were as energetic as those of "Vive la Reine!" had been only a few weeks previously; and thus, through the selfish treason of two ambitious and unprincipled individuals, Marie de Medicis, who at once felt that all further opposition must be fruitless, saw the powerful faction which it had cost her so much difficulty and so hard a struggle to combine, totally overthrown, and herself reduced, even while she still possessed an army of thirty thousand men in Poitou, Angoumois, and Guienne, to accept such conditions as it might please the King to accord to her.

Bewildered by the defeat of her troops and the loss of Ponts de Cé, the unhappy Queen resolved to effect her escape, and to throw herself on the protection of the Ducs de Mayenne and d'Epéron; but this project was defeated by Richelieu, who lost no time in communicating her intentions to the favourite; and parties of cavalry were in consequence thrown out in every direction to oppose her passage. Apprised of this precaution, although unconscious of its origin, Marie perceived that she had no alternative save submission; and she accordingly declared herself ready to obey the will of the King, whatever might be its nature; an assurance to which Louis replied that he was ready to receive her with open arms, and to grant her requests in so far as they regarded herself personally, although he was resolved to prove to the leaders of her faction that he was the master of his own kingdom.

On the conclusion of the treaty a meeting was appointed between the King and his mother at the castle of Brissac, whither he repaired to await her arrival; and she was no sooner made acquainted with this arrangement than she hastened to the place of rendezvous, escorted by five hundred horsemen of the royal army. She was met midway by the Maréchal de Praslin, and a short time afterwards by the Duc de Luxembourg, at the head of a strong party of nobles, by whom she was warmly welcomed; and finally, when she was within a few hundred yards of the castle, Louis himself appeared, who, as her litter approached, alighted in his turn, an example which she immediately followed, and in the next instant they were clasped in each other's arms.

"I have you now, Madame," exclaimed the King with a somewhat equivocal smile; "and you shall not escape me again."

"Sire," replied the Queen, "you will have little trouble in retaining me, for I meet you with the firm determination never more to leave you, and in perfect confidence that I shall be treated with all the kindness and consideration which I can hope from so good a son."

Marie de Medicis

These hollow compliments exchanged, Louis retired a pace or two in order to enable the Prince de Condé and the Duc de Luynes to pay their respects to the Queen-mother, by whom they were most graciously received; while Richelieu was no less warmly greeted by the young King and his favourite. No one, in fine, who had witnessed the scene, could have imagined that heart-burning and hatred were concealed beneath the smiles and blandishments which were to be encountered on all sides; or that among those who then and there bandied honeyed words and gracious greetings, were to be found individuals who had staked their whole future fortunes upon a perilous venture, and many of whom had lost.

After a few days spent at Brissac the King departed for Poitou, while Marie repaired to Chinon, whence she was to follow him in a few days; and thus terminated the second exile of the widow of Henry the Great, even as the first had done, in mortification and defeat.

As a matter of course, the Ducs de Mayenne and d'Epéron no sooner saw that the cause of the Queen-mother had become hopeless than they hastened to make their submission to the King; although the former, fearing that his known hostility to the favourite might militate against his future interests, first endeavoured to induce M. d'Epéron to join him in forming a new faction for their personal protection; but this attempt met with no encouragement, Epéron declaring that as his royal mistress had seen fit to trust to the clemency of the sovereign, he felt bound to follow her example, and that he advised M. de Mayenne to adopt the same course. Such a reply naturally sufficed to convince his colleague that he had no other alternative; and after the professions usual on such occasions both nobles prepared to lay down their arms.

Louis having learnt at Poitiers that the Queen was on her way to join him, immediately proceeded to Tours to await her arrival, and to conduct her to the former city, whither she accompanied him with all the great ladies of the Court; and four days subsequently Marie de Medicis followed with her slender retinue. She was welcomed by Anne of Austria with haughty courtesy; and during the ensuing week all was revelry and dissipation. The young Queen gave a splendid ball in honour of her august mother-in-law; and on the morrow the Jesuits performed a comedy at which all the Court were present.

It is probable, however, that Marie de Medicis did not enter with much zest into these diversions, as she could not fail to perceive that the courtesy evinced towards her was reluctant and constrained; and when, on the arrival of the Duc de Mayenne, she witnessed the coldness of his reception, her fears for her own future welfare must have been considerably augmented. At his first audience Mayenne threw himself at the feet of the King, protesting his sorrow for the past, and imploring the royal pardon with all the humility of a criminal, but Louis alike feared and hated the veteran leaguer, and he replied harshly: "Enough, M. le Duc; I will forget the past should the future give me cause to do so." And as he ceased speaking he turned away, leaving the mortified noble to rise at his leisure from the lowly attitude which he had assumed.

Two days subsequently the King resumed his journey to Guienne, Marie de Medicis proceeded to Fontainebleau, and Anne of Austria returned to Paris. As Louis reached Chizé he was met by the Duc d'Epéron, who, in his turn, sued for forgiveness, which was accorded without difficulty; and thus the Queen-mother found herself deprived of her two most efficient protectors, and clung more tenaciously than ever to the support of the treacherous Richelieu.

The next care of Louis was to compel the resumption of the Roman Catholic religion in Béarn; after which he followed the Court to the capital, whither he had already been preceded by the Queen-mother.

CHAPTER IV

1621-24

During the absence of the King from Paris, the Maréchal d'Estrées, who was at that period Ambassador at Rome, was engaged in soliciting two seats in the Conclave, the first for the Archbishop of Toulouse, and the second for the Bishop of Luçon; while Marie de Medicis lost no opportunity of entreating Bentivoglio, the Papal Nuncio, to further the interests of the latter, impressing upon him that no period could be more favourable than the present, when Louis XIII had enforced upon a whole refractory province the performance of the rites which it had so long rejected. To this argument the Cardinal had nothing to object, and he accordingly listened with complacency to her representations; but they were rendered abortive by De Luynes, who privately informed him that neither the sovereign nor himself sincerely desired the promotion of Richelieu, and that their apparent anxiety for his advancement had been merely assumed to gratify the Queen-mother; while, far from being disposed to consider the dissent of the Pontiff to this application as a slight, his Majesty would be gratified should he reject it, as he had reason to feel dissatisfied with the Bishop of Luçon, whom he was consequently not disposed to support in an ambition which he considered to be at once inordinate and premature. Paul V needed no further hint; he had been unwilling to countenance the elevation of two French prelates, and accordingly he replied to all the urgent solicitations of M. d'Estrées with evasive replies, until at length, wearied by his pertinacity, he laid before him a letter from Louis himself wherein he revoked all his former orders. The indignation of the Ambassador was only exceeded by that of Richelieu when they severally discovered that they had been duped; but the death of the Pope, and the election of Gregory XV, which occurred in the following month (February), once more renewed their hopes.

The demise of Paul V was followed by that of Philip III of Spain, and negotiations were immediately commenced with his successor for the restoration of the Valteline to the Grisons, which were happily concluded for the moment; but, whatever satisfaction this event might have elicited at the Court of France, it was counterbalanced by another, in which the great nobles felt a more personal and intimate interest. On the 2nd of April Charles Albert, Duc de Luynes, was invested with the sword of Connétable de France; and thus in the short space of four years, without having distinguished himself either as a warrior or a statesman, had risen from the obscure position of a Gentleman of the Household, and of a petty provincial noble, to the highest dignity which could be conferred upon a subject.

The ceremony of his investiture was conducted with extraordinary pomp; and when he had taken the oath, De Luynes received from the hands of the King a sword richly ornamented with diamonds, which was buckled on by Gaston, Duc d'Anjou. The murmurs elicited by this extraordinary promotion were universal, and the rather as it had long been promised to the Duc de Lesdiguières, who was compelled to content himself with a brevet of Marshal of France, and the title of colonel-general of the royal army, which constituted the veteran soldier the lieutenant of De Luynes, who had never been upon a field of battle.

The remainder of the year was occupied in a campaign against the Protestants, who, on the departure of the King from Béarn, had rallied in the defence of their religion, and revolted against the outrages to which they had been subjected by a lawless rabble. Their churches had been desecrated and burnt down at Tours, Poitiers, and other cities, themselves publicly insulted, and they began to apprehend that they were about to be despoiled of all the privileges accorded to them by the Edict of Nantes. Under these circumstances they had convoked a general assembly at La Rochelle, in order to decide upon the measures necessary for their preservation; and although warned immediately to dissolve the meeting, they had refused compliance with the royal edict, even while aware that they were not strong enough to contend with any prospect of ultimate success.

The new Connétable eagerly seized this opportunity of exerting his authority, and an army of forty thousand infantry and eight thousand horse was marched towards the Loire, at the head of which were the King himself, De Luynes, and the Maréchal de Lesdiguières; while, as though the projected expedition had been a mere party of pleasure, not only did a crowd of the great nobles volunteer to swell the ranks of the already enormous host, but the two

Queens, the Duchesse de Luynes, and a numerous suite of ladies also accompanied the troops to share in the campaign. The result of this fearful contest is known. The unhappy Protestants were driven from their strongholds, and with the exception of Montauban, which was so gallantly defended that the King was ultimately compelled to raise the siege, they found themselves utterly despoiled, and exposed to every species of insult.

No event could have been more unfortunate for the ambitious Connétable than the successful defence of Montauban. Louis loved war for its own sake, but he was also jealous of success; and he felt with great bitterness this first mortification. He had, moreover, become conscious that he was a mere puppet in the hands of his ambitious favourite; and he was already becoming weary of a moral vassalage of which he had been unable to calculate the extent. As the brilliant Connétable flashed past him, glittering with gold, the plumes of his helmet dancing in the wind, and the housings of his charger sparkling with gems, he looked after him with a contemptuous scowl, and bade the nobles among whom he stood admire the regal bearing of *le Roi Luynes*; nor was he the less bitter because he could not suppress a consciousness of his own disability to dispense with the services of the man whom he thus criticized.

Upon one point Louis XIII greatly resembled his mother; with all his arrogance and love of power, he possessed no innate strength of purpose, and constantly required extraneous support; but it was already easy for those about him to perceive that fear alone continued to link him with the once all-powerful favourite. Rumour said, moreover, that superadded to the jealousy which the King entertained of the daily increasing assumption of the Connétable there existed another cause of discontent. The Duchesse de Luynes was, as we have said, both beautiful and fascinating, and Louis had not been proof against her attractions, although his ideas of gallantry never overstepped the bounds of the most scrupulous propriety. The lady had on her part welcomed his homage with more warmth than discretion, and the favourite had not failed to reproach her for a levity by which he considered himself dishonoured. Madame de Luynes had retorted in no measured terms, and the young sovereign, who detested finding himself involved in affairs of this nature, and who had, moreover, reason to believe that he was not the only individual favoured by the smiles of the coquettish beauty, soon evinced an aversion towards both husband and wife, which encouraged the enemies of De Luynes to hint that the reverse which his Majesty had lately suffered at Montauban might be entirely attributed to the incapacity and selfishness of the Connétable. This opinion soothed the wounded vanity of the King, and he talked vehemently of his regret for the brave men who had fallen, among whom was the Duc de Mayenne, and bitterly complained of the dishonour to which he had been subjected; while in order to revenge himself at once upon De Luynes and the Duchess, he condescended to the meanness of informing the former that the Prince de Joinville was enamoured of his wife, and subsequently boasted to Bassompierre that he had done so. The Marquis listened in astonishment to this extraordinary communication, and in reply ventured to assure his Majesty that he had committed a serious error in seeking to cause a misunderstanding between a married couple.

"God will forgive me for it should He see fit to do so," was the sullen retort of Louis. "At all events it gave me great pleasure to be revenged on him, and to cause him this annoyance; and before six months have elapsed I will make him disgorge all his gains."

The rumour of his projected disgrace soon reached the ears of the bewildered favourite, who instantly resolved to redeem himself by some more successful achievement. He accordingly ordered the troops to march upon and besiege Monheur, an insignificant town on the Garonne, which was feebly garrisoned by two hundred and sixty men, and which was in consequence sure to fall into his hands. As he had foreseen, the place soon capitulated, but the late reverse had rendered Louis less accessible than ever to the claims of mercy; and although by the terms of the treaty he found himself compelled to spare the lives of the troops, numbers of the inhabitants were put to death, and the town was sacked and burned. This paltry triumph did not, however, suffice to reinstate the Connétable in the good graces of his royal master, who continued to indulge in the most puerile complaints against his former favourite; and the latter's mortification at so sudden and unexpected a reverse of fortune so seriously affected his

health that, while the ruins of the ill-fated town were still smouldering, he expired in an adjacent village of a fever which had already caused considerable ravages in the royal army.

When intelligence of the decease of De Luynes was communicated to the King he did not even affect the slightest regret, and the courtiers at once perceived that the demise of the man upon whom he had lavished so many and such unmerited distinctions was regarded by Louis as a well-timed release. So careless indeed did the resentful monarch show himself of the common observances of decency that he gave no directions for his burial; and, profiting by this omission, the enemies of the unfortunate Connétable pillaged his residence, and carried off every article of value, not leaving him even a sheet to supply his grave-clothes. The Maréchal de Chaulnes and the Due de Luxembourg, his brothers, with whom at his first entrance into life he had shared his slender income, and whom in his after days of prosperity he had alike ennobled and enriched, looked on in silence at this desecration of his remains, lest by resenting the outrage they should incur the displeasure of the King; and it is on record that the Abbé Rucellai and one of his friends alone had the courage and generosity to furnish the necessary funds for embalming the body and effecting its transport to its last resting-place.

The resolute position still maintained by the Protestants chafed the arrogant temper of Louis XIII, who, although personally incapable of sustaining the royal authority, was yet jealous of its privileges. Political and civil liberty was in his eyes a heresy to be exterminated at whatever cost; and while he was as infirm in purpose as a child, he grasped at absolute monarchy, and panted to acquire it. This, as he at once felt, could never be achieved while there existed within his kingdom a party which claimed to limit his prerogative, and to maintain the rights which it had acquired under his predecessors, and thus he eagerly resolved to rid himself of so dangerous an enemy; but although his determination was formed, he found himself unequal to the self-imposed task; he had no reliance on his own strength, and until he had selected a new favourite upon whom he could lean for support, he dared not venture upon so serious an undertaking.

There were, however, many candidates for the vacant honour, and De Luynes was scarcely in his grave ere two separate parties began to strive for pre-eminence. That of the ministers was headed by Henri de Gondy, Cardinal de Retz, President of the Council, Schomberg, Grand Master of the Artillery and Superintendent of Finance, and De Vic, Keeper of the Seals, who exerted all their efforts to dissuade the King from again placing himself in the power of a favourite; believing that should he consent to retain the government in his own hands, they need only flatter his foibles to secure to themselves the actual administration of the kingdom; a policy which they commenced by urging him to follow up his intention of pursuing the war against the Protestants.

On the other hand, the courtiers who were anxious for peace, and who desired to see Louis once more quietly established in his capital, were earnest that he should advance Bassompierre to the coveted dignity; nor were they without sanguine hope of success, as even before the death of De Luynes, the wit, courage, and magnificence of the courtly soldier had captivated the admiration of the King, who had evinced towards him a greater portion of regard than he vouchsafed to any other noble of his suite; while so conscious were the ministers of this preference, that in order to rid themselves of so dangerous an adversary, and to effect his removal from the Court, they offered to Bassompierre the lieutenancy of Guienne and the *bâton* of a marshal. These honours were, however, declined--not from ambition, for Bassompierre, although brave in the field, was an ardent votary of pleasure, and the Court was his world; but he was wise enough to feel that he did not possess the necessary talent for so perilous a post as that which his friends would fain have assigned to him; and he was the first to declare that the intrigues of both parties would fail, since the King must ere long fall, as a natural consequence, under the dominion of his mother, or that of the Prince de Condé.

On the 28th of January Louis re-entered Paris, where he was received with enthusiasm; and the meeting between the mother and son was highly satisfactory to both parties. In compliance with the advice of Richelieu, Marie de Medicis exhibited towards the young sovereign a deferential tenderness and a modest exultation, which flattered his vanity, and

disarmed his apprehensions. No allusion was made to the past, save such as afforded opportunity for adulation and triumph; Louis began to look upon himself as a conqueror, and the Queen-mother already entertained visions of renewed power and authority.

So soon as the death of De Luynes had been made known to M. de Condé, he had hastened to meet the King, in order to forestall the influence of Marie. Aware that she anxiously desired a termination of the war, he threw himself into the cabal of the ministers, and urged Louis to complete the work which he had so ably commenced, by compelling the Protestants to evacuate La Rochelle, Montauban, and Royan, the only fortified towns of which they still remained in possession; conscious that should he succeed in once more involving the country in civil war, his royal kinsman would not be able to dispense with his own support.

Louis had, however, recalled Jeannin and Sillery to his councils, both of whom were jealous of the Prince, and wounded by his arrogance, and who did not, consequently, hesitate to advise the King to offer conditions to the reformed party, and to endeavour to conclude a peace; while Marie de Medicis earnestly seconded their views, expressing at the same time her desire to become once more associated in the government.

To her extreme mortification Louis hesitated; he had resolved to share his authority only with his favourites, and he was aware that Marie would not enter into their views; while he was equally averse to permit the interference of Richelieu, whose power over the mind of the Queen-mother was matter of notoriety. In this dilemma he appealed to the two ministers, who, eager to counteract the influence of Condé, urged him to accede to her wishes, representing at the same time the danger which he must incur by exciting her displeasure, and thus inducing her to oppose his measures. When he urged the powerlessness to which she was reduced by her late reverses, they respectfully reminded him that her faction, although dispersed for the moment, was by no means annihilated; nor did they fail to impress upon him that her adhesion would be necessary in order to enable him to counteract the pretensions of the Prince de Condé, who had already given evidence of his anxiety to place himself at the head of affairs, and to govern the nation in his name. This argument prevailed. The Queen-mother was admitted to the Council on the understanding that the Bishop of Luçon should be excluded, and she accepted the condition without comment, feeling convinced that when she had succeeded in establishing her own position, she should find little difficulty in accomplishing all minor measures.

Madame de Luynes had no sooner ascertained that she had irretrievably lost the favour of the King than she devoted herself to Anne of Austria, who was soon induced to forget her previous jealousy, and to whom her society ere long became indispensable. In many respects the tastes of the girl-Queen and the brilliant widow of the Connétable were singularly similar, although Anne was a mere tyro in gallantry beside her more experienced friend. Both were young, handsome, and giddy; greedy of admiration, and regardless of the comments of those about them; and never perhaps did any Princess of Spain more thoroughly divest herself of the *morgue* peculiar to her nation than the wife of Louis XIII, whose Court set at defiance all etiquette which interfered with the amusement of the hour. In vain did the King and his mother expostulate; Anne of Austria merely pouted and persisted; and even her panegyrist, Madame de Motteville, has recorded that she did not hesitate in after-years to admit that she had numbered among her adorers the Duc de Montmorency, who previously to the passion with which she inspired him had been the devoted slave of the beautiful Marquise de Sablé; the Duc de Bellegarde, of whose antiquated worship she made for a while the jest of her circle, and her own pastime; and finally, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, who, mistaking her levity for a more tender feeling, was presumptuous and reckless enough to endanger her reputation; while her imprudent encouragement of the attentions of Richelieu, which subsequently caused her so much and such bitter suffering, has also become matter of history. In addition to Madame de Luynes, Anne of Austria had adopted as her especial favourites the intriguing Princesse de Conti and Mademoiselle de Verneuil, the natural sister of the King; and while Louis was absorbed by visions of absolute empire, and meditating the destruction of his Protestant subjects, the private circle of the Queen was loud with revelry, and indulging in amusement to the very verge of impropriety.

At the period of the sovereign's return to Paris hopes were entertained that Anne would shortly give an heir to the French throne; and while Marie de Medicis, whose policy it had been to maintain the coldness and indifference of the royal couple, was trembling at the increase of influence which could not fail to accrue to the young Queen should she become the mother of a Dauphin, Louis was impatiently anticipating the moment which would enable him to present to his good citizens of Paris a successor to his regal honours. Great therefore was his consternation when he was apprised that the Queen, while running across the great hall of the Louvre with Madame de Luynes and Mademoiselle de Verneuil, had fallen and injured herself so severely that all hopes of a Dauphin were for the moment at an end.

In the first paroxysm of his anger he ordered the two ladies, whom he, perhaps justly, regarded as the cause of the accident, to quit the palace within three days on pain of his most serious displeasure; but the Duchess, to whom exile from the Court was equivalent to a death-warrant, lost no time in despatching a messenger to the Prince de Joinville (who had recently assumed the title of Duc de Joyeuse), entreating him to exert all his influence to save her from this disgrace; nor did she make the appeal in vain. The Prince, who was devotedly attached to her, at once declared himself her champion, and despite the advice of his friends, not only induced Louis to rescind his order, but offered his hand to the lady, who subsequently became celebrated as Duchesse de Chevreuse; and together with her own pardon also obtained that of Mademoiselle de Verneuil, with permission to both parties to retain their position in the Queen's household.

Meanwhile the Prince de Condé continued to urge upon the King the expediency of following up his project of aggression against the Protestants, and proposed to him that he should join the army with Monsieur his brother, leaving Marie de Medicis in the capital; for which advice many designing and unworthy motives were attributed to him by his enemies. As an immediate consequence such an arrangement must naturally have tended to increase the dependence of the young sovereign upon himself, while the late accident of the Queen having removed all prospect of a new heir to the throne, should the chances of war prove fatal to the King and the Duc d'Anjou, the crown of France became the legitimate right of Condé himself. What tended to strengthen the belief that the Prince actually contemplated such a result, was the fact that it had been predicted to him by an astrologer that at the age of four and thirty he would be King of France; and the superstition so common at the time caused considerable faith to be placed in the prophecy, not only by himself but by many of his friends. Condé had now attained to within a year of the stated period; and as a few months previously Louis had been seriously indisposed, while the Duc d'Anjou had barely escaped with life from an illness which he had not yet thoroughly conquered, not a doubt was entertained by the party opposed to him that his great anxiety to see himself at the head of an army arose from his conviction that in such a position he should be the more readily enabled to enforce his pretensions.

Be his motives what they might, however, the ministers, who were anxious that Louis should absent himself from the capital before he fell under the dominion of a new favourite who might thwart their own views, zealously seconded the advice of M. de Condé; and although Marie de Medicis strenuously opposed the renewal of civil warfare, and the Duc de Lesdiguières represented to the King the ardent desire of the Protestants to conclude a peace, all their efforts were impotent to counteract the pernicious counsels of the Prince, which were destined to darken and desecrate all the after-reign of Louis XIII. Marie then endeavoured to dissuade the King from heading his troops in person; or, should he persist in this design, at least to forego that of leaving her in the capital, and of exposing Monsieur to the dangers of the campaign. All that she could obtain was a promise that the Duc d'Anjou should remain in Paris, while as Louis had named no precise period for his own departure it was believed that he would not leave the city before the termination of the Easter festival, and that meanwhile circumstances might occur to induce him to change his resolution. But while Marie de Medicis indulged in this hope, the same anticipation had produced a different effect upon the minds of Condé and his party, who secretly urged upon the King that longer delay could only tend to afford facilities to the Protestants for strengthening their faction, and consequently their means of resistance, an argument which determined Louis at once to carry out his project; and so alarmed was the Prince lest some circumstance might supervene to impede the departure of

the monarch, that he finally induced him to have recourse to the undignified expedient of quitting the Louvre by a back entrance at dusk on Palm Sunday, and of proceeding to Orleans, where he remained until the close of Easter, awaiting the arrival of the great officers of his household, who had no sooner joined him than he embarked with the troops who had been stationed there, and hastened with all possible speed to Nantes, where he appointed the Prince de Condé lieutenant-general of his army.

The indignation of the Queen-mother was unbounded when she became apprised of the departure of the King, which she at once attributed to the anxiety of M. de Condé to remove him beyond her own influence, and she consequently made immediate preparations for following the royal fugitive; but although she exerted all her energy to accomplish this object, her mental agitation overcame her physical strength; and when she reached the town of Nantes, which Louis had already quitted, she was unable to proceed farther, and was compelled by indisposition to remain inactive, and to leave her adversaries in possession of the field.

The war which supervened was one of great triumph to the royal army, if indeed the massacre of his own subjects can reflect glory upon a sovereign; but the laurels gained by Louis and his troops were sullied by a series of atrocious and bootless cruelties, which made them matter of reproach rather than of praise. In vain did the Maréchal de Lesdiguières, the Duc de Bouillon, and even Sully, who had once controlled the destinies of France, make repeated offers of submission; the Prince de Condé had sufficient influence over the infatuated King to render every appeal useless, and to induce him to persist in the wholesale slaughter of the unhappy Protestants.

In the affair of La Rochelle alone Bassompierre informs us that "there died upon the field, killed in cold blood, and without resistance, more than fifteen hundred men, while more than as many prisoners were taken who were sent to the galleys: the rest were put to death by the followers of M. de la Rochefoucauld and by the peasantry. So that M. de Soubise re-entered La Rochelle with thirty horsemen out of the seven hundred whom he had with him, and not four hundred infantry of the seven thousand who comprised his army on the preceding day."

The leaders of the Protestants, some alarmed for their personal safety, and others gained over by the offers of the Court, began to desert the cause for which they had so long contended, and to make terms with the sovereign. The Duc de la Force sold himself for two hundred thousand crowns and the *bâton* of a marshal; the Duc de Sully, after repeated delays, surrendered his fortress of Cadenac; the veteran De Lesdiguières abandoned not only his friends, but also his faith, for the sword of Connétable of France; and finally the Marquis de Châtillon, the grandson of the brave and murdered Coligni, delivered himself up together with the stronghold of Aigues Mortes; thus leaving no men of mark among the reformers, save the two brothers MM. de Soubise and de Rohan; the former of whom was then in England soliciting the assistance of James I., while the latter was endeavouring to raise troops in the Cévennes for the protection of Montpellier and Nîmes, both which cities were threatened with siege.

The favours accorded to the renegade Protestant leaders having caused great dissatisfaction among the Catholic nobles of Louis XIII, the King found himself compelled to gratify these also by honours and emolument. The Duc d'Epéron was made Governor of Guienne, a province which had never hitherto been bestowed save on a Prince of the Blood; while Bassompierre succeeded to the marshal's *bâton* vacated by Lesdiguières on his promotion; and M. de Schomberg was invested with the governments of Angoumois and Limousin.

Towards the close of August the troops marched upon Montpellier, but the arrival of the new Connétable excited the jealousy of Condé, who refused to submit to his authority. Lesdiguières, who, although he had abandoned his faith, had not yet ceased to feel a lively interest in the cause of his co-religionists, was eager to effect a peace, and for this purpose had conferred with the Duc de Rohan, who was equally anxious to obtain the same result; but for a considerable time the threatened cities refused to listen to any compromise. At length,

however, the representations of Rohan prevailed, and the negotiation was nearly completed when M. de Condé haughtily declared that whatever might be the conditions conceded by the King and the Connétable, he would deliver over the city to pillage so soon as he had entered the gates. The citizens of Montpellier, who were aware that, despite the capitulations made with other places, the most enormous atrocities had been committed in the towns which had surrendered, persisted in their turn that they would only admit Lesdiguières within their walls provided he were accompanied neither by Louis nor the Prince de Condé; a resolution which excited the indignation of the King, and the negotiation consequently failed. The Connétable returned to Guienne, and once more M. de Condé found himself in undisputed command of the royal army.

The incapacity of the Prince, the casualties of war, and the sickness which manifested itself among the troops, had, however, greatly tended to weaken the military resources of the sovereign; the Cardinal de Retz and De Vic, the Keeper of the Seals, had both fallen victims to disease; while numbers of the nobility had been killed; and De Rohan, with his usual perspicacity, decided that the moment had now arrived in which, could he ever hope to do so, he might be enabled to effect the desired treaty. Louis, who had become weary of the overweening pretensions and haughty dictation of Condé, secretly encouraged him to persist in his attempt; and the Duke immediately exerted himself to prevail upon the inhabitants of Montpellier to receive his Majesty into their city.

While he was thus engaged, the Prince, who soon discovered from the altered demeanour of the King that he should be unable to prevent the conclusion of a peace, resolved to absent himself from the army. He had been apprised by his emissaries of the recall of Lesdiguières, and he at once comprehended that the presence of the Connétable could be required for no other purpose than that of weakening his own authority, and of thwarting his own views; and acting upon this conviction, he did not hesitate to inform Louis that he was aware of the projected return of the veteran noble; adding that, as he could not bring himself to obey the orders of an individual so greatly his inferior in birth, he preferred retiring for a time to Italy, should his Majesty graciously accord him permission to absent himself. Louis required no entreaties to concede this favour to his arrogant kinsman; and, accordingly, to the undisguised satisfaction of the harassed army, the Prince departed for Rome; the Duc de Lesdiguières replaced him in his command; and, finally, the King having acceded to the conditions demanded by the citizens of the beleaguered town, they consented to receive him within their walls, provided that at his departure he withdrew the whole of his troops.

All the terms of the treaty were observed save this last demand. An edict of pacification was duly signed and registered; and Louis, in the month of November, quitted Montpellier with the bulk of his army, but left two regiments in garrison within the very heart of the city. The Protestants were, however, too weary of warfare, and too much exhausted by suffering, to resent this infraction of their rights; and they consequently saw the King set forth for Lyons without expostulation or remonstrance. Had they been enabled to make a final effort, it is probable that they might have imposed still more favourable conditions, as after the departure of Condé Louis relapsed into his usual helplessness; for although perfectly competent to direct the manoeuvres of a body of troops on a review-ground, he was totally unequal to the command of an army; and with the littleness of a narrow mind, he was at the same time jealous of his generals; neither was he able to comprehend either the precise political position of his own kingdom, or that of Europe; and thus, although he assumed an appearance of authority, so soon as the controlling influence of the paramount favourite was withdrawn, his powers were paralyzed, and he no longer possessed any defined principle of action.

The entry of the King at Lyons was celebrated with the utmost magnificence. Had he achieved the conquest of half Europe he could not have been greeted with more enthusiasm than awaited him on this occasion, when his hand still reeked with the blood of hundreds of his own subjects, and the shrieks of injured women and slaughtered children were still appealing to Heaven for vengeance. Triumphal arches, ecclesiastical and municipal processions, salvos of artillery, flourishes of trumpets, all the pomp and circumstance of war blent with the splendour of triumph, awaited him on his arrival in that city. The two Queens

with their separate Courts, and the Duke and Duchess of Savoy with a brilliant retinue, were assembled to give him welcome; and while the houseless inhabitants of Montpellier and of the smouldering villages of Guienne were wandering about the ruins of their once happy and prosperous homes, the streets of Lyons swarmed with velvet-clad courtiers and jewelled dames, hurrying from ball to banquet, and wholly absorbed in frivolity and pleasure. Theatrical performances took place every evening; and on the 12th of November the three Courts assisted at the marriage of Mademoiselle de Verneuil and the Marquis de la Valette, the second son of the Duc d'Epemon, which was celebrated with great pomp. The King presented to his sister a dowry of two hundred thousand crowns, to which the Marquise, her mother, added one hundred thousand more. This union was followed by that of Madame de Luynes with the Prince de Joinville; and the two marriages were followed by Italian comedies, fireworks, and public illuminations.

The most important event, however, which occurred during the sojourn of the King at Lyons, was the admission of the Bishop of Luçon to the Conclave. The long-coveted hat was forwarded to the French sovereign by Gregory XV, from whose hands it was received by Richelieu. The Queen-mother triumphed; but neither Louis nor his ministers felt the same exultation as Marie and her favourite; for guardedly as the new Cardinal had borne himself while awaiting this honour, his spirit of intrigue had already become notorious, and his extraordinary talents excited alarm rather than confidence. The death of the Cardinal de Retz, which had occurred while the King was with the army in Languedoc, had created two important vacancies; one in the Holy College, and the other in the royal Council, to both of which the astute Richelieu aspired; but Louis, urged by his ministers, decidedly refused to admit him to the Privy Council, and he was fain to content himself for the moment with the honours of the scarlet hat, while M. de la Rochefoucauld was appointed to the vacant seat in the Council.

The President Jeannin had died in the month of October, at the ripe age of eighty-two; a demise which was followed by those of De Vic, the Keeper of the Seals, and the Duc de Bouillon; and thus three stumbling-blocks had been removed from the path of Richelieu, whose professions of attachment to Marie de Medicis became more fervent than ever; while he was meanwhile carefully measuring the strength of those to whom he was opposed, studying the foibles of the King, and gradually forming a party at Court which might enable him to secure his own ultimate elevation, and to render himself independent of Marie's protection.

The ceremony of his admission to the Conclave had no sooner been concluded in the chapel of the Archbishop's palace, than Richelieu hastened to place the symbol of his new dignity at the feet of his benefactress.

"Madame," he said, at the close of a harangue full of the most exaggerated declarations of devotion to her person, "this honour, for which I am indebted to the benevolence of your Majesty, will ever cause me to bear in mind the solemn vow I have made to shed my blood in your service."

Marie listened and believed; and in addition to the scarlet hat, and the dignity of Minister of State which it involved, the deceived Princess in the short space of a few months bestowed upon her future enemy the enormous sum of nine hundred thousand crowns, besides sacerdotal plate to an almost incredible amount. No timely presentiment warned her how the "solemn vow" was to be observed; and the influence of the selfish and unprincipled churchman became greater than ever.

The King did not return to Paris until the 10th of January (1623), and shortly after his arrival another change took place in the ministry. Schomberg had excited the animosity of the Chancellor Sillery, his son the Marquis de Puisieux (who, since the death of De Luynes, had risen greatly in the favour of Louis), and the Marquis de Caumartin, who, on the demise of M. de Vic, had been appointed Keeper of the Seals. He was also avowedly obnoxious to M. de la Vieuville, the adjutant-general of the royal army; and these nobles combined to effect his ruin. As, however, M. de Schomberg was protected by the Prince de Condé, the conspirators were for a time compelled to forego their purpose, but the Prince had no sooner taken his departure

for Italy than they hastened to poison the mind of the King against his finance minister; an attempt in which they so easily succeeded, that although Schomberg undertook to prove the fallacy of every charge which was brought against him, Louis refused to admit his justification, and he was dismissed from his charge, which was conferred upon De la Vieuville; while by the death of De Caumartin, which shortly afterwards occurred, Sillery once more found himself in possession of the seals. His triumph was, however, of short duration, the King having conceived an extraordinary aversion to the Chancellor, although he was aware that he could not safely dispense with his services; and accordingly, a short time subsequently, the seals were again reclaimed, and bestowed upon M. d'Aligre.

On the return of Louis XIII to the capital Anne of Austria organized two magnificent ballets, one of which was danced in the apartments of the King, and the other in her own. It was hinted that these splendid entertainments were given in order to impress Lord Holland with a high idea of the splendour of the French Court, that nobleman having been instructed by James I. to endeavour to effect a marriage between the Prince of Wales and Madame Elisabeth; and great was the astonishment of the royal party when they ascertained that the Prince himself, attended by the Duke of Buckingham, had been present incognito, both personages being disguised with false beards and enormously bushy wigs; and that, after only remaining one day in Paris, they had pursued their journey to Spain, where Charles was about to demand the hand of the Infanta. It was, moreover, afterwards ascertained that having arrived in the French capital on the evening before that of the royal ballet, the Prince and his companions had gone disguised to the Louvre to see the Queen-mother at table, and had introduced themselves as travelling nobles into a gallery in which Louis was walking surrounded by his courtiers; after which they had induced the Duc de Montbazon to allow them to enter the hall in which the festival was to take place. There Charles saw for the first time the young Queen of Louis XIII, with the portrait of whose sister he had become enamoured, and also Madame Henriette, who was subsequently destined to become his wife. But it would appear that the French Princess whom he so tenderly loved in after-years made, on this occasion, no impression upon his mind; as, still eager to convince himself that the Spanish Infanta was as beautiful as the miniature in his possession, he set forth on the following day for Madrid, as he had originally intended.

La Vieuville and his party (at the head of which figured the Queen-mother, who could not brook that Louis should retain about his person a minister whose influence counterbalanced her own) began in the spring of 1624 to make new efforts to effect the disgrace of the veteran Chancellor and his son M. de Puisieux; both of whom had, moreover, incurred the hatred of Richelieu by their endeavours to oppose his admission to the Conclave; and the continual representations of the cabal soon produced so marked an alteration in the bearing of the King towards Sillery, that the latter resolved not to await the dismissal which he foresaw would not be long delayed. Pretexting, therefore, his great age--for he had attained his eightieth year--and his serious sufferings from gout, by which he was disabled from following his Majesty in his perpetual journeys to the provinces, he entreated permission to retire from the Government, an indulgence which was conceded without difficulty; and the seals transferred, as we have already stated, to M. d'Aligre; and although Louis continued to treat De Puisieux with studied courtesy, the rival faction soon discovered that his favour was at an end. On several occasions the King gave audiences to the different foreign ambassadors without desiring his presence, although as Secretary of State it had hitherto been considered indispensable; and finally, both father and son were informed that they were at liberty to quit the Court.

The exultation of Marie de Medicis at their dismissal was undisguised, and she immediately took measures to secure the admission of Richelieu to the ministry; for which purpose she endeavoured to secure the interests of La Vieuville. For a time, however, the finance minister declined to second her views, as neither he nor his colleagues were desirous of the co-operation of a man whom they distrusted; but Marie, who would suffer no repulse, at length succeeded in overcoming his repugnance, and he was ultimately induced to urge upon the King the expediency of compliance with the wishes of his mother; although under certain

Marie de Medicis

restrictions which might tend to curb the intriguing and ambitious spirit of the enterprising candidate.

At this period the Court was sojourning at Compiègne; and on one occasion, as Louis, according to his custom, paid his morning visit to the Queen-mother in her sleeping-apartment, he announced, to her extreme delight, that he had appointed the Cardinal de Richelieu Councillor of State; warning her, however, that he must rest satisfied with a subordinate authority, and not permit himself to suggest measures which had not previously been considered by the King himself.

That Louis nevertheless made this concession with reluctance is evidenced by the fact that he forthwith wrote to M. de Condé, who was then residing at Bourges, to invite him to return to Court in order to counterbalance the influence of the Queen-mother, which the admission of her favourite to the Privy Council could not fail greatly to augment. The appeal was, however, fruitless; the Prince considering himself aggrieved not only by the elevation of an individual to whom he justly attributed his imprisonment in the Bastille, but also by the increased power of Marie de Medicis, and he consequently coldly returned his thanks for the desire evinced by his royal kinsman to see him once more near his person, but declared his intention of remaining in his government.

From this period the prominent figure upon the canvas of the time is Richelieu. He it was who negotiated the marriage of the Prince of Wales with Madame Henriette, after the alliance with Spain had been abandoned by James I. To him the Marquis de la Vieuville owed his disgrace, and by his representations the Queen-mother enlisted the young Prince Gaston d'Anjou in his interests. All bent, or was crushed, before him; he had affected to accept office reluctantly; pleaded his physical weakness, even while he admitted his mental strength, declaring that his bodily infirmities incapacitated him from collision with the toil and turmoil of state affairs; and coquetted with the honours for which he had striven throughout long years until he almost succeeded in inducing those about him to believe that he sacrificed his own inclinations to the will of the sovereign and his mother. But history has proved that having once possessed himself of the supreme power, and moulded the mind of his royal master to his own purposes, he flung off all restraint, and governed the nation like a monarch, while its legitimate sovereign obeyed his behests, and made peace or war, as the necessity of either measure was dictated to him by his imperious minister.

And amid all this pomp of power and pride of place, how did the purple-robed politician regard the generous benefactress who had furthered his brilliant fortunes? It cannot be forgotten that the wretched Concini had been his first patron, and that when one word of warning from his lips might have saved the Maréchal from assassination, those lips had remained closed; that he had even affected to slumber with the death-warrant of the victim beneath his pillow, and had striven to rise upon his ruin. The after-career of Richelieu did not belie its commencement. The glorious talents with which Heaven had gifted him festered into a curse beneath his ambition; he became the marvel of the whole civilized world, and the scourge of those who trusted in his sincerity.

That Marie was as eager as Richelieu himself for the alliance with England is undoubted; for while the latter, whose enlarged political views led him to seek through this medium to curb the growing power of Austria and Spain, looked only to the aggrandizement of the nation which he served, the Queen-mother was equally anxious to secure for herself a safe asylum in the event of any new reverse; and consequently on this particular subject they acted in unison, the Cardinal openly striving to attain his own object, and Marie de Medicis secretly negotiating at the Court of St. James's to effect a marriage by which she believed that she should ensure her future safety.

The difference of religion between the contracting parties necessarily induced considerable difficulties, but as these were never, at that period, suffered to interfere with any great question of national policy, Richelieu unhesitatingly undertook to obtain the consent of the Sovereign-Pontiff, who, as the minister had foreseen, finally accorded the required dispensation. Nor was he deterred from his purpose by the opposition of the Spanish monarch,

who caused his ambassador to assure Marie de Medicis that, in the event of her inducing the King to bestow the hand of the Princesse Henriette upon the Infant Don Carlos, he would secure to that Prince the sovereignty of the Catholic Low Countries on the demise of the Archduchess Isabella, and meanwhile the royal couple could take up their abode at Brussels under the guardianship of that Princess.

The Queen-mother, however, placed no faith in the sincerity of this promise, while Richelieu met it by an instant negative, declaring that "every one was aware that Spain was like a canker which gnawed and devoured every substance to which it attached itself." And meanwhile Louis, glad to have once more found an individual alike able and willing to take upon himself the responsibility of government, suffered the Cardinal to pursue his negotiation with England. The dowry demanded by James with the Princess was eight hundred thousand crowns, half of which was to be paid down on the eve of the marriage, and the remainder within eighteen months, while it was further stipulated that, in the event of her dying before her husband, and without issue, a moiety only of the entire sum was to be repaid by the Prince.

During the progress of this treaty, the Marquis de la Vieuville, whose rapid elevation had created for him a host of virulent and active enemies, was suddenly dismissed. Although not gifted with remarkable talents, M. de la Vieuville was a man of uprightness and integrity, who commenced his office as Superintendent of Finance by reducing the exorbitant salaries and pensions of the great officers of state and other nobles. This was not, however, his worst crime. Well aware of the constitutional timidity of the monarch, he had assumed an authority which rendered him odious to all those whose ambition prompted them to essay their own powers of governing, and among these, as a natural consequence, was the Cardinal de Richelieu, who, despising the abilities of the finance minister, chafed under his own inferiority of place, and did not fail to imbue the Queen-mother with the same feeling. La Vieuville was accused of arrogating to himself an amount of authority wholly incompatible with his office, and it is impossible to suppress a smile while contemplating the fact that this accusation was brought against him by the very individual who, only a few months subsequently, ruled both the monarch and the nation with a rod of iron.

The desired end was, however, attained. Weak and vain, as well as personally incompetent, Louis XIII was easily led to fear those upon whom he had himself conferred the power of lessening his own authority; and as so many interests were involved in the overthrow of De la Vieuville, it was soon decided. Fearful of betraying his own personal views, Richelieu took no active measures in this dismissal, nor were any such needed; as, in addition to his other errors, the finance minister had, by a singular want of judgment, excited against himself the indignation of Monsieur by committing his governor, Colonel d'Ornano, to the Bastille, upon the pretext that he had instigated the Prince to demand admission to the Council in order that he might obtain a knowledge of public affairs, but with the sole intention of procuring his own access to the Government. The jealousy of Louis was at once aroused by this assurance; and the arrest of his brother's friend and confidant had, as a natural consequence, resulted from the minister's ill-advised representation, an insult which Gaston so violently resented that he forthwith entered into the cabal against De la Vieuville, and thus seconded the views of the Queen-mother, who was anxious to replace the obnoxious minister by the Cardinal de Richelieu.

True to his character, on being apprised of the powerful faction formed against him, De la Vieuville resolved to tender his resignation, and thus to deprive his enemies of the triumph of causing his disgrace, for which purpose he proceeded to declare to the King his desire to withdraw from the high office which had been conferred upon him. Louis XIII simply replied: "Make yourself perfectly easy, and pay no attention to what is going forward. When I have no longer occasion for your services, I will tell you so myself; and you shall have my permission to come and take leave of me before your departure."

On the following day De la Vieuville accordingly presented himself as usual during the sitting of the Privy Council, when the King abruptly exclaimed: "I redeem the promise which I made to tell you when I could dispense with your services. I have resolved to do so; and you

are at liberty to take your leave." The ex-minister, bewildered by so extraordinary a reception, attempted no rejoinder, but hastened to quit the royal presence. He had, however, no sooner reached the gallery than he was arrested by the Marquis de Thermes, and conveyed as a prisoner to the citadel of Amboise, whence he made his escape a year afterwards.

The result of this arrest was a total change in the aspect of the Court. M. de Marillac succeeded to the vacant superintendence of finance; the Comte de Schomberg was recalled to the capital, and made a member of the Privy Council; D'Ornano was liberated from the Bastille, restored to his position in the household of the Duc d'Anjou, and honoured with a marshal's *bâton*; while, to complete the moral revolution, Richelieu was appointed chief of the Council, and became, as the Queen-mother had anticipated, all-powerful over the weak and timid mind of the King under his new character of Minister of State.

Fully occupied as the Cardinal might have found himself by the foreign wars into which his ambition ere long plunged his royal master, he was nevertheless compelled to turn his attention to the intrigues of certain great ladies of the Court, which threatened internal dissension, and in which the two Queens ultimately became involved. The young Duc d'Anjou, whose prepossessing manners and handsome person had rendered him universally popular, began about this time to awaken the distrust and jealousy of the King; a feeling which was heightened by the marked preference evinced by Marie de Medicis for her younger son. The marriage of the Prince with the wealthy heiress of Montpensier, whose mother had espoused the Duc de Guise, had long been decided; but as Gaston had hitherto evinced the utmost indifference towards his destined bride, the subject had elicited little attention. Suddenly, however, this indifference gave place to the most marked admiration; and it became evident that he was seriously contemplating an alliance with the Princess who had been designed for him by his father. In so trivial and dissolute a Court as that of France at this period, it is needless to remark to how many fears and regrets such a resolution immediately gave birth; nor was it long ere two separate cabals were formed--the one favouring, and the other seeking to impede, the marriage. Passion and party-feeling overthrew every barrier of decency and dignity; and from this moment may be traced that insurmountable aversion which Louis XIII subsequently exhibited alike towards the Queen his wife and the Prince his brother.

It no sooner became apparent to the Court circle that the Princesse de Conti gave perpetual entertainments, in order to afford to Gaston constant opportunity for conversing with Mademoiselle de Montpensier, than the enemies of the Guises leagued together to inspire the King with their own fears, declaring that such an accession of influence as must accrue to that haughty house by an alliance with the heir-presumptive threatened the stability of the throne; representations which were rendered the more powerful by the extraordinary fact that the Duchesse de Joyeuse, who was herself the wife of a younger brother of the Guises, and the Marquise de la Valette, whose husband was a near relation of the Princesse de Montpensier, were both loud in their entreaties that the brother of the King should not be permitted to contract the alliance which he contemplated. But while Louis was bewildered by this seeming contradiction, Richelieu thoroughly appreciated its real motive, being well aware of the enmity which existed between Mesdames de Joyeuse and de la Valette and the Princesse de Conti, who had long ceased to dissemble their dislike; and who were consequently overjoyed to oppose any undertaking to which the adverse party was pledged.

The two former ladies, who were the most confidential friends of the young Queen, found little difficulty in exciting her alarm, and in inducing her to assist them in their endeavours to thwart a marriage by which, as they asserted, her own personal interests were threatened; nor did they scruple to remind her that in the event of the King's demise, an occurrence which his feeble constitution and frequent indisposition rendered far from improbable, it was necessary for her own future welfare that the heir-presumptive to the Crown should remain unmarried as long as possible.

"What must be your fate, Madame," they insidiously urged, "should his Majesty die without issue? Should you be willing to retire to a cloister while Mademoiselle de Montpensier took your place upon the throne? Or, even supposing that the King survives, and that you

continue childless while the Prince becomes the father of a son, whom all France will regard as its future sovereign, how will you be able to brook the comparative insignificance to which you must be reduced? You will do well to consider these things; and to remember that, in the event of your widowhood, your interest requires that the successor of your present consort should be in a position to secure to you the same station as that which you now hold."

These artful representations produced the desired effect upon the mind of Anne of Austria, who, alike haughty and vain, could not brook to anticipate any diminution of her dignity; and she accordingly lost no time in impressing upon Louis the danger to which he would expose himself by allowing his brother to form an alliance that could not fail to balance his own power in the kingdom. Naturally jealous and distrustful, the King listened eagerly to her reasoning; and while the young Prince continued to pay his court each day more assiduously to the noble and wealthy heiress, the adverse faction, under the sanction of the sovereign, were labouring no less zealously to contravene his views. In conjunction with the Queen, there were not wanting several individuals who, moreover, pointed out to the monarch that should Gaston be permitted to accomplish the contemplated marriage, he would be thus enabled to gain over the still existing leaders of the League, and the party of the Prince de Condé, who, already disaffected towards his own person, would not fail to embrace the interests of his brother. More and more alarmed by each succeeding argument, Louis forthwith summoned M. d'Ornano to his presence, and peremptorily commanded him to put an immediate stop to the intrigues which were going on upon the subject of the projected alliance; and to forbid the Prince, in his name, to form any engagement with Mademoiselle de Montpensier.

Few orders could have been more agreeable to the governor of Gaston, who, aware that both Richelieu and the Queen-mother ardently desired the accomplishment of a marriage which, while it must greatly enrich the Prince and augment his influence, would nevertheless still render him amenable to their authority, was on his side eager to effect his alliance with a foreign princess, for the express purpose of emancipating him from a dependence which interfered with his own influence, and threatened his personal ambition. Meanwhile the Prince himself was divided between his affection for the beautiful heiress and his desire to shake off the yoke of the Cardinal-Minister, to which he submitted with ill-disguised impatience; and thus, although less ostensibly, each faction continued to intrigue as busily as ever.

CHAPTER V

1625-28

The death of James I. and the succession of Charles, Prince of Wales, to the English throne, at the commencement of the year 1625, excited the greatest uneasiness at the Court of France, where all parties were alike anxious for the arrival of the Papal dispensation. Nor was the new monarch himself less desirous of completing the contemplated alliance, as only three days were suffered to elapse after the demise of his royal father ere he hastened to ratify the treaty, and to make preparations for its immediate fulfilment.

On the arrival of the long-expected courier from Rome the dispensation was delivered into the hands of Marie de Medicis by Spada, the Papal Nuncio; and on the 8th of May the Duc de Chevreuse, whom Charles had appointed as his proxy, signed the contract of marriage, conjointly with the Earl of Carlisle and Lord Holland, who officiated as Ambassadors Extraordinary from the Court of St. James's. At the ceremonial of the marriage, which took place on the 11th of May, the difference of religion between the English monarch and the French Princess compelled the observance of certain conventional details which were all scrupulously fulfilled. The Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld, Grand Almoner of France, pronounced the nuptial benediction on a platform erected before the portal of Notre-Dame, after which the Duc de Chevreuse and the English Ambassadors conducted the young Queen to the entrance of the choir, and retired until the conclusion of the mass, when they rejoined Louis XIII and their new sovereign at the same spot, and accompanied them to the great hall of the archiepiscopal palace, where a sumptuous banquet had been prepared.

Some days subsequently, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, arrived unexpectedly in Paris, to urge the immediate departure of the Princess for her new kingdom, and to express the impatience of the King his master to welcome her to his dominions. The extraordinary magnificence displayed by Buckingham on this occasion was the comment of the whole Court, while the remarkable beauty of his person excited no less admiration than the splendour of his apparel; nor was it long ere the scandal-mongers of the royal circle whispered that it had not failed in its effect upon the fancy, if not upon the heart, of Anne of Austria, who received his homage with an evident delight which flattered the vanity of the brilliant visitor. High in favour with his sovereign, and anxious to profit by so favourable an opportunity of enhancing his own personal attractions, Buckingham appeared at the Court festivals attired in the Crown jewels, and indulged in a reckless profusion which enriched all with whom he came into contact, and soon rendered him a general favourite. Aware of the impression that he had produced, the English Duke, whose ambition was as great as his gallantry, soon suffered himself to be betrayed into an undisguised admiration of the French Queen, which led him to commit a thousand unbecoming follies; while Anne was on her side so imprudent that her most partial biographer deemed it necessary to advance an apology for her levity by declaring that "it should excite no astonishment if he had the happiness to make this beautiful Queen acknowledge that if a virtuous woman had been able to love another better than her husband, he would have been the only person who could have pleased her."

Fortunately, alike for the thoughtless Anne and the audacious favourite, this dangerous intercourse was abruptly terminated by the departure of Madame Henrietta, who left the capital in great pomp, accompanied by the King her brother (who was to proceed only as far as Compiègne), and by the two Queens, from whom she was not to separate until the moment of her embarkation at Boulogne, where the vessels of Charles awaited her arrival. On reaching Amiens, however, Marie de Medicis was attacked by sudden indisposition; and as, after a delay of several days, it was found impossible that she should continue her journey, the English

Marie de Medicis

Queen was compelled to take leave of her august mother and sister-in-law in that city, and to proceed to the coast under the escort of Monsieur, who was attended by the Ducs de Luxembourg and de Bellegarde, the Maréchal de Bassompierre, the Marquis d'Alencourt, and the Vicomte de Brigueil. On the 22nd of June the royal fleet set sail, and in twenty-four hours Queen Henrietta reached Dover; where she was met by her impatient consort, who, on the following day, conducted her to Canterbury; and in the course of July she made her entry into London, whence, however, she was immediately removed to Hampton Court, the prevalence of the plague in the capital rendering her sojourn there unsafe.

Having witnessed the departure of the royal bride for her new kingdom, Monsieur and his brilliant train returned to Amiens; and on the recovery of the Queen-mother the whole of the august party retraced their steps to Paris, whence they shortly afterwards proceeded to Fontainebleau.

At this period Richelieu had become all-powerful. He possessed the entire confidence alike of the King and of the Queen-mother. He had been appointed chief of the Council, and possessed such unlimited authority that he opened the despatches, and issued orders without even asking the sanction of Marie de Medicis, whose influence was rapidly becoming merely nominal; and whose favour he treated so lightly that he never appeared at Court during the absence of the King lest the jealousy of Louis should be aroused, and he should be induced to believe that the wily minister still acknowledged the supremacy of his ancient benefactress; while he flattered the ambition of the war-loving monarch by attributing to him personally all the success which attended his own measures alike in the foreign and civil contests which were at that period writing the history of the French nation in characters of blood.

Marie de Medicis was, however, slow to discover the falling-off of her long-cherished favourite. She still dwelt upon the years in which he had, as she fondly believed, devoted himself to her interests, when others in whom she had equally trusted had shrunk from all participation in her altered fortunes; and she was, moreover, conscious that to his counsels she was indebted for much of the prudence and ability which she had displayed on occasions of difficulty. It was, consequently, painful and almost impossible to suspect that now, when she was once more restored to the confidence of her son, and had resumed that position in the government which she had so long coveted in vain, he could sacrifice her to his own ambition. But Marie de Medicis, subtle politician as she esteemed herself, was utterly incapable of appreciating the character of Richelieu. She had now reached her fifty-third year; she was no longer necessary to the fortunes of the man whose greatness had been her own work, and she had ceased to interest him either as a woman or as a Queen. She had, moreover, become devout; and her increasing attachment for the Jesuit Bérulle (for whom she subsequently obtained a seat in the Conclave) rendered her less observant of the neglect to which she was subjected by the minister; while her superstition, together with the prejudices and jealousies in which she indulged, occupied her mind, and blinded her to the efforts which the Cardinal was hourly making to reduce her to absolute insignificance.

Perhaps no greater proof of the unbounded influence which Richelieu had obtained over the mind of the King at this period can be adduced than is afforded by the fact that although, as we have shown, Louis had stringently forbidden all further mention of his brother's marriage with Mademoiselle de Montpensier, and Gaston had at length consented to relinquish his claim to her hand, the Cardinal found little difficulty in inducing the sovereign to rescind this order, and to instruct M. d'Ornano to determine the weak and timid Prince to renew his addresses to the heiress, and to hasten the completion of the marriage ceremonies.

Gaston d'Anjou had attained his seventeenth year; and although of more robust temperament than the King, he was constitutionally indolent and undecided. His after-history proves him to have been alike an incapable diplomatist, a timid leader, and a false and fickle friend; but as yet no suspicion of his courage or good faith had been entertained by any party, and he was consequently the centre around which rallied every cabal in turn. He was moreover, as we have already stated, the favourite son of the Queen-mother, who saw in him not only a cherished child but also a political ally. By securing the support of Gaston, Marie

believed that she should be the more readily enabled to maintain her influence, and to protect herself against any future aggression on the part of Louis, with whom she felt her apparent reconciliation to be at once hollow and unstable; and as the vain and vacillating character of the Prince readily lent itself to the projects of each cabal in succession, so long as it did not interfere with his pleasures, every party in turn believed him to be devoted to its especial interests, and calculated upon his support whenever the struggle should commence. Thus, while himself jealous of Louis, whose crown he envied, Gaston d'Anjou was no less an object of distrust and terror to the King; who, whatever may have been his other defects, was never found deficient in personal courage; and who could not consequently comprehend that with every inclination to play the conspirator, the young Prince was utterly incapable of guiding or even supporting any party powerful and honest enough openly to declare itself.

Under these circumstances, however, it is not surprising that the marriage of the heir-apparent should have excited the most absorbing interest not only at the French Court, but throughout all Europe. The health of Louis XIII continued feeble and uncertain; he rallied slowly and painfully after each successive attack; and since the visit of the Duke of Buckingham to Paris his repugnance to Anne of Austria had become more marked than ever; while the young Queen in her turn resented his neglect with augmented bitterness, and loudly complained of the injustice to which she should be subjected were the children of Gaston d'Anjou to inherit the throne of France. The Princes of the Blood supported Anne in this objection; for neither Condé nor the Comte de Soissons could, as a natural consequence, regard with favour any measure which must tend to diminish the chances of their own succession; while the latter, moreover, desired to become himself the husband of Mademoiselle de Montpensier, and the Princesse de Condé aspired to unite her own daughter, still a mere infant, to the brother of the King. The other great nobles were also disinclined to see the young Prince form so close an alliance with the Duc de Guise; and the Duke of Savoy was eager to bestow on him the hand of Marie de Gonzaga, the heiress of Montferrat, and thus to secure to himself a powerful ally against the perpetual aggressions of his numerous enemies.

D'Ornano, as we have seen, had been commanded to renew the negotiation of marriage between Gaston and the bride destined for him by Henri IV, but private reasons decided him against the measure; and, in consequence of his representations, the Prince formally refused to obey the expressed wishes of the King. The moment was a favourable one for Richelieu, who had long sought a pretext for ridding himself of Monsieur's favourite friend and counsellor; and he accordingly lost no time in impressing upon Louis that, as the young Prince was entirely governed by M. d'Ornano, no concession could be expected from him until that individual had been removed from about his person. Nor was the Maréchal alone an object of suspicion and uneasiness to the minister, for it was not long ere he ascertained that the party of the Prince was hourly becoming more formidable, and that were the cabal not crushed in its infancy, it might very soon tend to endanger at once the safety of the sovereign and the tranquillity of the kingdom; while he also learned through his emissaries that his own security was no less involved in the issue than that of Louis himself.

Under these circumstances Richelieu at once felt that the only method by which he could hope to control Gaston was by proceeding with the utmost severity against all such persons as should be convicted of endeavouring to excite the mind of the Prince against his royal brother; a policy which Louis eagerly adopted. In accordance with this resolution, during the sojourn of the Court at Fontainebleau in the month of May, the King on his return from a hunting-party, after having retired to rest, suddenly rose again, dressed himself, and at ten o'clock at night summoned M. d'Ornano to his presence, whom he entertained for a time with an account of the day's sport, and other inconsequent conversation, until Du Hallier, the captain of the bodyguard, made his appearance at the head of his archers, and approaching the Maréchal, announced to him that he was his prisoner; requesting him to withdraw from the royal apartment, whence he conducted him to the chamber in which the Duc de Biron had been confined twenty-four years previously, while Madame d'Ornano at the same time received an order to quit Paris upon the instant, and the two brothers of the disgraced courtier, together with MM. Déageant, Modéna, and other partisans of the Maréchal, were also arrested.

By this bold stroke of policy the Cardinal effectually paralyzed the power of Monsieur; although this conviction was far from allaying his personal apprehensions. Among the favourites of the Prince he had equally marked for destruction the young Prince de Chalais, the Duc de Vendôme, and his brother the Grand Prior; but Richelieu feared by venturing too much to lose all, for his authority had not at that period reached its acme; and he felt all the danger which he must incur by adopting measures of such violence against two Princes of the Blood.

The indignation of Monsieur was, moreover, thoroughly excited, and he did not scruple either to reproach his royal brother, or to utter threats against those who had aided in the arrest of the Maréchal, whose restoration to liberty he vehemently demanded; and as his representations failed to produce the desired effect, he indulged in a thousand extravagances which only tended to strengthen the hands and to forward the views of Richelieu, who found no difficulty in widening the breach between Louis and the imprudent Prince by whom his authority was openly questioned. In vain did Marie de Medicis endeavour to impress upon him the danger of such ill-advised violence, Gaston persisted in upholding his favourite; until the King, irritated beyond endurance, exhibited such marked displeasure towards his brother that the weak and timid Prince began to entertain fears for his own safety, and became suddenly as abject as he had previously been haughty; abandoned D'Ornano to his fate; and after signing an act, in which he promised all honour and obedience to the sovereign, carried his condescension so far as to visit the Cardinal at his residence at Limours, whither he had retired on the pretext of indisposition.

Richelieu triumphed: and ere long the Duc de Vendôme and his brother were arrested in their turn, and conveyed to the citadel of Amboise. The Comte de Soissons, the second Prince of the Blood, fled the Court in alarm, and took refuge in Savoy; while edict after edict was fulminated against the nobles, which threatened all their old and long-cherished privileges. The costume of each separate class was determined with a minuteness of detail which exasperated the magnificent courtiers, who had been accustomed to attire themselves in embroidery and cloth of gold, in rich laces, and plumed and jewelled hats, and who suddenly found themselves reduced to a sobriety of costume repugnant to their habits; the Comte de Bouteville, of the haughty house of Montmorency, who had dared to disregard the revived law against duelling, lost his head upon the scaffold; and all castles, to whomsoever belonging, which could not aid in the protection of the frontiers, or of the towns near which they were situated, were ordered to be demolished.

The reign of Richelieu had commenced.

Meanwhile the Court had taken up its residence at Fontainebleau; where Louis, deaf to the murmurs of his great nobles, passed his time in hunting, a sport of which he was passionately fond; while Marie de Medicis and the Cardinal endeavoured, by every species of dissipation, to lull him into acquiescence with the perilous measures they were adopting.

Always sickly and querulous, Louis was a prey to dark thoughts and fearful anticipations of early dissolution; and even while he suffered himself to be amused by the hawking, dancing, and feasting so lavishly provided for his entertainment, he was never at fault, during his frequent fits of moroseness and ill-humour, for subjects of complaint. His brother, Gaston d'Anjou, whom he at once feared and hated, was a constant theme of distrust; while the Comte de Soissons, the Duc de Montmorency, and the Prince de Chalais, his sworn adherents, were at times equally obnoxious to the suspicious and gloomy young sovereign. Then he bewailed the treachery of the Queen, whom he believed, through the agency of Richelieu, to be engaged in an intrigue with Spain dangerous to his own interests; mourned over himself because he had weakly suffered his authority to be usurped by a subject, and had not moral courage to redeem the error; and in his most confidential moments even inveighed against Richelieu with the bitterness of a sullen schoolboy, declaring that it was he who had poisoned the mind of his brother, estranged him from his wife, and deprived him of the support of the Princes of the Blood; forgetting, or wilfully overlooking the fact, that a single effort on his own part must have sufficed for his emancipation from this rule of iron.

Marie de Medicis

On the departure of the Court for Fontainebleau, the Cardinal, according to his usual custom, had excused himself on the plea of ill-health from following the King; while Gaston d'Anjou, who, despite the concession that he had made, still deeply resented the affront to which he had been subjected by the arrest of his favourite, had remained in Paris. Richelieu, was, however, far from inactive in his retreat; but, while he was occupied in further schemes of self-aggrandizement, the partisans of the Prince were equally busy in devising the means of ridding themselves of a thrall so obnoxious to their pride; and after mooting several measures which were successively abandoned from their apparent impracticability, it was at length decided that, under the pretext of a hunting-party, nine of the conspirators should proceed to Fleury, and there assassinate their common enemy. Of this number was the unfortunate Chalais; who, however, before the execution of the project, confided it to a friend, by whom he was warned against any participation in so dangerous an attempt, and advised immediately to apprise the Cardinal of his danger. As the young Prince hesitated to follow this counsel, the Commandeur de Valence, who was anxious to save him from, as he believed, inevitable destruction, assured him that should he fail to communicate the conspiracy to the minister, he would himself instantly reveal it; upon which Chalais, intimidated by the threat, consented to accompany him to Richelieu, and to confess the whole.

Having listened attentively to all the details of the plot, the Cardinal courteously thanked his informants, and requested them to proceed to Fontainebleau, and to repeat what they had told him to the King. He was obeyed; and an hour before midnight Louis despatched a body of troops to Fleury, with instructions to obey the orders of the minister whatever might be their nature; while Marie de Medicis at the same time commanded the officers of her household and a number of the nobility to accompany the royal guards.

As Chalais had asserted, at three o'clock on the following morning the clerks of the kitchen to the Duc d'Anjou arrived at Fleury, and immediately commenced their preparations for the dinner of the Prince; upon which Richelieu caused them to be informed that he should leave the house at the entire disposal of Monsieur; and, escorted by the armed party that had been sent for his protection, he set out at once for Fontainebleau, where he had no sooner arrived than he went without the delay of a moment to the apartment of the King's brother. Gaston was in the act of leaving his bed, and was evidently alarmed by the sudden appearance of so unexpected a visitor; but the Cardinal, affecting not to perceive his embarrassment, merely reproached him in the most courtly terms for the precaution which he had taken, assuring him that he should have felt honoured had he relied upon his hospitality; but adding that, since his Highness had shown himself desirous of avoiding all restraint, he was happy to be at least enabled to offer him the use of his residence. The Prince, taken by surprise, and utterly disconcerted at the failure of so well organized a plot, could only stammer out his acknowledgments; and the Cardinal had no sooner heard them to an end than he requested admission to the King, where, having briefly expatiated upon his escape, he requested permission with ably-acted earnestness to retire from the Court.

As we have shown, Louis was by no means slow in deprecating the self-constituted authority of Richelieu; but he was nevertheless so well aware of his own incapacity, that the idea of being thus abandoned by a minister whose grasp of intellect and subtle policy had complicated the affairs of government until he was compelled to admit his own utter powerlessness to disentangle the involved and intricate mesh, terrified him beyond expression; nor was Marie de Medicis, whom he hastened to summon on perceiving the apparently resolute position assumed by Richelieu, less alarmed than himself.

Had the scene been enacted by three individuals of mean station, it would have been merely a painful and a degrading one, for each was alike deceiving and deceived; but as they stood there, a crowned King, a Princess born "under the purple," and a powerful minister, it presented another and a more extraordinary aspect. Stolid and resolute as were alike the mother and the son, they were totally unable to cope with the superior talent and astuteness of the man whom they had themselves raised to power; and before the termination of the interview Richelieu had convinced both that his counsels and services were essential to their own safety.

This point conceded, the wily Cardinal was enabled to make his own terms. He received the most solemn assurances of support, not only against the brother of the sovereign, but also against the Princes of the Blood and all the great nobles; while a promise was moreover made, and ratified, that he should have immediate information of every attempt to injure him in the estimation of the King; and, finally, he was offered a bodyguard, over which he was to possess the most absolute control.

This exhibition of royal weakness strengthened the hands of the haughty minister, who thus became regal in all save name and blood; and encouraged him to pursue his system of dissimulation. As mother and son vied with each other in opening before him the most brilliant perspective ever conceded to a subject, he feigned a reluctance and a humility which only tended to render their entreaties the more earnest and the more pressing; until at length, although with apparent unwillingness, he was prevailed upon to retain his post, and to crush his enemies by the exhibition of a splendour and authority hitherto without parallel in the annals of ministerial life.

It was not to be anticipated that under such circumstances as these the imprudent Chalais could retain one chance of escape. Aware of his favour with the King, his fall at once relieved Richelieu of a rival, and taught the weak and capricious monarch to quail before the power of the man whom he had thus invested with almost unlimited authority; and the natural result ensued. Unwilling to admit that he sought to revenge an attempt against his own person, the Cardinal caused the unfortunate young noble to be accused of a conspiracy against the life of the King himself, and a design to effect a marriage between Anne of Austria and the Duc d'Anjou. Judges were suborned; a court was assembled; the gay and gallant Chalais, whose whole existence had hitherto been one round of pleasure and splendour, and who was, as we have fully shown, too timid and too inexperienced to enact, even with the faintest chance of success, the character of a conspirator, was put upon his trial for treason, and condemned to die upon the scaffold; nor did the efforts of his numerous friends avail to avert his fate.

Louis forgot his former affection for his brilliant favourite in his fear of the minister who sought his destruction; while the heartless and ungrateful Gaston, wilfully overlooking the fact that it was in his service that the miserable young man had become compromised, actually appeared as one of his accusers; his relatives were forbidden to intercede in his behalf; and finally, when some zealous friends succeeded in hiding away not only the royal executioner, but also the city functionary, in the hope of delaying his execution, the emissaries of the Cardinal secured the services of a condemned felon, who, on a promise of unconditional pardon, consented to fill the office of headsman; and who, between his inexperience and his horror at his unwonted task, performed his hideous functions so imperfectly that it was only on the thirty-fourth stroke that the head of the martyred young man was severed from his body.

During the progress of this iniquitous trial (which took place in the city of Nantes, whither Louis had proceeded to convoke the States of that province) both Marie de Medicis and Richelieu were assiduously labouring to accomplish the marriage of Gaston with Mademoiselle de Montpensier; nor does there remain the slightest doubt that it was to the splendid promises held out by his mother and her minister on this occasion, that the cowardly and treacherous conduct of the Prince towards his unfortunate adherent must be ascribed. A brilliant appanage was allotted to him; he was to assume the title of Duc d'Orléans; to occupy a post in the Government; and to enjoy a revenue of a million of francs.

Prospects far less flattering than these would have sufficed to purchase Gaston, whose besetting sin throughout his whole life was the most disgusting and inordinate selfishness; but when his consent had been obtained, a new difficulty supervened on the part of the King, whose distrustful character would not permit him to perceive the eagerness with which the Cardinal urged forward the alliance without misgivings which were fostered by his immediate friends. Richelieu, however, soon succeeded by his representations in convincing the suspicious monarch of the policy of thus compelling his brother to a thorough subjection to his own authority, which could not have been enforced had Monsieur allied himself to a Princess

Marie de Medicis

of Austria or Spain; an argument which was instantly appreciated, and a royal command was accordingly despatched to the elected bride to join the Court at Nantes, under the escort of the Duc de Bellegarde, the Maréchal de Bassompierre, and the Marquis d'Effiat.

In accordance with this invitation, Mademoiselle de Montpensier arrived at Nantes on the 1st of August; and on the 5th of the same month, while the wretched and deserted Chalais was exposed to the most frightful torture, the marriage took place. "There was little pomp or display," says Mézeray, "either at the betrothal or at the nuptial ceremony." *Feux de joie* and salvos of artillery alone announced its completion. The mass was, however, performed by Richelieu himself; and so thoroughly had he succeeded in convincing Louis of the expediency of the measure, that the delight of the young King was infinitely more conspicuous than that of the bridegroom. The satisfaction of Marie de Medicis, although sufficiently evident, was calm and dignified; but the King embraced the bride on three several occasions; and no one could have imagined from his deportment that he had for a single instant opposed a marriage which now appeared to have fulfilled his most sanguine wishes.

The reign of blood had nevertheless commenced. The head of Chalais fell on the 19th of August; and on the 2nd of September the Maréchal d'Ornano expired in his prison; a fate which was shared on the 28th of February 1629 by the Grand Prieur de Vendôme, both of these deaths being attributed to poison. Be the fact as it may, thus much is at least, certain, that the Cardinal, not daring to drag two legitimated Princes of the Blood to the scaffold, had gradually rendered their captivity more and more rigorous, as if to prove to the nation over which he had stretched his iron arm that no rank, however elevated, and no name, however ancient, could protect its possessor.

Having accomplished the marriage of the Duc d'Orléans, Richelieu and the Queen-mother next laboured to widen the breach between Louis XIII and his wife; for which purpose they represented that she had taken an active part in the lately detected conspiracy, and was secretly intriguing with Spain against the interests of her royal husband; an attempt in which she had been aided and abetted by her confidential friends.

The first consequence of this accusation was the arrest of Madame de Chevreuse, who, after having undergone a formal examination, was exiled from the Court; and this order had no sooner been obeyed than Anne of Austria was summoned to the presence of the King, whom she found seated between the Queen-mother and the Cardinal, and there solemnly accused, on the pretended revelations of Chalais while under torture, of having intrigued to procure the death of her husband, and her own marriage with his brother.

To this accusation the Spanish Princess disdainfully replied that "she should have gained so little by the exchange, that the absurdity of the charge must suffice for its refutation;" but her haughty and indignant retort produced no effect upon her judges. She was commanded thenceforward to reside exclusively at the palaces of the Louvre and St. Germain; without the privilege of receiving a single guest, not even excepting the ambassador of the King her brother, or the Spanish attendants who had accompanied her to France, and, moreover, forbidden all correspondence beyond the limits of the kingdom; while, at the same time, as if to complete her humiliation, she was strictly prohibited from receiving any male visitor in her apartments during the absence of the King.

Although, as we have stated, Richelieu was present at this degrading scene, he nevertheless professed to be perfectly independent of what he thought proper to designate as mere family dissensions, entirely beyond the functions of a minister; and thus the whole odium of the proceedings fell upon Louis XIII and the Queen-mother, while the Cardinal himself remained ostensibly absorbed in public business. Neither the great nobles nor the people were, however, deceived by this assumed disinterestedness; but all felt alike convinced that the total alienation which supervened between the royal couple was simply a part of the system by which Richelieu sought one day exclusively to govern France.

Henriette Marie had left Paris after her betrothal, accompanied by a numerous retinue of French attendants of both sexes, and by several of the priests of the Oratory, attired in their

black gowns; and on her arrival at Whitehall she had been permitted to have the services of her religion performed in one of the apartments of that palace; but this concession did not, unhappily, serve to satisfy the exactions of the girl-Queen, who, even during the first days of her residence in England, suffered herself to betray all her antipathy to the heretical country which was hereafter to be her home. At the public ceremonial of her marriage, when the venerable Abbey of Westminster was crowded with princes, bishops, and barons, she refused to receive her crown from the hands of a Protestant prelate, or to bend her knee before the Lord Primate; while at the same time, relying on her youth and the effect which her extreme beauty had produced upon her royal consort, she endeavoured to obtain an ascendancy over him that excited the jealousy and distrust of the English Court; a feeling which was not lessened by the fact that she succeeded in extorting from the King his sanction to erect a chapel for the more solemn observance of the rites and ceremonies of her faith. Acting under the influence of Richelieu, who at frequent intervals despatched missionaries to London upon futile errands, with instructions that she should retain them about her person, she moreover soon taught herself to believe that she had a great mission to accomplish; and under this impression she carried her imprudence so far as to authorize a public procession through the streets of London, in which she herself appeared mounted upon a mule, surrounded and followed by all her household, and a crowd of Roman Catholic ecclesiastics.

So wanton a disregard for the feelings of her new subjects excited the indignation of the Parliament, and made them distrustful of the Duke of Buckingham, through whose agency and influence the alliance with France had been formed; while it laid the foundation of those accusations against him which were so warmly refuted by the sovereign. The Parliament was dissolved, and the necessity of raising subsidies engaged the minister in measures which became hostile to the French interests. An anti-Catholic reaction was declaring itself; and Buckingham at once felt that he could not more effectually satisfy both the Parliament and the people than by suppressing without delay that spirit of religious defiance which was arising in the very palace of the King.

With this conviction he accordingly declared to the young Queen, a few days after the public pilgrimage which she had made, that she must immediately send back to France, not only the members of her household, but also all the ecclesiastics who had induced her so ostentatiously to insult the faith of the nation by which she had been received and welcomed with a warmth that merited more consideration on her part. Indignant at so peremptory an order, Henriette exhibited an amount of violence which in a mere girl failed to produce the effect that she had anticipated. The Duke continued calm and resolute, while she, on her side, vehemently refused to comply with his directions; and after having reproached the sovereign in the most bitter terms for what she designated both as a breach of faith and as an act of tyranny, she summoned the Bishop of Mende, the French Ambassador, to the palace, and instructed him to apprise the King her brother of the insult with which she was threatened.

The prelate approved her resistance: and loudly declared that neither the individuals composing her household, nor the ecclesiastics who were attached to it, should leave England without an order to that effect from their own sovereign; and he forthwith despatched couriers to Paris, to inform the Court of the position of the English Queen; to which Louis replied by insisting that the persons who had accompanied his royal sister to her new kingdom should be permitted to remain about her; in default of which concession he should thenceforward hold himself aggrieved, and become the irreconcilable enemy of the British Government.

The Duke of Buckingham nevertheless persisted in his resolution, and the foreign attendants of Henriette were compelled to return to France, to the excessive indignation of Marie de Medicis, who refused to see in the extreme munificence of Charles towards the exiled household any extenuation of the affront which had been put upon her favourite daughter; while Henriette on her part, far from endeavouring to adapt herself to circumstances, and to yield with dignified submission to a privation which it was no longer in her power to avert, gave way to all the petulance of a spoiled girl, and overwhelmed the minister with reproaches and even threats. So unmeasured, indeed, were her invectives that at length, when she had on one occasion exhausted alike the temper and the endurance of Buckingham, he so far forgot

the respect due to her rank and to her sex, as well as his own chivalry as a noble, as to retort with an impetuosity little inferior to her own that she had better not proceed too far, "for that in England queens had sometimes lost their heads;" a display of insolence which Henriette never forgot nor forgave, and which was immediately communicated to the French Court.

Time, far from lessening the animosity of the young Queen towards the favourite, or the consequent schism between herself and the King, appeared rather to increase both; and Richelieu, after having for a while contemplated a war with England conjointly with Philip of Spain, ultimately abandoned the idea as dangerous and doubtful to the interests of France. M. de Blainville and the Marquis d'Effiat were despatched to the Court of London with orders to attempt a compromise; but both signally failed; and Louis had no sooner returned to Paris than the Cardinal, who was aware that Buckingham was as anxious to commence hostilities as he was himself desirous to maintain peace, induced the King to despatch Bassompierre as ambassador-extraordinary to the Court of Whitehall with stringent instructions to effect, if possible, a good understanding between the two countries.

On his arrival in England, however, Bassompierre discovered to his great consternation that the coldness existing between the English monarch and his Queen was even more serious than had been apprehended at his own Court; and he was met on the very threshold of his task by a declaration from the Duke of Buckingham that Charles would only consent to give him a public audience on condition that he should not touch upon the subject which had brought him to England; as he felt that it was one which must necessarily make him lose his temper, which would be undignified in the presence of his Court and with the Queen at his side; who, angered by the dismissal of her French retinue, would not, as he felt convinced, fail in her turn to be guilty of some extravagance, but would probably shed tears before everybody; and that consequently, without this pledge on the part of the French envoy, he would accord him merely a private interview. Bassompierre hesitated for a time before he could bring himself to consent to such a compromise of his own dignity and that of his royal master; but, aware of the importance attached by Richelieu to the result of his mission, he at length declared that after having delivered the letters with which he was entrusted, he would leave it to his Majesty to determine the length of the audience, which might be easily abridged by a declaration that the subjects upon which they had to treat would require more time than his Majesty could then command, and that he would consequently appoint an earlier hour for seeing him in private.

This delicate affair having been thus satisfactorily arranged, the public audience took place at Hampton Court. Bassompierre was introduced into the royal presence by the Duke of Buckingham and the Earl of Carlisle, and on entering he found the King and Queen seated upon a raised dais, surrounded by a brilliant Court, but both sovereigns rose as he bent before them. Having presented his letters, together with the royal message, Charles, as had been previously arranged, pleaded want of leisure to enter upon public business; upon which the envoy proceeded to pay his respects to the Queen, who briefly replied that his Majesty having given her his permission to return to the capital, she should be able when there to discourse with him at greater length. Bassompierre then withdrew, and was escorted by all the great nobles to his carriage.

This commencement, as will be at once apparent, was sufficiently unpromising, but the French envoy was in a position of such responsibility that he dared not suffer himself to be discouraged; nor had he been long in England ere he became painfully convinced that the petulance and want of self-control in which Henriette wilfully indulged, daily tended to widen a schism that was already too threatening. Nevertheless, Bassompierre remained firmly at his post. Matrimonial feuds in high places were no novelty to the brilliant courtier of Henri IV and the confidant of Marie de Medicis; and he at once felt that he must enact at St. James's the same rôle as Sully had formerly represented at Fontainebleau and the Louvre; nor did his experience of the past fail, moreover, to convince him of the policy of endeavouring in the first instance to effect a reconciliation between the Queen and the favourite. This was, however, no easy task; but at length the zealous Marquis succeeded in the attempt, as he informs us in his usual naïve style.

Marie de Medicis

"On Sunday the 25th," he says, "I went to fetch the Duke and took him with me to the Queen, where he made his peace with her, which I had accomplished after a thousand difficulties. The King afterwards came in, who also made it up with her and caressed her a great deal, thanking me for having restored a good understanding between the Duke and his wife; and then he took me to his chamber, where he showed me his jewels, which are very fine."

On the morrow, however, when Bassompierre went to pay his respects to Henriette at Somerset House, he discovered that he had personally lost considerably in her favour, as she vehemently complained that he sacrificed her dignity as a Princess of France to expediency; and had espoused the cause of her adversary instead of upholding her own. To these reproaches the French envoy replied by explaining the difficulty of his position, and the earnest desire of his sovereign to maintain peace; but this reasoning did not avail to satisfy the wounded vanity of the girl-Queen; who finally, by her violence, compelled Bassompierre to remind her that her headstrong egotism was endangering the interests of her royal brother. Incensed at this accusation, Henriette at once wept and recriminated; and finally the French courtier retired from her presence, and hastened to forward a courier to Paris to solicit the interference of the King and his minister, and to request further instructions for his guidance.

A few days subsequently, after he had received urgent letters from the King, by which he was commanded to avoid in every emergency a rupture between the two countries, Bassompierre again waited upon the Queen, and explained to her the stringent orders of her royal brother; but Henriette persisted in declaring that her actual position was not appreciated at the French Court; and while she was maintaining this argument, despite all the asseverations of the bewildered envoy, the arrival of the King was announced. Charles had no sooner entered the apartment than a violent quarrel arose, which threatened such serious consequences that Bassompierre interposed, assuring the imprudent Princess that should she not control her temper, and acknowledge her error, he would on the following day take leave of his Britannic Majesty, and on his return to Paris explain to the sovereign and the Queen-mother that he had been compelled to abandon his mission entirely through her obstinate and uncompromising violence.

As this threat produced an evident effect upon Henriette, the King had no sooner retired than the Maréchal, with admirable tact and temper, represented to the young Queen that at the age of sixteen she was incompetent to appreciate the measures of her royal consort; while by her intemperate language and strong prejudices she was seriously injuring her own cause. Henriette, during her paroxysms of petulance, was deaf to all his remonstrances; but on this occasion she listened with greater patience, and even admitted that she had gone too far; a concession which once more restored the hopes of Bassompierre.

Meanwhile he continued to receive constant letters of encouragement, both from Louis XIII and Richelieu, urging him to persevere until he should have succeeded in effecting a perfect reconciliation not only between the King and Queen, but also between the Queen and the Duke of Buckingham; and assuring him of their perfect satisfaction with the measures which he had already adopted. Marie de Medicis was, however, less placable; and much as she deprecated the idea of hostilities with England, she nevertheless openly applauded the resistance of her daughter to what she designated as the tyrannical presumption of Buckingham, and the blind weakness of Charles, who sacrificed the domestic happiness of a young and lovely bride to the arrogant intrigues of an overbearing favourite. The English Duke himself was peculiarly obnoxious to the Queen-mother, who could not forgive his insolent admiration of Anne of Austria, and the ostentatious manner in which he had made the wife of her son a subject of Court scandal; while, at the same time, she deeply resented the fact that Henriette had not even been permitted to retain her confessor, but was compelled to accept one chosen for her by the minister.

While, therefore, Bassompierre constantly received directions from both the King and the Cardinal to ensure peace at any price, and to prevail upon the young Queen to make the concessions necessary for producing this result, Marie de Medicis as continually wrote to

entreat of the Maréchal to uphold the interests of the French Princess, and to assure her of her perfect satisfaction at the spirit which she had evinced; though it is doubtful if, when these messages were entrusted to the royal envoy, they were ever communicated to the excitable Henriette.

Finally, to his great satisfaction, Bassompierre succeeded in carrying out the wishes of his sovereign; and he at length took his leave of the English Court, laden with rich presents, after having received the warm acknowledgments of all parties for the patience and impartiality with which he had acted throughout; and the gratification of feeling that a better, and as he hoped a lasting, understanding existed between the royal pair. The household of Henriette had been re-organized, and although upon a more reduced scale than that by which she had been accompanied from France, it was still sufficiently numerous to satisfy even the exigencies of royalty; and thus, estimated by its consequences, this embassy was probably the most brilliant event of Bassompierre's whole career; as [pg 163] from the period of his residence at the Court of England, the young Queen possessed both the heart and the confidence of her royal husband, whose affection for his beautiful and accomplished consort thenceforward endured to the last day of his existence.

In the month of November France lost another of her marshals in the person of M. de Lesdiguières, who had passed his eightieth year; while the subsequently celebrated court *roué*, the Duc de Saint-Simon, became the accredited favourite of the changeful and capricious Louis, without, however, attaining any influence in the government, which had at this period become entirely concentrated in the hands of Richelieu and the Queen-mother.

The pregnancy of the Duchesse d'Orléans, which was formally announced at the close of this year, was a source of great exultation to her husband, who received with undisguised delight the congratulations which were poured out upon him from every side; nor did he seek to disguise his conviction that, should the Queen continue childless, there was nothing to which he might see fit to aspire, which, with the assistance of the Guises and their faction, he would find it impossible to attain. A general hatred of Richelieu was the ruling sentiment of the great nobles, who were anxious to effect his overthrow, but the Cardinal was too prudent to be taken at a disadvantage; and he at once felt that in addition to the blow which he had aimed at the power of the barons by depriving them of their fortified places, he still possessed the means of maintaining his position, and even of increasing his authority, by labouring to accomplish the destruction of the Protestants; a policy which was eagerly adopted by Louis, whose morbid superstition, coupled with his love of war for its own sake, led him to believe that the work of slaughter which must necessarily supervene could not but prove agreeable to Heaven; counselled as it was, moreover, by a dignitary of the Church.

While Richelieu was thus seeking to involve the nation in a renewal of that intestine warfare by which it had already been so fearfully visited, simply to further his own ambitious views, the princes and nobles whom he had irritated into a thirst for vengeance were no less eager to attain the same object in order to effect his ruin; and for this purpose they endeavoured to secure the co-operation of Gaston, deluding themselves with the belief that the heir-apparent to the throne, who had encouraged their disaffection, and for the maintenance of whose interests Ornano and Chalais had already suffered, would not refuse to them at so critical a moment the support of his name, his wealth, and his influence. But these sanguine malcontents had not yet learned to appreciate the egotistical and ungrateful nature of the young Prince, who kept no mental record of services conferred, and retained no feeling of compunction for sufferings endured in his cause; but who ever sought to avail himself of both, while he continued utterly unable to appreciate either.

The appeal was consequently made in vain. Enriched by the careful policy of the Cardinal, Gaston sought only to profit by his suddenly-attained wealth; and despite the entreaties of his wife, whose youth, beauty, and accomplishments might well, for a time at least, have commanded his respect, he plunged into the most puerile and degrading pleasures, and abandoned himself to a life of alternate indolence and dissipation. The immense fortune of the Duchess, which had moreover been greatly increased by the accumulated interest of a long

minority, was wasted in the most shameful orgies, amid dissolute and unseemly associates; and even while he was awaiting with undisguised anxiety the birth of a son who, as he fondly trusted, would one day fill the throne of France, no sentiment of forbearance towards the expectant mother could induce him to sacrifice his own selfish passions.

On the 29th of May the desired event took place, but to the extreme mortification of the Duc d'Orléans it was announced that the Duchess had given birth to a daughter--the Princess who subsequently became famous during the reign of Louis XIV under the title of La Grande Mademoiselle. Nor was this the greatest trial which Gaston was destined to endure, as four days subsequently the unfortunate Duchess breathed her last, to the regret of the whole Court, to whom she had become endeared by her gentleness and urbanity; and to the deep grief of the Queen-mother, who saw in this deplorable event the overthrow of her most cherished prospects. Louis XIII was, however, far from participating in the general feeling of sorrow, nor did he seek to conceal his exultation.

"You weep, Madame," he said coldly to Marie de Medicis, whom he found absorbed in grief; "leave tears to your son, who will soon be enabled to drown them in dissipation. You will do well also not to expose him for some time to come to the chance of a second disappointment of the same nature; he is scarcely fitted for a married life, and has signally failed in his first attempt at domestic happiness."

The Queen-mother offered no reply to this injunction; but while the King and Richelieu were absorbed by the invasion of Buckingham, and the persecution of the Protestants, she commenced a negotiation with the Grand Duke of Florence which had for its object an alliance between the widowed Gaston and one of the daughters of that Prince.

Buckingham had been repulsed by the French troops before the Island of Rhé, but had ultimately effected a landing; and on the 28th of June the King left Paris in order to join the army at La Rochelle, and to prevent a junction between the English general and the reformed party. He had already been threatened by symptoms of fever, but his anxiety to oppose the enemy was so great that he disregarded the representations and entreaties of those about him, and proceeded to Beaulieu, where he slept. Shortly after his arrival in that town his malady increased, but he still refused to follow the advice of his physicians, and on the morrow advanced as far as Villeroy, where, however, he was compelled to remain, being utterly incapable of further exertion.

This intelligence no sooner reached the Queen-mother than she hastened to rejoin the royal invalid; an example which was followed a few days subsequently by Anne of Austria, the Keeper of the Seals, and the whole Court. The indisposition of the King, which for some days threatened the most fatal results, was, however, ultimately conquered by his physicians; and on the 15th of August the royal patient was declared convalescent.

During the illness of the sovereign the entire control of public affairs had, by his command, been formally confided to Marie de Medicis and the Cardinal; and he was no sooner in a state to resume his journey than he hastened to La Rochelle, which was blockaded by his forces under the orders of Monsieur; while the troops destined to succour the Island of Rhé were placed under the command of the Maréchal de Schomberg, and Louis de Marillac, the brother of Michel de Marillac, the Keeper of the Seals (who, through the influence of Richelieu, had succeeded M. d'Aligre in that dignity), by whom Buckingham was compelled, after a siege of three months, to evacuate the island, and to retreat in confusion, and not without severe loss, to the vessels which awaited him.

This victory created immense exultation in France; the Duc de Saint-Simon was instructed to convey the colours and cannon taken from the English with great pomp to the capital, and public rejoicings testified the delight with which the citizens of Paris received the welcome trophies. One individual alone took no share in the general triumph, and that one was the Duc d'Orléans, who had been deprived of his command by the King, in order that it might be conferred upon the Cardinal de Richelieu, and who had so deeply resented the

indignity that he instantly retired from the army and returned to Paris, leaving Louis and his minister to continue the siege.

The vigorous defence of the Rochelais, however, and the extreme severity of the winter, did not fail to produce their effect upon the King, who became weary of a campaign which exacted more mental energy than physical courage, and who was anxious to return to the capital. He declared his constitution to be undermined, and asserted that he should die if he remained in the camp; but as he feared that his reputation might suffer should he appear to abandon the army at his own instigation, he was desirous that Richelieu should suggest his departure, and thus afford him an opportunity of seeming resistance; while the minister, who was unsuspecting of the truth, did not hesitate to assure him that his absence at so important a juncture might prove fatal to his interests, and could not fail to tarnish his fame as a general. Incensed by this opposition to his secret wishes, Louis retorted so bitterly that the Cardinal at once perceived his error, and hastened to repair it; nor did he do this an hour too soon, as the exasperation of the King was so great that he even talked of dispensing with his services; but the able policy of Richelieu once more saved him, and he so skilfully convinced the King only a few hours subsequently that his presence was necessary in the capital in order to counteract the intrigues of the Queen-mother and the Duc d'Orléans, that the ruffled pride of the weak monarch was soothed, while a plausible pretext for his departure was supplied of which he hastened to avail himself; and having taken leave of the troops, he at length set forth for Paris on the 10th of February.

Louis was rendered, moreover, the more earnest to regain the capital by the constant information which he received of the gaities in which the two Queens and Monsieur were constantly indulging while he was devoured by melancholy under the walls of the beleaguered city; nor had he been indifferent to a rumour which had reached him of the marked inclination evinced by the Prince his brother for the beautiful and accomplished Marie de Gonzaga, the daughter of the Duc de Nevers, who shortly afterwards became Duke of Mantua.

Coupled with his disinclination to see Gaston again placed in a position to give an heir to the French throne, Louis had sufficiently profited by the lessons of Richelieu to feel the whole extent of the danger by which he would be threatened should Gaston succeed in acquiring allies beyond the frontiers; and he accordingly hastened to express to the Queen-mother his displeasure at the intelligence of this new passion, with a coldness which immediately tended to convince her that a great change had taken place in his feelings towards herself. Alarmed by this conviction, and anxious to discover the cause of so marked a falling-off in his confidence, Marie de Medicis exerted all her energies to ascertain through whose agency her influence had thus been undermined; nor was it long ere she became assured that Richelieu had availed himself of her absence to renew all the old misgivings of the King, and by rendering her motives and affection questionable, to make himself entirely master of the mind of the jealous and suspicious monarch.

Once satisfied of this fact, the Queen-mother resolved to profit in her turn by the absence of the Cardinal, whose ingratitude was so flagrant as thenceforward to sever every link between them; and the opportunity afforded by the open demonstrations of affection which Gaston lavished upon the Mantuan Princess was consequently eagerly seized upon in order to counteract the evil offices of the minister. Marie had watched the growing passion of the Duc d'Orléans with an annoyance as great as that of the King himself, for she had never forgotten the animosity displayed towards her by the Duc de Nevers; and she was, moreover, anxious, as we have already stated, to effect an alliance between her second son and a Princess of Tuscany; but aware of the capricious and unstable character of Gaston, she had hitherto confined herself to expostulations, which had produced little effect. Now, however, she resolved to derive the desired benefit from a circumstance which she had previously deprecated, and, summoning Monsieur, she readily persuaded him to affect the most violent indignation at her opposition, while she, on her side, would evince an equal degree of displeasure against himself. To this arrangement Gaston readily consented, as he delighted in intrigue, and was aware that by pursuing Marie de Gonzaga with his addresses he should alarm Richelieu as well as annoy the King. An open rupture accordingly appeared to take place between the mother and son; and

Marie de Medicis

while the Duke continued to visit the young Princess, and to enact the impassioned lover, Marie de Medicis expressed her indignation in the most unmeasured terms, and threatened him with her unrelenting anger should he persist in his suit. So well indeed did she perform her self-imposed part, that not only Louis himself, but the whole Court were thoroughly deceived by the stratagem; and meanwhile the unsuspecting Princess became the victim of the dissembling Queen and her capricious and heartless suitor.

As the Cardinal had laboured to impress upon the King that Marie de Medicis was anxious to effect the second marriage of her younger son in order to secure the succession to his children, Louis had arrived in the capital fully possessed by this idea; and his surprise was consequently great when he perceived that the Queen-mother resented the projected alliance as an insult to her own dignity; nor did he hesitate to express his satisfaction at the misunderstanding which it had caused between them. His moody brow relaxed; his suspicions were for awhile laid at rest; and after having devoted some time to the pleasures of the chase, he once more left the capital and returned to La Rochelle.

On the 16th of October the city, exhausted by famine, and decimated by the artillery of the royal army, was compelled to capitulate; and on the 30th of the same month it was garrisoned by its conquerors. So soon as a fitting residence could be prepared for him, Richelieu took up his abode within its walls; and on the 1st of November the King made a triumphal entry into the late stronghold of Protestantism in France, whose subjugation had cost the lives of upwards of forty thousand of his subjects.

La Rochelle was no sooner in possession of the royal forces than the Cardinal determined to protect Mantua against the aggression of Austria, a measure which he proposed in the Council, where it met with considerable opposition. Richelieu, however, persisted in his purpose, alleging that he had pledged himself to the Italian states to come to their support immediately that the campaign against the reformed party should have been successfully concluded; and he even urged the King to head the army in person. Louis, who was naturally brave, and who, moreover, prided himself upon his prowess in the field, and loved to contrast it with the pusillanimity of Philip IV of Spain, whose person was scarcely known to his troops, listened eagerly to the suggestion; but it was peculiarly obnoxious to Marie de Medicis, who did not fail to declare that the sole object of the Cardinal was to separate her from the King, and thus to weaken her influence. She consequently opposed the project with all the energy of her naturally impetuous character, asserting that her tenderness as a mother would not permit of her consenting thus constantly to see her son exposed to the vicissitudes of war, or his feeble health overtaxed by exertions and fatigues to which he was unequal.

The Cardinal listened to her representations with an impassibility as respectful as it was unbending. He had no faith in the reasons which she advanced, although he verbally accepted them, for the time had not yet arrived when he could openly brave her power; but it was at this period that the moral struggle commenced between them of which the unfortunate Queen was destined to become the victim.

The exultation of Louis XIII at the fall of La Rochelle was considerably lessened by a violent attack of gout which immediately succeeded, and by which he was detained a prisoner within its gates until the 19th of November, when he departed for Limours, where he was met by the two Queens and Monsieur. Thence the Court proceeded to St. Germain in order to enjoy the diversion of hunting, and subsequently to Versailles, to await the completion of the ceremonial of the solemn and triumphal entry of the King into his capital, which took place on the 23rd of December with great pomp and magnificence. All the approaches to the city were crowded by dense masses of the population of the adjacent country, while the streets were thronged with the citizens who rent the air with acclamations. Triumphal arches were erected at intervals along the road by which the royal procession was to travel; the balconies of the houses were draped with silks and tapestry; and nearly eight thousand men, splendidly armed and clothed, awaited the King a league beyond the gates in order to escort him to his capital. The Parliament, and all the municipal bodies, harangued him as he reached the walls, and exhausted themselves in the most fulsome and servile flatteries; and finally, he received the

Marie de Medicis

congratulations of all the foreign ambassadors, as well as the compliments of the Papal Nuncio, by whom he was exhorted in the name of the Pope to persist in the great work which he had so gloriously commenced, until he had accomplished the entire extermination of the Protestants of France

CHAPTER VI

1629

La Rochelle had no sooner surrendered than, as already stated, Richelieu determined to make an attempt to undermine the power of Austria, greatly to the dissatisfaction of the Cardinal de Bérulle, Marillac the Keeper of the Seals, and all the other members of the secret council of Marie de Medicis. The position of Philip was at that moment a formidable one; Germany, which was almost entirely subjugated, was prepared to supply him with an immense number of troops, while the treasures which had poured in upon him from the New World made him equally independent as regarded the outlay required to support his armies. Moreover, religious prejudices strengthened their antagonism to the meditated war. The Emperor was anxious to exterminate the Protestants, and the Council consequently looked upon all opposition to that potentate as a crime against their own faith. M. de Bérulle was eloquent and enthusiastic; Marillac aspired to build up his fortunes on the ruins of those of Richelieu, and to succeed him in his office as prime minister; and Marie de Medicis clung with tenacious anxiety both to the Emperor of Germany and the King of Spain, who had alike approved of her determination to effect the overthrow of the man whom she had herself raised to power, and by whom she had been so ungratefully betrayed.

Marie and her counsellors were, however, by no means a match for the astute and far-reaching Richelieu, who had, by encouraging the belligerent tastes of the King, and still more by so complicating the affairs of the kingdom as to render them beyond the comprehension and grasp of the weak monarch, and to reduce him to utter helplessness, succeeded in making himself altogether independent of his benefactress, none of whose counsellors were capable of competing for an hour with his superior energy and talent. Aware of his advantage, Richelieu consequently despised the opposition by which he was harassed and impeded in his projects; and while he affected to pay the greatest deference to the representations of the Queen-mother, he persisted in his enterprises with an imperturbability which ensured their success.

One circumstance, however, tended greatly to embarrass the Cardinal-minister. Anne of Austria, indignant at the protracted neglect of the King, and the utter insignificance to which she was consequently condemned, openly espoused the party of the Queen-mother, and, in her turn, loudly complained that the King should be induced by the egotism of the Cardinal to expose his health to the chances of warfare and the dangers of unwholesome climates; declaring that Richelieu, not satisfied with retaining his royal master for several months amid the marshes of Aunis, was now seeking to destroy him by exposure to the snows and storms of the Alps during the depth of winter.

Irritated by these open accusations, and still more alarmed lest the egotism of the monarch should lead him to adopt the same opinion, the Cardinal urged the necessity of placing at the head of so considerable an army as that which was about to march into Italy, a general whose name alone must suffice to awe the enemy against whom it was directed; but even this subterfuge, welcome as it was to the vanity of Louis, did not produce the effect which he had hoped; for the Queen-mother, profiting by a private interview with the King, earnestly represented that a more favourable opportunity than the present could never again present itself to effect a separation between Monsieur and Marie de Gonzaga.

"You know, Sire," she said in conclusion, "how tenaciously I have striven to prevent a marriage so obnoxious alike to your Majesty and to myself, and how signally I have hitherto failed. Now, however, Gaston may be induced to forego his intention, for he has assured me that should you consent to confer upon him the command of the expedition to Italy, he will resign all claim to the hand of Marie de Gonzaga, and even permit her to return to Mantua. It

remains, therefore, with yourself to terminate an affair which has already created much annoyance both to your Majesty and to the Queen, who is equally desirous that this ill-judged and premature alliance should not be suffered to take place."

The tears and entreaties of the two Queens at length produced their effect; and with some reluctance Louis consented that his brother should be appointed to the command of the army, desiring at the same time that he should receive fifty thousand crowns to defray the expenses of his equipment; and, although the spendthrift Prince lost the whole sum at the gaming-table during the course of a single evening, Richelieu did not venture upon further expostulation, the union of the two Queens, and the undisguised satisfaction of the great nobles, rendering a more sustained opposition alike doubtful and dangerous. Affecting, therefore, to withdraw from the struggle, he retired to Chaillot, while he left to his friends the task of reawakening the jealousy which Louis had long evinced of the military talents of his brother. This project could not, as Richelieu was well aware, fail to prove successful; and, accordingly, the King ere long manifested great uneasiness and irritation; refused to join in the amusements which Marie de Medicis was careful to provide for him; lost his rest; and, finally, set forth for Chaillot in order to have an interview with the minister.

When the Cardinal saw the moody King arrive, he at once felt that he had triumphed; the brow of Louis was as black as night, and he clutched the hilt of his sword with so tight a grasp that his fingers became bloodless.

"You are ill, Sire; you are suffering," said the wily churchman, with well-acted anxiety. "Can my poor services avail to restore you to peace of mind?"

"I cannot allow my brother," was the abrupt reply, "to command my army beyond the Alps. You must enable me to retract my promise."

"I know only one method of doing so," said Richelieu, after appearing to reflect, "and that is that your Majesty should repair thither in person. But should you adopt this resolution, you must carry it into effect within eight days; there is no time to be lost."

"Be it so," exclaimed Louis; "I will leave the capital and place myself at the head of my troops;" and beckoning to Bassompierre, by whom he had been accompanied, and who stood near the door of the Apartment, he added, with something approaching to a smile: "Here is a man who will willingly bear me company, and who will serve me zealously."

"Whither does your Majesty purpose to proceed?" inquired the Maréchal, as he bowed his acknowledgments.

"To Italy," said the King, "and that not later than a week hence, in order to raise the siege of Casal. Make your preparations and follow me without delay. I shall appoint you my lieutenant-general under my brother, should he consent to share in the campaign; and I shall also take the Maréchal de Créquy with me; he knows the country; and I trust that we shall cause ourselves to be talked of throughout Europe."

Thus in a single hour were all the projects of Marie de Medicis overthrown; and the King had no sooner, on his return to Paris, informed her of his change of purpose than she felt that Richelieu had at length thrown down the gauntlet, and that thenceforward there must be war between them. Nor was the Duc d'Orléans less mortified and alarmed than the Queen-mother; but neither the one nor the other ventured to expostulate; and, although with less precipitation than the King, Monsieur commenced his preparations. Louis XIII left Paris on the 4th of January; but it was not until the 29th that his brother took leave of the Court, and reluctantly proceeded to rejoin him. The Cardinal had already set forth, although the extreme severity of the weather, and the deep fall of snow by which the roads were obstructed, might have sufficed to furnish him with a pretext for delay; but it was no part of Richelieu's policy to suffer the two brothers to remain together beyond his surveillance; and accordingly, as was his usual habit on such emergencies, he threw off his indisposition, and boldly defied alike wintry weather and fatigue.

He might, however, as the event proved, have been more deliberate in his movements; for Monsieur, already annoyed by the disappointment to which he had been subjected, evinced no disposition to profit by the brief opportunity thus afforded to him, but proceeded leisurely to Dauphiny; where he had no sooner arrived than he received information that the most strenuous efforts had been made immediately after he had left Paris to hasten the departure of Marie de Gonzaga. Delighted at any pretext for abandoning the journey to which he had been compelled, he forthwith retraced his steps; but great as was the haste which he displayed to reach the capital, the first news by which he was greeted was that the Queen-mother had caused the Princess of Mantua to be imprisoned in the fortress of Vincennes.

This extraordinary intelligence was communicated to him by the Maréchal de Marillac, who had succeeded Richelieu in the confidence of Marie de Medicis; and who endeavoured to palliate the outrage by explaining the motives which induced her Majesty to take so singular a step. She had been as M. de Marillac asserted, assured that his Highness had resolved to carry off Mademoiselle de Gonzaga, and then to leave the kingdom; a determination by which she was so much alarmed that she had adopted the only measure which had appeared to her to offer a certain preventive to so dangerous and unprecedented a proceeding; but Monsieur would listen to no arguments upon the subject, and withdrew in violent displeasure to Orleans, whence he despatched one of the officers of his household to protest against the imprisonment of the Princess, and to demand not only that she should immediately be set at liberty, but also that she should not be permitted to leave the country.

The Queen-mother, who was aware that she could not justify a proceeding which violated all the rights of hospitality, and who was, moreover, alarmed lest she should incur the lasting animosity of her favourite son, and thus render herself still more helpless than she had already become through the defection of Richelieu, found herself compelled to accede to a request which had in fact assumed the character of a command; but she, nevertheless, only accorded her consent to the release of the captive on condition that Monsieur should desist, for a time at least, in pressing his marriage either with Marie de Gonzaga or any other Princess until he had received the consent of the King to that effect; and Gaston having, after some hesitation, agreed to the proposed terms, the unfortunate girl was removed from Vincennes to the Louvre, whither the Prince immediately hastened to congratulate her on her liberation, and to express to the Queen-mother his indignation at what had occurred.

Before the departure of the King for Italy he had, at the instigation of Richelieu, declared Marie de Medicis Regent of all the provinces on the west bank of the Loire; a concession to which, extraordinary as it must appear, the Cardinal had been compelled, in order to appease the Queen-mother, whose exasperation at this renewed separation from the King had exceeded any which she had previously exhibited; and who had been supported in her complaints and expostulations by Anne of Austria, with whom she had begun to make common cause. That Richelieu, however, did so with great and anxious reluctance there can be little doubt, as he was well aware that he had excited her suspicion and dislike, and that he should, moreover, leave her surrounded by individuals who would not fail to embitter her animosity against him.

Moreover, the haughty minister could not disguise from himself that he was labouring to build up his own fortunes upon the ruin of those of his benefactress--of the confiding and generous mistress to whom he was indebted for all the honours which he then enjoyed--nor could he fail to feel that reprisals on her part would be at once legitimate and justifiable; and accordingly he caused the commission of her regency to be prefaced by the most elaborate encomiums. Not content with asserting that her "able government and her wise measures had proved her to be alike the mother of the sovereign and of the state." Louis, acting under the advice of the wily minister, lavished upon her every epithet of honour and respect; apparently forgetting that he had previously exiled her from the Court, taken up arms against her, and that he even then believed her to be in secret correspondence with his enemies; while at the same period Richelieu records in his Memoirs that the Pope had declared to his nuncio, during his audience of leavetaking on his departure for the French Court: "You will see the Queen-mother. She is favourable to Spain; and her attachment to the King her son does not extend beyond her own interests. She is, moreover, one of the most obstinate persons in the world."

And yet, even while dwelling with complacency on the Papal strictures, the Cardinal did not hesitate to put into the mouth of the King the most unmeasured panegyrics of the same Princess, in order to shelter himself from her vengeance. This concession was the result of an able calculation, for Richelieu could not remain blind to his personal unpopularity; and was, moreover, conscious that both Marie de Medicis and Monsieur were beloved by the populace. It was not perhaps that either the one or the other was individually the object of popular affection, but each represented the interests of an irritated opposition; and both sought to undermine the existing Government, or rather the authority [pg 186] of Richelieu, who was rapidly absorbing all power, and striving to bend the necks of nobles, citizens, and people under his iron yoke.

The campaign having terminated favourably for the royal cause, and the taking of La Rochelle, coupled with the deliverance of Casal, having greatly increased the influence of Richelieu over the mind of the King, the former began more openly to defy the power of the Queen-mother; and anxious, if possible, to regain the favour of Gaston, he no longer scrupled to declare that she had been actuated solely by her own interests in the violent repugnance which she had evinced to the union of the Prince with Marie de Gonzaga; and to impress upon the weak monarch the danger of irritating his brother by further opposition to a union which would meet with the approval of the whole kingdom. Louis, however, as we have already shown, was himself averse to the marriage of Monsieur, who had refused to see him until he consented to his wishes; but, angered by this apparent defiance, he nevertheless bitterly reproached his mother for her harshness towards both parties, and refused to listen to her proffered justification.

Marie de Medicis at once perceived whence the factitious strength of her son was derived; and all her previous affection for the Cardinal became changed into a hatred which was destined to continue undiminished to the close of her existence.

Nor was Richelieu, on his side, less ill at ease. He was aware that his ingratitude to his benefactress was the theme of general remark and reproach; and he apprehended, should the King fall a victim to one of those attacks of indisposition to which he was continually subject--an event which had been foretold by the astrologers, and which was anticipated by his physicians--that he should be unable to contend against the animosity of the irritated Princess, and the undisguised aversion of the Duc d'Orléans, who made no effort to conceal his dislike to the haughty minister, against whom he published during his sojourn at Nancy a manifesto, in which he accused him of having usurped the authority of the sovereign.

Louis, however, who felt his own utter inability to dispense with so able and fearless a counsellor, paid no regard to the discontent of the Prince; and increased his indignation by issuing letters patent, in which, after eulogizing the Cardinal, and expressing his sense of the services which he had rendered alike to himself and to his kingdom, he officially appointed him Prime Minister. It is true that from his first admission to the Council Richelieu had performed all the functions appertaining to that rank, but he had nevertheless hitherto been preceded by the other ministers, whereas this public declaration enabled him to take his place immediately below the Princes of the Blood; while, in addition to this new dignity, he found himself *de facto* generalissimo of the King's armies in Piedmont.

Bassompierre had meanwhile greatly distinguished himself at the Pass of Susa, which had been forced by the French troops; and his vigour, activity, and courage had rendered him the idol of the soldiers, who justly attributed to his able exertions no small portion of the success which had attended the royal arms. The military renown of the brilliant courtier, whom he had hitherto affected to regard merely as a spoilt child of fortune, was, however, highly distasteful to the Cardinal, whose flatterers did not fail to persuade him that the victory was due to his own admirable arrangements, rather than to the valour of any of the generals who had braved the dangers of the hazardous expedition; and he consequently sought to excite the jealousy and suspicion of Louis against the zealous Maréchal, who little imagined that his prowess in the field was fated to involve his personal safety.

Marie de Medicis

The sojourn at Susa, a wretched locality in which, while awaiting the ratification of the treaties consequent upon its capture, Louis could not even enjoy the diversion of hunting, soon exhausted the patience of the monarch, who declared his intention of returning to France previous to the conclusion of the necessary arrangements; and although he was earnestly entreated by Soranzo, the Venetian Ambassador, to forego his purpose, he resolutely refused to listen to his representations; and on the 28th of April he accordingly commenced his homeward journey, simply taking the precaution, in order to satisfy his several allies, of leaving Richelieu with a strong body of troops, and full authority to terminate as he should see fit the pending negotiations. The Cardinal, however, felt as little inclination as his royal master to waste his time and to exhaust his energies at such a distance from the Court; and thus to enable his enemies to gain the unoccupied ear of the King, who was, as he had already experienced, easily swayed by those about him. During his absence from the capital his emissaries had been careful to report to him every movement of the Queen-mother and the Duc d'Orléans; and he felt that he was lost should they again succeed in acquiring the confidence of the weak and wavering Louis. Within a fortnight after the departure of the monarch, he consequently made his own hasty preparations for a similar retreat; and having placed six thousand infantry and five hundred horse under the command of the Maréchal de Créquy, with orders that he should vigilantly guard the several passes and rigidly enforce the orders of the King, he set forth in his turn for Paris, in order to counteract the designs of the rival faction.

Meanwhile Marie de Medicis and Gaston d'Orléans had been consistent in their policy; and on the arrival of Louis in Paris he was assured that time had only tended to embitter their misunderstanding on the subject of the Princesse de Gonzaga; a fact which was no sooner ascertained by Richelieu than he resolved to profit by so promising an opportunity of regaining the good graces of the royal Duke. This was precisely the result which both the mother and son had desired; for while the former sought to secure a pretext for complaint against the ingratitude and treachery of the individual whose fortunes had been her own work, and who now evinced a disposition to build up his prosperity upon the disobedience of her best-beloved child, the latter had many and forcible reasons for being equally delighted to see the ordinarily-astute Cardinal taken in his own toils, and readily consented to second the irritated Queen-mother in her attempt to effect his overthrow. During the first few days which succeeded the arrival of the King in Paris, every circumstance tended to increase the hopes of Marie de Medicis. Louis made no secret of his satisfaction at the firmness which she had evinced, and displayed towards her a confidence and respect by which she was assured that his prejudices were shaken; but the sudden apparition of the Cardinal reawakened all her anxiety.

His advent was no sooner announced than a swarm of velvet-clad and bejewelled nobles hastened to Nemours to bid him welcome; and thence they served as his escort to Fontainebleau, where the Court was then sojourning, and whither he travelled in a covered litter, followed by the Maréchaux de Bassompierre, de Schomberg, and de Marillac. On reaching the palace Richelieu at once proceeded to the apartments of the Queen-mother, accompanied by the Cardinals de La Valette and de Bérulle, and the other nobles who had joined him on the road; where he found himself in the presence not only of Marie de Medicis, but also in that of the young Queen, the Princesses, and all the great ladies of the Court, by the whole of whom he was very coldly received; and the blood mounted to his brow as Marie de Medicis replied to his lowly salutation by a slight curtsy, and a formal inquiry after his health.

"I am well, Madame," he answered petulantly; "better than many of those whom I see in your company may have desired."

The Tuscan Princess turned haughtily away; but as her eyes fell upon the Cardinal de Bérulle, her confessor, her features relaxed into a smile, which was not unobserved by the irritated minister.

"Ah, Madame," he said, striving to rally alike his temper and his hopes, and addressing his royal mistress with the familiarity of old times, "would that I were possessed of the same amount of favour as M. de Bérulle."

Marie de Medicis

"Oh, Monseigneur," replied the Queen drily, "I was laughing at the extraordinary breeches of the reverend Cardinal."

This retort turned the gaze of the whole circle upon her confessor, who, on taking the road, had discarded his flowing purple robes, and attired himself in a short vest, a pair of *haut-de-chausses*, and white boots; and the smile immediately became general.

Richelieu bit his lips with an impatient gesture; and then, in order to divert the attention of the courtiers from the discomfited Jesuit, he hastened to present to their Majesties the three marshals who were in his suite. Marie de Medicis bowed to each in succession, but addressed herself only to M. de Marillac; and the scene was becoming each instant more embarrassing when the usher on duty threw back the tapestried hangings of the door, and announced "The King."

The face of Louis beamed with delight as he extended his hand to the minister, and welcomed him once more to the capital; but the brow of Richelieu remained clouded until he was led away by the monarch, with whom he continued in conversation for a considerable time, complaining bitterly of the reception which he had met with from the Queen-mother, and requesting permission to retire from office and to leave the Court. To this proposition Louis, however, refused to accede, declaring that whatever might be the cause of the Queen's displeasure, he would soon find some means of effecting their reconciliation.

As, however, after the lapse of several days, Marie de Medicis evinced no disposition to display greater cordiality towards her late favourite, Richelieu deemed it expedient to adopt more stringent measures; and he accordingly sent for his niece Madame de Comballet, who was lady of honour to the young Queen, M. de la Meilleraye his kinsman, who was also a member of her household, and several other persons who were devoted to his interests, and who held places about the Court, and desired them to tender their resignations, as he was about to withdraw from office. Intelligence of this order soon reached the ears of the King, by whom it was violently opposed; and at his earnest entreaty the Queen-mother was at length induced to pardon the Cardinal, who with the utmost humility professed his utter unconsciousness of all offence, and his deep regret at the displeasure exhibited by her Majesty. But neither Richelieu nor Marie was the dupe of this hollow peace, although both were willing for the moment to pacify the monarch, who was also anxious for the return of his brother; Gaston having, on the first intimation of the expected arrival of Louis in the capital, withdrawn to Lorraine, and placed himself under the protection of the ducal sovereign, who received his royal guest with the greatest magnificence.

Worthless as he was individually, Gaston was destined throughout his whole career to serve as a rallying-point for the ambition of all the princes and nobles who sought to aggrandize themselves and their families; while, as presumptive heir to the French throne, he was welcomed by the Duc de Lorraine with every demonstration of respect and regard. Aware of the puerile vanity of the princely fugitive, the Duke stood bareheaded in his presence, and never presumed to seat himself until he had received an invitation to do so. Moreover, he had been instructed by the Spanish Cabinet to exert all his best energies to win over the Prince to his interests; a suggestion upon which he acted so skilfully that the little Court of Lorraine became a perpetual scene of festivity and amusement, of which the frivolous and fickle Gaston was at once the object and the centre. Nor was there wanting in the ducal circle an attraction even greater than the splendid *fêtes* and brilliant assemblies at which Monsieur fluttered and feasted in all the triumph of his weak and selfish nature. The Princesse Marguerite, the younger sister of M. de Lorraine, soon weaned the changeful fancy of Gaston from the persecuted Marie de Gonzaga; nor had he long resided at Nancy before his marked attentions to the beautiful and accomplished Princess became the subject of general comment.

This state of things seriously alarmed the Cardinal, who, in addition to his hatred of the Guises, apprehended the worst consequences should the Prince be permitted thus to emancipate himself from the royal authority, and to play the quasi-sovereign with impunity; and, accordingly, only a few weeks after the establishment of Gaston in Lorraine, he sent the Cardinal de Bérulle and the Duc de Bellegarde to Nancy to negotiate his return. Aware of his

advantage, however, the Prince showed no inclination to yield to the solicitations of the minister; and demanded in the event of his compliance a provincial government in appanage. Rendered more and more anxious by this pertinacity, Richelieu, even while refusing to concede the required boon, heaped offer upon offer without effect, until the Maréchal de Marillac, more successful than the two previous envoys, induced Gaston to accept as a substitute for the government which he demanded the fortresses of Orleans and Amboise, with a hundred thousand livres a year, and fifty thousand crowns in ready money. An agreement to this effect was drawn up; after which Monsieur pledged himself to return to Court, and to submit in all things to the pleasure of the King and the Queen-mother; an idle promise, where his hostility to the minister constantly urged him to opposition; but which served to tranquillize the mind of Louis, who, being about once more to renew the war in Italy, was desirous of securing peace within his own capital.

Immediately after the departure of the Cardinal from Susa, the armies of Austria and Spain had advanced to the centre of Italy, and the power of France beyond the Alps was consequently threatened with annihilation. In this extremity Richelieu instantly directed the concentration of all the frontier forces upon Piedmont, and declared war against the Duke of Savoy; but as the whole responsibility of this campaign would necessarily devolve upon himself, he demanded of the King that an unlimited authority should be granted to him, in the event of his Majesty declining to head the army in person. With this demand Louis unhesitatingly complied; and on the 29th of December the Cardinal left Paris as lieutenant-general of the royal forces, escorted by ten companies of the King's bodyguard, and surrounded by upwards of a hundred nobles.

Previously to his departure, however, he entertained the King, the two Queens, and the principal nobility at one of those elaborate *fêtes* which have now become merely legendary; and which combined a comedy, a concert, and a ballet, with other incidental amusements, sufficient, as it would appear in these days, to have afforded occupation for a week even to the most dissipated pleasure-seekers; but which during the reign of Louis XIII excited emulation rather than surprise.

Richelieu had scarcely commenced his march, when the King resolved in his turn to proceed to Italy with a force of forty thousand men; a determination which was no sooner made known to the Queen-mother than she expressed her intention of bearing him company in this new expedition; as, superadded to her anxiety to counterbalance by her presence the influence of the Cardinal, she was moreover desirous of preventing a rupture with Spain, and of protecting the Duke of Savoy, whom she secretly favoured.

The never-ceasing intrigues of the Court had once more sowed dissension between the two Queens; and it is here necessary to state that on the death of the Comtesse de Lannoy, which had occurred towards the close of the preceding year, her post of lady of honour to Anne of Austria had been conferred upon the Marquise de Seneçay, while that previously held by Madame de Seneçay was bestowed upon Madame du Fargis. As these arrangements had been made without any reference to the wishes of the Queen herself, she expressed great indignation at an interference with the internal economy of her household which was generally attributed to Marie de Medicis; but her anger reached its climax when she ascertained that the Comtesse du Fargis was the fast friend of Madame de Comballet, the niece of Richelieu. Apprehensive of the consequences likely to accrue to herself from such an intimacy, Anne of Austria for some time refused to admit the new Mistress of the Robes into her private circle, alleging that her apartments were not sufficiently spacious to accommodate the relatives and spies of a minister who had already succeeded in embittering her existence. All opposition on her part was, however, disregarded; the ladies were officially installed; and although the Queen made no secret of her annoyance, and loudly inveighed against both Richelieu and her royal mother-in-law for the indignity to which she was thus subjected, they retained their places, and endeavoured, by every demonstration of respect and devotion, to gain the good graces of their irritated mistress. In this endeavour one of them only was destined to succeed, and that one, contrary to all expectation, was the beautiful and witty Comtesse du Fargis, whose fascinations soon won the heart of the young Queen, and who was fortunate enough to

Marie de Medicis

secure alike her confidence and her esteem; nor was it long ere she profited by her advantage to attempt a reconciliation between Marie de Medicis and her offended daughter-in-law; urged thereto, as some historians assert, by the advice of the Cardinal de Bérulle, but more probably by her own affection for the Queen-mother, in whose household she had formerly held the same office which she now filled in that of Anne of Austria.

Her project, however, presented considerable difficulty. The King had suddenly become more assiduous than he had ever yet shown himself in his attendance upon the Court of Marie de Medicis, constantly joining her evening circle, and absenting himself entirely from the apartments of his royal consort; a circumstance which Anne did not fail to attribute to the evil offices of the Tuscan Princess, who, as she asserted, was perpetually labouring to undermine her dignity, and to usurp her position. Soon, however, it became rumoured that it was to no effort on her own part that the Queen-mother was indebted for the constant society of the monarch, but rather to the attractions of one of her maids of honour; and that for the first time in his life Louis XIII evinced symptoms of a passion to which he had hitherto been supposed invulnerable. Mademoiselle de Hautefort, the object of this apparent preference, was remarkable rather for intellect than beauty; her conversational powers were considerable, her mind well cultivated, and her judgment sound. She was, moreover, totally without ambition, virtuous from principle, and an enemy to all intrigue.

On first being made acquainted with the presumed infidelity of her royal consort, Anne of Austria exhibited the most unmeasured anger, and was unsparing in her menaces of vengeance; but it was not long ere Madame du Fargis succeeded in convincing her that she had nothing to fear from such a rival, and that she would act prudently in affecting not to perceive the momentary fancy of the King for the modest and unassuming maid of honour.

"You have only to consult your mirror, Madame," she said with an accent of conviction which at once produced its effect upon the wounded vanity of the Queen, "to feel that you are beyond an apprehension of this nature. Believe me when I assert that, were his Majesty capable of such a passion as that which is now attributed to him, he could not remain insensible to your own attractions. Mademoiselle de Hautefort is amiable, and amuses the indolence of the King; but did he seek more than mere amusement, it is in yourself alone that he could find the qualities calculated to awaken the feeling which you deprecate."

Anne of Austria listened with complacency to a species of consolation which she could not but acknowledge to be based on probability, as she was conscious that even in the midst of the most brilliant Court in Europe her own beauty was remarkable; and although she still indulged in a sentiment of irritation against the Queen-mother, through whose agency the King had formed so dangerous an intimacy, she nevertheless consented to conceal her discontent, and to maintain at least a semblance of cordiality with her illustrious relative; a policy which the approaching departure of the monarch rendered imperative.

The influence of Marie de Medicis over the mind of the King had, as we have shown, seriously diminished after the return of Richelieu to the capital; while the necessity of pursuing the campaign in Italy had rendered the services of his able minister more than ever essential to Louis, who was aware of his personal inefficiency to overcome the perils by which he was menaced on all sides; and who had so long ceased to sway the sceptre of his own kingdom, that he was compelled to acknowledge to himself that the master-spirit which had evoked the tempest was alone able to avert its effects. This conviction sufficed to render him deaf to all remonstrances, and at length induced him sullenly to command their discontinuance. He declared that every one about him felt a delight in calumniating the Cardinal, and on all occasions he ostentatiously displayed towards the triumphant minister the utmost confidence and affection.

As the Queen-mother became convinced that all her efforts to undermine the influence of Richelieu must for the present prove abortive, she ceased to expostulate, and turned her whole attention towards the reconciliation of the royal brothers. Aware that the Dukes of Lorraine and Savoy were seeking by every means in their power to increase the discontent of Gaston, and that Charles Emmanuel had offered him a safe retreat in Turin, and an army to

Marie de Medicis

support him should he desire to overthrow the power of the Cardinal by whom he had been reduced to the position of a mere subject without authority or influence, she wrote in earnest terms to caution him against such insidious advice; and urged upon the King the expediency of recalling him to Paris, and investing him with the command both of the city itself and of the surrounding provinces during his own absence from the kingdom.

In reply to the entreaties of his mother, Gaston declared his willingness to become reconciled to the King, and to serve him to the best of his ability; but he at the same time requested that she would not exact from him any similar condescension as regarded Richelieu, whom he looked upon as his most dangerous enemy, and on whom he was resolved one day to revenge himself. Against this determination Marie de Medicis felt no disposition to offer any expostulations, as it accorded with her own feelings; and she consequently merely represented to the Prince the necessity of concealing his sentiments from the King (whom she had induced to comply with her request), and to make immediate preparations for his return to France.

CHAPTER VII

1630

At the close of January 1630 the Duc d'Orléans, in compliance with his promise, took leave of the Court of Lorraine; and early in February he crossed the French frontier, and had an interview with the King, who had already reached Troyes, accompanied by the two Queens and their several households. At this meeting the royal brothers displayed towards each other an amount of confidence which gladdened the heart of the Queen-mother, to whom their long estrangement had been a subject of perpetual grief and anxiety; nor was their good understanding lessened for an instant until their separation upon the departure of Louis for Lyons, when Monsieur in his turn proceeded to Orleans, where he remained until the middle of March; and thence he finally returned to Paris towards the close of April, to assume his command.

As the Cardinal had foreseen, there was little time to be lost in retrieving the fortunes of the French armies. Casal in Montferrat, which was held by M. de Thoiras, was besieged by the Marquis de Spinola, with an immense force, and he earnestly demanded the sum of fifty thousand crowns for defraying the arrears due to his troops, who had begun to murmur, and threatened to surrender. The Germans had once more attacked Mantua, which they ultimately took; and the armies of MM. de la Force and de Schomberg were suffering from sickness, famine, and desertions, and, moreover, harassed by the troops of the Duke of Savoy. Charles Emmanuel meanwhile was advancing in person upon Savillan, in order to provoke an engagement with the French forces; and on every side difficulty and danger loomed over the banners of Louis, when the Duke of Savoy was suddenly attacked by apoplexy and expired towards the close of January. He was succeeded by Victor Amédée his elder son, who was the husband of Madame Christine de France, the sister of the French King; and it was anticipated that the closeness of this alliance would at once terminate all aggressive measures on the part of France, and that the new Duke would be suffered to take peaceful possession of his inheritance. Such, however, was not the policy of the Cardinal, and accordingly the operations already directed against the Duchy were suffered to proceed.

Shortly after the arrival of the King at Lyons he received a despatch from the minister stating that he had taken Pignerol, and thus secured a safe passage for his Majesty into Italy; and that he was about to join him at Lyons, in order to receive his further commands.

On his arrival he was warmly welcomed by Louis, whom he easily induced to accompany him on his return to the seat of war; for although in his despatches Richelieu had affected to attach an immense importance to the conquest of Pignerol, he was aware that the honour of the French nation must be compromised should her armies be thus checked at the very commencement of the expedition, and he consequently urged the King at once to possess himself of the Duchy of Savoy; an undertaking which presented so little difficulty that its success was certain. In vain did Marie de Medicis represent the injury which Louis must, by such an enterprise, inflict upon his sister; the project flattered the vanity of the King, and accordingly on the 14th of May the vanguard of the French army entered the Duchy, and before the middle of the ensuing month the whole of Savoy, with the exception of Montmelian, was in the possession of his troops. This puny triumph was, however, counterbalanced and outweighed by the disasters at Casal and Mantua, the former of which, from the failure of provisions and reinforcements, fell into the hands of Spinola; while the latter, after having had twenty-five thousand of its inhabitants carried off by the plague, was ultimately lost through treason, and delivered over to pillage by the Imperialist generals.

Marie de Medicis

From Savoy the Cardinal endeavoured to induce Louis to advance into the district of Maurienne, but from this project he was strongly dissuaded by the Queen-mother, who had, during the campaign in Savoy, remained at Lyons with Anne of Austria, Marillac the Keeper of the Seals, and other discontented nobles who were opposed to the war in Italy, and were anxious for peace at any price. Negotiations to that effect were, moreover, pending; and Urban VIII had offered himself as arbitrator through the medium of Jules Mazarin, a young man of twenty-eight years of age, whom he had appointed internuncio for that purpose. The talent and energy displayed by the Papal envoy in a position of so much difficulty enchanted Richelieu, who at once recognized in the juvenile diplomatist a congenial spirit, and he determined to attach him to the interests of France. But even while he did full justice to the precocious ability of Mazarin, the minister nevertheless bitterly complained that the violent measures adopted by the Queen-mother and her party rendered the prospect of a peace impossible; and that they attached too great an importance to the pending negotiations, and overacted their uneasiness on the subject of the King's health, and their terrors of the plague. These arguments sufficed to reassure Louis XIII, who, [pg 207] delighted at his success in Savoy, and intoxicated by the plaudits of his courtiers, was eager to pursue a war from which he hoped to acquire fresh reputation; and accordingly, disregarding the expostulations of the peace party, he advanced to St. Jean-de-Maurienne; and the aggressive measures so earnestly deprecated by Marie de Medicis were continued.

The King had, however, scarcely joined the camp when he was attacked by fever; and his condition soon became so dangerous that it was deemed expedient to remove him in a litter to Lyons, while his armies were still engaged in the sieges of Pignerol and Casal. For several days he continued hovering between life and death; and his strength was at length so utterly exhausted that his physicians believed him to be beyond all further hope.

Monarchs are mere mortals on a bed of sickness; and Louis XIII was far from being an exception to the rule. Stubborn and wilful when in health, he no sooner became the prey of disease, and pondered over the prophecies of the astrologers who had foretold his early demise, than he suffered himself to be governed without resistance by those about him; the ties of kindred, and the claims of family affection, resumed their rights; duties long neglected were admitted and recognized; he bewailed the past, and despaired of the future. It was therefore not possible that such an opportunity should be neglected by Marie de Medicis, who, even while watching over his sick-bed with an assiduity and care which were emulated by her royal daughter-in-law, eagerly availed herself of her advantage to shake the power of Richelieu. In this attempt she was zealously seconded by Anne of Austria; and the combined tears and entreaties of the two Queens at length so far prevailed over the inclinations of Louis as to wring from him a promise that, should he survive, he would dismiss his minister so soon as he should have once more reached the capital.

"I cannot, Madame," he replied to the earnest solicitation of Marie de Medicis that he would act upon the instant, "comply with your request at an earlier period than that which I have named. The Cardinal is now fully occupied with the affairs of Italy, and his services are essential to their success. Let us not be precipitate. Suffer him to conclude the pending negotiations; and I pledge myself, on my return to Paris, both to exclude him from the Council and to dismiss him from the government of the state."

With this assurance the Queen-mother was compelled to appear satisfied, although she panted for more immediate vengeance; and so grateful did the King express himself for the unceasing tenderness and vigilance of the two Queens, that he listened without remonstrance to their complaints. As, contrary to the anticipations of the faculty, he rallied from the attack, he became even more indulgent; an extent of confidence and affection hitherto unknown reigned in the royal circle; and when he heard Marie and her daughter-in-law attribute all their humiliations and sufferings to the Cardinal alone, while they entirely exonerated himself, he did not scruple to deplore the misstatements of others by which he had been induced to disregard their previous expostulations.

Marie de Medicis

The convalescence of Louis was no sooner assured than he resolved to return to Paris, believing that his native air would hasten his complete recovery; and accordingly, after having entreated Marie de Medicis to dissemble her displeasure against Richelieu until he should be prepared to dismiss him from office, the Court commenced its homeward journey. The Cardinal meanwhile, although necessarily ignorant of the pledge given by the King, had learnt enough to convince him that the faction of the Queen-mother had been actively seeking to undermine his influence during the sojourn of the monarch at Lyons, and he consequently resolved to accompany the royal party to the capital; his weak health forming a sufficient pretext for this determination. Having made his final arrangements, he accordingly proceeded to Roanne in order to join the Queen-mother, and to endeavour during the journey to reinstate himself in her favour.

In compliance with the request of the King, Marie de Medicis met the astute minister with a dissimulation equal to his own; and even affected to feel flattered when he demanded her permission for his litter to travel immediately behind her own. It was not, however, until the royal barge had received its august freight, and begun to descend the Loire, that the Cardinal had an opportunity of fully enacting the courtly character which he had assigned to himself in this serious emergency. As the Queen-mother lay upon her couch the minister stood obsequiously beside her, beneath the crimson canopy by which she was overshadowed, occasionally dropping upon his knee in an attitude of profound and affectionate respect; a voluntary homage to which Marie replied by conversing with him in the most endearing terms; addressing him more than once as *mio caro! amico del cuore mio!* and other soft and flattering appellations.

To Richelieu it seemed for the time as though the past had come back upon him, but he deceived himself; the Florentine Princess had but drawn a glove over a hand of iron, a fact which he ascertained before the termination of the journey, as well as the whole extent of the intrigue at Lyons; but this knowledge did not for a moment affect his deportment towards the Queen-mother, for whom he continued to evince the deepest veneration, while he carefully noted the bearing of those by whom she was surrounded, in order that he might one day be enabled to wreak his vengeance upon such as had participated in the cabal.

The most zealous partisans of Marie de Medicis were at this period the two Marillacs and the Ducs de Guise and de Bellegarde; while her confidential friends of her own sex were the Duchesse d'Elboeuf and the Princesse de Conti. Of these the most obnoxious to Richelieu was the elder Marillac, the Keeper of the Seals. This minister was indebted to the Cardinal for the office which he held; and even while Richelieu was plotting the ruin of his own benefactress, he could not brook that a man whom he had himself raised to power should dare to oppose his will, or to succeed him in the good graces of the Queen-mother. He had, moreover, ascertained that Marillac, who had, in the first instance, attached himself to Marie de Medicis at the suggestion of his brother the Maréchal, had rendered her such good service that she had pledged herself to make him Prime Minister on his own dismissal. Nor was this the only cause of anxiety to which Richelieu was at this moment exposed; as during the indisposition of the King a strong affection had grown up between the two Queens, while the Duc d'Orléans no longer made any effort to conceal his animosity; and thus the Cardinal found himself placed in opposition to the whole of the royal family with the exception of the sovereign.

Gaston d'Orléans was no sooner apprised of the approach of Louis to the capital than he hastened to Montargis to receive him, and the meeting was one of great cordiality on both sides; but the King had scarcely urged upon his brother the expediency of a reconciliation with the Cardinal, ere the Prince violently complained of the indignities to which he had been subjected by Richelieu, and insisted that he had just reason to hate him. Alarmed by the unmeasured vehemence of Gaston, the King entreated him to be more calm, and to accede to his request; but Monsieur, after bowing profoundly, remained silent; and shortly afterwards withdrew.

Marie de Medicis

On her arrival in Paris, Marie de Medicis at once proceeded to the palace of the Luxembourg, which she had recently built, and embellished with those treasures of art which had rendered it one of the most regal residences in the kingdom. During the first three days of her sojourn there, the gates were closed, and no visitors were admitted; but on the fourth, the King, who had taken up his abode at Versailles, arrived, accompanied by the Cardinal, and followed by all the great nobles, to welcome her back to Paris. Louis had no sooner saluted his mother than he remarked the absence of the Duc d'Orléans, and on expressing his surprise that the Prince had not hastened to meet him, he was informed that his Highness was indisposed. As he was about to despatch one of his retinue with a message of condolence, Gaston was suddenly announced; who, after having paid his respects to their Majesties, stepped back to receive the compliments of the courtiers. At this moment he was accosted by the Cardinal, but before the latter had time to utter a syllable, Monsieur abruptly turned his back upon him, and entered into conversation with the nobles who stood near. Enraged by this public affront, Richelieu immediately approached the Queen-mother, and bitterly complained of the insult to which he had been subjected; but Marie, in her turn, answered coldly: "Monsieur has merely treated you as you deserve." A retort which only served to embitter the indignation of the minister, who at once perceived that, in order to save himself from ruin, he must forthwith possess himself of the ear of the King, and strike a decisive blow.

The moment was a favourable one, as intelligence shortly afterwards reached the Court that a treaty of peace with Italy on the most advantageous terms for France had been concluded, and all was consequently joy and gratulation throughout the capital. Showers of rockets ascended from the palaces of the Louvre, the Luxembourg, and St. Germain, which to the faction of Richelieu celebrated the triumph of his exploits beyond the Alps, while to that of the Queen-mother they indicated the downfall of the Cardinal, which it was anticipated would succeed the cessation of hostilities. So convinced indeed was Marie de Medicis that her time of trial was at length over that she disdained to conceal her exultation; and as the first-fruits of her presumed victory she determined to dismiss from her service alike Richelieu himself, who had been appointed superintendent of her household, and every member of his family who was about her person.

In pursuance of this resolution she hastened to inform the Cardinal that she declined his further offices; and before he could recover from the surprise occasioned by so abrupt an announcement, she turned towards the Marquis de la Meilleraye, the captain of her bodyguard, adding in the same cold and haughty tone in which she had just addressed his kinsman: "Nor will I longer retain you here, sir; you must also retire." Finally, as Madame de Comballet entered the apartment, unconscious of the scene which was then being enacted, she applied to her the most humiliating epithets, and commanded her immediately to quit the palace. In vain did the niece of Richelieu throw herself upon her knees, weeping bitterly, and entreating the pardon of her royal mistress, without even inquiring into the nature of her offence; Marie de Medicis remained inflexible, and sternly ordered her to withdraw. The command was obeyed; and as she left the apartment Madame de Comballet was followed by the Cardinal, who, bewildered by this sudden and astonishing change of attitude, did not even attempt to expostulate.

After this first exhibition of her recovered power the Queen-mother stepped into her private closet, where she was shortly joined by the King; and he had no sooner entered than she desired the usher on duty to leave the room, and to refuse ingress to all comers, be they whom they might; after which, with her own hand, she drew the heavy bolts across the doors that he had closed behind him, and returned to the King, whose gesture of surprise and annoyance she affected not to remark. She had passed the Rubicon, and she felt that she had no time to lose if she did not desire to become herself the victim of the struggle in which she was engaged; and thus having announced to her son the dismissal of Richelieu and his relatives from her personal service, she continued the conversation by reminding him of the pledge which he had given at Lyons, and urging the immediate removal of the obnoxious minister from office. Louis, weak and wavering as was his wont, endeavoured to temporize, declaring that the crisis was one of too much difficulty to admit of so extreme a measure at that moment, and entreating her to sanction his delaying for a few weeks the fulfilment of his

Marie de Medicis

promise; but Marie was aware that she stood upon the brink of a precipice, and she became only the more importunate in her demands, and the more bitter in her sarcasms.

"Are you indeed the sovereign of France, and the son of Henry the Great?" she asked passionately; "and do you quail before a subject, and place your sceptre in other hands, when you were born to wield it in the eyes of Europe?"

"I cannot dispense with the services of the Cardinal," was the sullen reply; "and you would do well, Madame, to become reconciled to a man who is essential to the welfare of the kingdom."

"*Per Dio!* never!" exclaimed the Queen resolutely, while tears of rage burst from her eyes, and the blood mounted to her brow. "France, and the widow of her former monarch, can alike dispense with the good services of Armand de Richelieu, the false friend, the treacherous servant, and the ambitious statesman. It is time that both were delivered from his thrall. Do not fear, Sir, that our noble nation can produce no other minister as able as, and at the same time more trustworthy than, the man who, when he bends his knee before you, is in heart clutching at your crown."

"What mean you, Madame?" asked the suspicious King, starting from his seat.

"Ask your good citizens, Sire, by whom they are governed," was the impetuous answer of the excited Queen; "ask your nobles and barons by whom they are oppressed and thwarted, when they would feign recognize their sovereign alone as their ruler; ask your brave armies who has reaped the glory for which you have imperilled your health, and gone near to sacrifice your life. Do you shrink from the exertion necessary to the measure that I propose?" she continued as she remarked the effect of her words upon the King, whose wounded vanity revolted against the idea of being considered what he really was, a puppet in the hands of his minister. "Dismiss the apprehension. Trusting to your royal word--and the word of an anointed monarch, Sire, is as sacred as the oath of the first subject in his realm--I have been careful to spare you all unnecessary fatigue. Here," and as she spoke she drew a parchment from her bosom--"here your Majesty will find, duly drawn up, an order for the instant retirement of the Cardinal, which requires only your royal signature to become valid; M. de Marillac is prepared, with your sanction, to replace him, and to serve you with equal zeal, and far more loyalty than he has done. Subscribe your name at the bottom of this document; and then ride forth into the streets of your good city of Paris, and as the news spreads among your people, see if one single voice will be raised for the recall of *Maitre Gonin*."

As Marie de Medicis uttered these words a slight noise caused her to glance from the King towards the direction whence it proceeded; and there, standing in the opening of a door which communicated with her oratory, she saw before her the Cardinal de Richelieu.

Aware that the monarch was closeted with his mother, and apprehending the worst consequences to himself should the interview be suffered to proceed without interruption, the minister had instantly resolved to terminate it by his own presence; and for this purpose, disregarding the affront to which he had so lately been subjected by Marie de Medicis, he hastened to her apartments; where, having found the door of the antechamber fastened from within, he entered a gallery which communicated with the royal closet, at the door of which he tapped to obtain admittance. As no answer was elicited, his alarm increased; the heavy drapery by which the door was veiled deadened the voices within; and after waiting for a few instants to convince himself that no ingress could be obtained save by stratagem, he proceeded along the corridor until he reached the oratory, where he found one of the waiting-women of the Queen, who, unable to withstand a heavy bribe, permitted him to penetrate into the royal closet.

At the moment of his appearance Louis was seated in a huge chair of crimson velvet with a scroll of parchment before him, and a pen already in his hand; while Marie de Medicis stood beside him, the tears chasing each other down her cheeks, and her whole frame trembling with excitement.

Marie de Medicis

"*Per Dio!*" was the first exclamation of the Queen, as she hurriedly snatched the scroll from the table, and forming it into a roll, thrust it into her girdle; "are you here, *Cardinale?*"

"I am here, Madame," replied Richelieu with perfect composure; "and I am here because your Majesties were speaking of me."

"You are wrong, Monseigneur," murmured the King.

"Nay, Sire," persisted the minister, turning towards Marie de Medicis; "your august mother will, I am convinced, own that such was the case."

"You are right, Sir," admitted the Tuscan Princess, no longer able or anxious to restrain her resentment; "we were speaking of you, and you had just cause to dread the results of such a conversation. We were expatiating upon your treachery, your ingratitude, and your vices; and the subject was a copious one."

"Ah, Madame!" expostulated Richelieu, as he fell upon his knees before his irritated mistress. "What have I done to forfeit your favour? How have I sacrificed your esteem?"

"*Miserabile! miserabile!*" cried the Queen-mother; "dare you ask *how?* But it is idle to bandy words with such as you; *teme mia vendetta!*"

"At least, Madame, suffer M. le Ministre to justify himself," stammered out Louis; "he may perhaps convince you that you have wronged him."

"Wronged him!" echoed Marie with a contemptuous gesture. "Even his ready eloquence must prove powerless beside the experience of the past. Henceforward there can be no trust or fellowship between the widow of Henry the Great and her discarded servant."

"In that case, Sire," said the Cardinal, rising from his abject posture at the feet of the Queen-mother, and throwing himself at those of the King, "I can no longer offer my unworthy services to your Majesty, as it is not for me to contend against the will of my royal mistress."

Terrified by this threat, which renewed his sense of utter helplessness, Louis faintly endeavoured to intercede in behalf of the man upon whom he had so long leant for support; but Marie impetuously interposed.

"You have heard my decision, Sir," she said haughtily; "and it is now for you to choose between your mother and your valet."

Finding that all interference on his part must prove ineffectual, the King suddenly rose, remarking that it was late, and that as he had resolved to return to Versailles he had no time to lose. Richelieu, who had not yet recovered sufficient self-possession to entreat a continuance of his intercession, remained motionless as he left the room; while the indignation of the Queen-mother at so undignified a retreat rendered her equally unable to expostulate; and meanwhile Louis, delighted to escape from all participation in so dangerous a contention, sprang into the carriage which was awaiting him, and beckoning his new favourite M. de Saint-Simon to take his place beside him, set off at full speed for the suburban palace where he had taken up his temporary abode.

After the departure of the King, Richelieu made a fresh effort to overcome the anger of Marie de Medicis; he still knelt humbly before her, he supplicated, he even wept, for the Cardinal was never at a loss for tears when they were likely to produce an effect upon his hearers; but all was vain. The Queen-mother turned from him with a contemptuous gesture; and gathering her heavy drapery about her, walked haughtily from the room.

The eyes of the prostrate minister followed her as she withdrew with a glance in which all the evil passions of his soul were revealed as if in a mirror. He believed himself to be utterly lost; and when he reached the Petit Luxembourg, where he had lodged since his arrival in the capital, he gave orders that his carriages should be packed, and immediately proceed to Pontoise, on their way to Havre de Grâce, where he had hastily determined to seek an asylum. In a few hours all was in movement in the vicinity of his residence. A long train of mules laden with what many asserted to be chests of treasure, first took the road under the escort of a body

Marie de Medicis

of military, with strict orders not to halt in any village lest they should be pillaged; and meanwhile the Cardinal hurriedly terminated his more important arrangements and prepared to follow.

In this occupation he was interrupted by his fast friend the Cardinal de la Valette, by whom he was earnestly urged to forego his resolution, and instead of flying from the capital, and thus ensuring the triumph of his enemies, to hasten without loss of time to Versailles, in order to plead his cause with the King. This advice, coupled as it was with the judicious representations of his brother-prelate, once more awakened the hopes of Richelieu, who stepped into a carriage which was in waiting, and with renewed energy set off at all speed from Paris. This day had been one of intense suffering for the Cardinal; who, in addition to the personal humiliation to which he had been exposed, had ascertained before his intrusion into the royal closet that Louis had, at the entreaty of the Queen-mother, already signed a letter in which he conferred upon the Maréchal de Marillac the command of his army and the direction of public affairs in Italy; and that a courier had moreover left Paris with the despatch. Nevertheless, yielding to the arguments of MM. de la Valette and de Châteauneuf, Richelieu readily consoled himself by recalling the timid and unstable character of Louis, and the recollection of the eminent services which he had rendered to France. Siri even asserts that before the Court left Lyons an understanding had been come to between the King and his minister, and that the exile of Marie was then and there decided.

Be this as it may, however, it is certain that all parties believed in the utter overthrow of Richelieu; and while he was yet on his way to Versailles, the ballad-singers of the Pont Neuf were publicly distributing the songs and pamphlets which they had hitherto only vended by stealth; and the dwarf of the Samaritaine was delighting the crowd by his mimicry of *Maître Gonin*. At the corners of the different streets groups of citizens were exchanging congratulations; and within the palace all the courtiers were commenting upon the approaching triumph of M. de Marillac, whose attachment to the interests of the Queen-mother and the Duc d'Orléans had rendered him popular not only with the bulk of the people, but also with the Parliament. Already were the presidents and councillors of the law-courts discussing the charges to be brought against the fallen minister in order to justify his dismissal; while the foreign ambassadors were equally alert in writing to acquaint their several courts with the overthrow of Richelieu and the supremacy of the Queen-mother.

The *salons* of Marie de Medicis were crowded. All the great nobles who had hitherto haunted the antechambers of the Cardinal, and awaited his pleasure as humbly as that of the sovereign himself, now swarmed in the gilded galleries and stately halls of the Luxembourg; feathers waved and jewels flashed on every side; the wand of an enchanter had passed over the Court, and the metamorphosis was complete. In the centre of this brilliant throng stood Marie de Medicis, radiant with joy, and holding the young Queen by the hand; while Monsieur took up his station a few paces from them, laughing and jesting with his favourites.

Heaven only knows what hopes and projects were formed that day--how many air-built castles were erected which in a few brief hours were fated to vanish into nothingness. Even Bassompierre, whose courtly tact had never hitherto deserted him, was blinded like the rest; and he, who had hitherto so assiduously paid his court to the Cardinal that he appeared to have forgotten the time when he was devoted heart and soul to the fortunes of the Queen-mother, suffered five days to elapse before he found leisure to bend his steps towards the Petit Luxembourg; an omission which he was subsequently destined to expiate in the dungeons of the Bastille.

Louis, meanwhile, had reached Versailles with his equerry and favourite, M. de Saint-Simon, to whom he bitterly inveighed against the violence of his mother; declaring that he could not dispense with the services of Richelieu, and that he should again have to contend against the same humiliations and difficulties which he had endured throughout the Regency. As the ill-humour of the King augmented, Saint-Simon privately sent to inform the Cardinal de la Valette of the undisguised annoyance of his Majesty, who was evidently prepared to revoke

Marie de Medicis

the dismissal of Richelieu should he be urged to do so; and that prelate, acting upon the suggestion, lost no time in presenting himself before the monarch.

"Cousin," said Louis with a smile, as M. de la Valette entered the apartment, "you must be surprised at what has taken place."

"More so, Sire, than your Majesty can possibly imagine," was the reply.

"Well then," pursued the King, "return to the Cardinal de Richelieu, and tell him from me to come here upon the instant. He will find me an indulgent master."

M. de la Valette required no second bidding. Richelieu had concealed himself in a cottage near the palace, awaiting a favourable moment to retrieve his tottering fortunes, and he hastened to obey the welcome summons. The results of this interview even exceeded the hopes of the minister; and before he left the royal closet he was once more Prime Minister of France, generalissimo of the armies beyond the Alps, and carried in his hand an order signed by Louis for the transfer of the seals from M. de Marillac to his own friend and adherent Châteauneuf; together with a second for the recall of the Maréchal de Marillac, who had only on the previous day been appointed to the command of the army in Italy.

One obstacle alone remained to the full and unlimited power of the exulting minister, who had not failed to perceive that henceforward his influence over the sovereign could never again be shaken; and that obstacle was Marie de Medicis. Louis, even while he persecuted and thwarted his mother, had never ceased to fear her; and the wily minister resolved, in order the more surely to compass her ultimate disgrace, to temporize until he should have succeeded in thoroughly compromising her in the mind of the King; an attempt which her own impetuosity and want of caution would, as he justly imagined, prove one of little difficulty after the occurrences of the day.

Thus his first care on returning to his residence at Ruel was to address a letter to the Queen-mother, couched in the following terms:

"Madame--I am aware that my enemies, or rather those of the state, not satisfied with blaming me to your Majesty, are anxious to render you suspicious of my presence at the Court, as though I only approached the King for the purpose of separating him from yourself, and of dividing those whom God has united. I trust, however, through the divine goodness, that the world will soon learn their malice; that my proceedings will be fully justified; and that innocence will triumph over calumny. It is not, Madame, that I do not esteem myself unfortunate and culpable since I have lost the favour of your Majesty; life will be odious to me so long as I am deprived of the honour of your good graces, and of that esteem which is more dear and precious to me than the grandeurs of this earth. As I owe them all to your liberal hand, I bring them and place them voluntarily at the feet of your Majesty. Pardon, Madame, your work and your creature.

RICHELIEU."

Such was the policy of the astute and heartless minister. Only a few hours had elapsed since he had overthrown all the most cherished projects of Marie de Medicis, sown dissension between herself and her son, proved to her that her efforts to struggle against his superior influence were worse than idle; and now he artfully sought to excite her indignation at his duplicity, and to compel her to reprisals which would draw down upon herself all the odium of their future estrangement. He well knew that by such a measure as that which he adopted, he must render her position untenable; for while on the one hand he overwhelmed her with professions of deference and respect, on the other he wrenched from her all hope of power, wounded her in her affections, and deprived her of the confidence of her adherents. Bassompierre attempted to disguise his mortification at the mistake of which he had himself been guilty by designating the 11th of November on which these extraordinary events took place as the "Day of Dupes," while the Queen-mother--whose great error had been that, instead of accompanying Louis to Versailles, and thus preventing all private intercourse with

the minister, she had yielded to her vanity and remained to listen to the congratulations of the courtiers--when she learned the ruin of all her hopes, passionately exclaimed that she had only one regret, and that one was that she had not drawn the bolt across the door leading to her oratory, in which case Richelieu would have been lost without resource.

Aware of his unpopularity with both nobles and people, the Cardinal considered it expedient to signalize his restoration to power by conferring certain favours upon individuals towards whom he had hitherto only manifested neglect and dislike. On the 19th of November he accordingly conferred the dignity of Marshal of France upon the Duc de Montmorency and the Comte de Thoiras; and on the 30th of the succeeding month he restored the Duc de Vendôme to liberty, although upon conditions degrading to a great noble and the son of Henri IV; while he purchased the favourites of Monsieur by large sums of money, and still more important promises. The latter concession at once restored the good humour of Gaston d'Orléans, who forthwith proceeded to Versailles to pay his respects to the King, by whom he was graciously received, after which he paid a visit to the Cardinal; but Marie de Medicis and her royal daughter-in-law remained inflexible, and Louis so deeply resented their coldness towards his minister that even in public he scarcely exchanged a word with either. For this mortification they found, however, full compensation in the perfect understanding which had grown up between them, based on their mutual hatred of Richelieu; for while the Queen-mother dwelt upon his ingratitude and treachery, Anne of Austria was no less vehement in her complaints of his presumption in having dared to aspire to the affection of the wife of his sovereign.

As day succeeded day the two royal ladies had increased subject for discontent. The disgrace of the Marillacs had deeply wounded Marie de Medicis, who at once perceived that the blow had been aimed at herself rather than at the two brothers; and that the real motive of the Cardinal had been to weaken her party: a conviction which she openly expressed. Still she remained, to all appearance, mistress of her own actions, and retained her seat in the Council; but it was far otherwise with the young Queen, whose affection for her brother having been construed by the minister into a treasonable correspondence with the Spanish Cabinet, she was banished to her private apartments; while she had the annoyance of seeing Mademoiselle de Hautefort exercise the most unlimited influence over the mind of the King, and perpetually accompany him on his excursions to St. Germain and Fontainebleau, not only as an invited but also as an honoured guest. Meanwhile Gaston, who was aware of the empire which he exercised over his mother, and who sought to harass the Cardinal, was assiduous in his attentions to the two Queens; a persistence which so alarmed Richelieu that he did not hesitate to insinuate to his royal master that the Prince was more devoted to Anne of Austria than was consistent with their relative positions; and thus he succeeded in arousing within the breast of Louis a jealousy as unseemly as it was unprovoked. The continued sterility of the Spanish Princess and the utter estrangement of the august couple, while it irritated and mortified the young Queen, served, however, to sustain the hopes of Marie de Medicis, who looked upon her younger son as the assured heir to the crown, and supported both him and Anne in their animosity to Richelieu.

Two powerful factions consequently divided the French Court at the close of the year 1630; Louis XIII, falsifying the pledge which he had given to the Queen-mother and Monsieur, had abandoned his sceptre to the grasp of an ambitious and unscrupulous minister, whose adherents, emulating the example of their sovereign, made no attempt to limit his power, or to contend against his will; while, with the sole exception of the King himself, all the royal family were leagued against an usurpation as monstrous as it was dishonouring. The sky of the courtly horizon was big with clouds, and all awaited with anxiety the outburst of the impending tempest.

At this ungenial period Louis XIII gave a splendid entertainment at the Louvre, to which he personally bade the Cardinal, who eagerly availed himself of so favourable an opportunity of mortifying the Queen-mother, by dividing with his sovereign the homage and adulation of the great nobles. Already had many of the guests arrived, and amid the flourish of trumpets, the melody of the royal musicians, the glare of torches, and the rustling of silks and cloth of

gold, the great staircase and the grand gallery were rapidly becoming crowded; while groups might be seen scattered through the state apartments conversing in suppressed tones, some anxiously expecting the entrance of the King, and others as impatiently awaiting the arrival of the all-powerful minister. One of these groups, and that perhaps the most inimical of all that brilliant assemblage to the Cardinal, was composed of the two MM. de Marillac, the Duc de Guise, and the Marquis de Bassompierre. As they conversed earnestly with one another, the three first-named nobles remained grave and stern, as though they had met together to discuss some subject of vital and absorbing interest rather than to participate in the festivities of a monarch, while even Bassompierre himself seemed ill at ease, and strove in vain to assume his usual light and frivolous demeanour.

"His Eminence moves tardily to night," he said in reply to a remark of the Duke. "Can it be that we shall not have the honour of seeing him exhibit his crimson robes on this magnificent occasion?"

"It would seem so," was the moody rejoinder, "for time wears, and the King himself cannot delay his entrance much longer. Be wary, gentlemen, for should Richelieu indeed arrive, he will be dangerous tonight. I watched him narrowly at noon, and I remarked that he smiled more than once when there was no visible cause for mirth, and you well known what his smiles portend."

"Too well," said the Maréchal de Marillac; "death, or at best disgrace to some new victim. Shame to our brave France that she should submit even for a day to be thus priest-ridden!"

By an excess of caution the four nobles had gradually retreated to an obscure recess, half concealed by some heavy drapery; and Bassompierre, in an attitude of easy indifference, stood leaning against the tapestried panels that divided the sumptuous apartment which they occupied from an inner closet that had not been thrown open to the guests. Unfortunately, however, the peculiar construction of this closet was unknown even to the brilliant Gentleman of the Bedchamber, or he would have been at once aware that they could not have chosen a more dangerous position in which to discuss any forbidden topic. The trite proverb that "walls have ears" was perhaps never more fully exemplified than when applied to those of the Louvre at that period; many of them, and those all connected with the more public apartments, being composed of double panelling, between which a sufficient space had been left to admit of the passage of an eavesdropper, and the closet in question chanced to be one of these convenient lurking-places. A slight stir in the courtly crowd had for a moment interrupted the conversation, but as it almost immediately subsided, the subject by which the imprudent courtiers were engrossed was resumed; and meanwhile the Cardinal-Minister had arrived at the palace. He was not, however, attended by his train of gentlemen and guards; his name had not been announced by the royal ushers, nor had he yet joined the gorgeous company who were all prepared to do him honour. Since his interview with the King at Versailles he had apprehended treachery, and had consequently resolved to leave no means untried for discovering the truth of his suspicions. Various circumstances had tended to point those suspicions towards Bassompierre, and anxious, if possible, to test their validity, he determined to make an effort to surprise the incautious noble during a moment of frivolity and recklessness. Acting upon this impulse, he threw aside his ecclesiastical dress, and assuming that of a private citizen, as he was frequently in the habit of doing when he desired to escape observation, he alighted from his carriage near the Tuileries, and gained the Louvre on foot, entirely unattended.

On reaching the palace he inquired of the officer on duty if M. de Bassompierre had yet arrived.

"He has, Monseigneur," replied the captain of the royal guard; "the Maréchal and several of his friends were conversing when I last traversed the blue hall, near the book-closet of his Majesty."

Marie de Medicis

Richelieu nodded his thanks, and hastily turning into a side-gallery, he made his way to the treacherous closet by a private staircase, followed by Père Joseph who had been awaiting him, and in a few minutes they found themselves in the immediate neighbourhood of their intended victim.

During this time the King, the two Queens, and the Duc d'Orléans had made their entrance, and were slowly passing round the several *salons* uttering courteous welcomes to the assembled guests, and the royal party had no sooner swept by the group to which we have alluded, than the Duc de Guise exclaimed disdainfully, "Richelieu has learnt to fear at last! Here is the King, and he has not yet ventured to trust his sacred person within the grasp of his enemies."

"He does well," said the younger Marillac, "for he is perhaps aware that although the wolf may prowl for awhile in safety, he is not always able to regain his lair with equal security. Is there no man bold enough to deliver the kingdom from this monster? Has he not yet shed blood enough? Let his fate be once placed in my hands and it shall soon be decided by the headsman."

"Heard you that?" whispered the Cardinal to his companion, as he wiped away the cold perspiration from his forehead, and again applied his ear to the wainscotted partition.

"Nay, nay, Maréchal," interposed De Guise with a bitter laugh, "you are inexorable! Let the man live, and do not seek to emulate his bloodthirstiness. His exile will content me, provided that it be accompanied by the confiscation of his ill-gotten wealth."

"So, so; you are indulgent, Monsieur le Duc," again murmured Richelieu.

"For my part," said Bassompierre with affected clemency, "I do not advocate such extreme measures; there is no lack of accommodation in the Bastille; why send him on his travels either in this world or the next when he can be so snugly housed, and at so small an outlay to the state, until his Satanic Majesty sees fit to fetch him home?"

"Do not seek to pollute the ancient edifice by such a tenant," said the elder Marillac; "good men and gallant soldiers are at times housed in the fortress, who would ill brook the companionship of such a room-fellow. Have you forgotten our galleys, M. de Bassompierre? His Eminence would there bask in a southern sun as clear as his own conscience."

These words had scarcely escaped the lips of the speaker, when close beside, and even as it seemed in the very midst of the incautious group, was heard the hard dry cough of the subject of their discourse. It was a sound not to be mistaken, and as it fell upon their ears the four nobles started, gazed upon each other, and grew pale with a terror which they were unable to control. They at once felt that they had been overheard, and that their fate was sealed. In another instant, and without exchanging a word, they separated; but the die was cast, and the precaution came too late.

The Cardinal had no sooner assured himself that the conference was at an end, than he emerged from his hiding-place, and advancing to the centre of the closet, he cast himself heavily upon a seat, exclaiming with bitter irony, "What think you, my reverend Father, are not these wily conspirators? Are not these prudent and proper counsellors for an ambitious and headstrong woman? But they have done me good service, and I thank them. Let me see; I love justice, and I must not wrong even those who have the will to be less forbearing to myself. A pen, Joseph, a pen, lest my memory prove treacherous and I disappoint their tastes."

The Capuchin hastened to obey; writing implements stood upon the table near which the Cardinal was seated; and in another moment he was scribbling, in the ill-formed and straggling characters peculiar to him, upon the back of a despatch.

"So, so," he muttered between his set teeth, "the gallant Maréchal de Marillac has an affection for the block: so be it; a scaffold is easily constructed. And M. de Guise is an amateur of exile and of beggary: truly it were a pity to thwart his fancy; and France can well spare a prince or two without making bankrupt of her dignity. Bassompierre, the volatile and restless

Marie de Medicis

Bassompierre, the hero of the Court dames, and the idol of the Court ballets, favours the seclusion of a prison; there is space enough for him in the one which he has selected, and his gorgeous habiliments will produce the happiest effect when contrasted with the gloomy walls of the good old fortress. And my colleague, my destined successor, did he not talk of the galleys? I had never given him credit for sufficient energy to prefer the oar to the pen, and the chain of a felon to the seals of a minister of state; but since he will have it so, by the soul of Jean du Plessis, so shall it be!"

And as he terminated this envenomed monologue the Cardinal thrust the fatal paper into his breast, and clasped his hands convulsively together; his dim eyes flashed fire, his thin lips quivered, his pale countenance became livid, and the storm of concentrated passion shook his frail form as with an ague-fit.

"The day is your own," said the Capuchin calmly; "you are now face to face with your enemies, and you know all the joints in their armour. Every blow may be rendered a mortal one."

Richelieu smiled. The paroxysm of fury had subsided, and he was once more cold, and stern, and self-possessed. "We lose time," he said, "and I have yet to play the courtier. Are my robes ready?"

"All is prepared," quietly replied his companion, as he withdrew from the closet, where he shortly reappeared laden with the sumptuous costume of his friend and patron. A few minutes sufficed for the necessary metamorphosis; the citizen-vestment was cast aside, the crimson drapery flung over the shoulders of its owner, the jewelled cross adjusted on his breast; and before the detected nobles had recovered from their consternation, the Cardinal was solemnly traversing the crowded halls surrounded by the adulation of the assembled Court. As he advanced to pay his respects to the sovereigns, he encountered Bassompierre, whom he greeted with a smile of more than usual cordiality; and the Duc de Guise, to whom he addressed a few words of courteous recognition; but the one felt that the smile was a stab, and the other that the greeting was a menace.

History has taught us the justice of those forebodings.

And still the festival went on; the fairest women of the Court fluttered and glittered like gilded butterflies from place to place; princes and nobles, attired in all the gorgeous magnificence of the time, formed a living mosaic of splendour on the marble floors; floating perfumes escaped from jewelled *cassolettes*; light laughter was blent with music and with song; the dance sped merrily; and heaps of gold rapidly exchanged owners at the play tables. Nor was the scene less dazzling without; the environs of the Louvre were brilliantly illuminated; fireworks ascended from floating rafts anchored in the centre of the river; and troops of comedians, conjurers, and soothsayers thronged all the approaches to the palace. It was truly a regal *fête*; and when the dawn began to gleam, pale and calm through the open casements, a hundred voices echoed the parting salutation of the Cardinal-Minister to his royal host, as he said, bowing profoundly, "None save yourself, Sire, could have afforded to his guests so vivid a glimpse of fairy-land as we have had to-night. Not a shade of gloom, nor a care for the future, can have intruded itself in such a scene of enchantment. I appeal to those around me. How say you, M. de Guise? and you, M. de Bassompierre? Shall we not depart hence with light hearts and tranquil spirits, grateful for so many hours of unalloyed and almost unequalled happiness?"

The silence of the two nobles to whom his Eminence had thus addressed himself fortunately passed unobserved amid the chorus of assenting admiration which burst forth on all sides; and with this final strain of the moral rack the Cardinal took his leave of the two foredoomed victims of his vengeance.

CHAPTER VIII

1631

In order, as he asserted, to protect the interests of France, Richelieu had strictly forbidden all further correspondence between Anne of Austria and her royal brother Philip of Spain; and had further informed her that she would no longer be permitted to receive the Marquis de Mirabel, the Spanish Ambassador, who had hitherto been her constant visitor and the medium of her intercourse with her family. Indignant at such an interference with her most private feelings, Anne revolted against a tyranny which aroused her southern pride; and complaining that the close confinement to which she was subjected at the Louvre had affected her health, she demanded permission to retire to the Val de Grâce; a proposal which was eminently grateful to the Cardinal, who desired above all things to separate her from the Queen-mother. She had, however, no sooner left the palace than she caused M. de Mirabel to be apprised of the place of her retreat; at the same time informing him that she should continue to expect his visits, although he must thenceforward make them as privately as possible. In compliance with these instructions, the Ambassador alighted from his carriage at some distance from the Val de Grâce, and proceeded on foot to the convent generally towards the dusk of the evening, believing that by these precautions he should be enabled to baffle the vigilance of the watchful minister. He was, however, soon destined to be undeceived, as Richelieu, having ascertained the fact, openly denounced these meetings in the Council, expatiating upon the fatal effects of which they might be productive to France; while Marie de Medicis boldly supported her daughter-in-law, declaring that any minister who presumed to give laws to the wife of his sovereign exceeded his privilege, and must be prepared to encounter her legitimate and authorized opposition.

In this assertion she was, moreover, supported by the Duc d'Orléans, who considered himself aggrieved by the non-performance of the promises made by Richelieu to his favourites. He had, it is true, in his turn pledged himself to the King that he would no longer oppose the measures of the minister; but the pledges of Monsieur were known to be as unstable as water; and his chivalrous spirit was, moreover, aroused by the harsh treatment of his young and beautiful sister-in-law, with whom he passed a great portion of his time. More than once he had surprised her bathed in tears, had listened to the detail of her wrongs, and soothed her sorrows; and, finally, he had vowed to revenge them.

It would appear that on this occasion at least he was in earnest, as on the 1st of January 1631, when the intense cold rendered the outward air almost unendurable, and the Cardinal had remained throughout the whole morning in his easy chair, rolled up in furs, beside a blazing fire, Monsieur was suddenly announced, and immediately entered the apartment, followed by a numerous train of nobles. Richelieu rose in alarm to receive him, for he remembered a previous visit of Monsieur which was as unexpected as the present one, and probably not more threatening.

"To what, Sir," he asked with a slight tremor in his voice, as he advanced towards the Prince with a profound bow, "am I to attribute the honour of this unexpected favour?"

"To my anxiety to apprise you," said Gaston without returning his salutation, "that it was contrary to my own inclination that I lately promised you my friendship. I recall that promise, for I cannot keep it to a man of your description, who, moreover, insults my mother."

As the Prince ceased speaking the nobles by whom he was accompanied laid their hands upon their swords, and the petrified Cardinal stood speechless and motionless before them, unable to articulate a syllable.

Marie de Medicis

"As for myself," pursued Gaston, "I have too long submitted to your insolence, and you deserve that I should chastise you as I would a lackey. Your priestly robe alone protects you from my vengeance; but beware! You are now warned; and henceforward nothing shall form your security against the chastisement reserved for those who outrage persons of my quality. For the present I shall retire to Orleans, but you will soon hear of me again at the head of an armed force; and then, Monsieur le Cardinal, we will decide who shall hold precedence in France, a Prince of the Blood Royal, or a nameless adventurer."

With this threat, Monsieur turned and left the room, closely followed by the Cardinal, whom he overwhelmed with insult until he had descended the stairs; and even while the pale and agitated minister obsequiously held the stirrup to assist him to mount, he continued his vituperations; then, snatching at the bridle, he dashed through the gates, and disappeared at full speed with his retinue.

Alarmed at the menacing attitude assumed by the Duc d'Orléans, Richelieu renewed his attempts to conciliate the Queen-mother, not only personally, but also through the medium of those about her. All these efforts, however, proved abortive; and although the King himself deeply and openly resented her resolute estrangement from the Cardinal, by whom he was at this period entirely governed, nothing could induce her to listen to such a proposal; and she was further strengthened in her resolve by the representations of her partisans, who constantly assured her of her popularity with the people, and asserted that they were loud in their denunciations of the weakness of the sovereign, and the tyranny of his minister; while they anticipated from their experience of the past that she would, by maintaining her own dignity, place some curb upon the encroaching ambition of a man who was rapidly undermining the monarchy, and sapping the foundations of the throne.

Having failed in this endeavour, Richelieu resolved no longer to delay his cherished project of effecting the exile of his former benefactress; and as a preliminary measure, he no sooner ascertained that the Duc d'Orléans had indeed retired to his government than he insinuated to Louis that Monsieur had been instigated to this overt act of opposition by the counsels of Marie de Medicis. When reproached with this new offence, the Queen-mother denied that she had encouraged the Prince to leave the capital; bitterly remarking that she was not so rich in friends as to desire the absence of any who still remembered that she was the mother and mother-in-law of the two greatest monarchs in Europe; that she had given one Queen to England, another to Spain, and a female sovereign to Savoy; and that she was moreover the widow of Henry the Great.

Little credence was, however, vouchsafed to these disclaimers; the Cardinal coldly remarking that Gaston never acted save in conformity with her will; and Louis loudly declaring that his brother had been urged to his disobedience entirely by herself, in order to gratify her hatred of his minister.

The struggle continued. Encouraged by her adherents, and calculating on the feeble health of the King, who had never rallied from the severe attack by which he had been prostrated at Lyons, Marie de Medicis still flattered herself that she should ultimately triumph; an opinion in which she was confirmed by the astrologers, in whom, as we have already shown, she placed the most unbounded faith. One of these charlatans had assured her that at the close of the year 1631 she would be more powerful and fortunate than she had ever before been; and she had such perfect confidence in the prophecy that when it was uttered, although at that period surrounded by difficulty and danger, she had replied with a calm and satisfied smile: "That is sufficient. I have therefore now only to be careful of my health."

The retirement of Monsieur to Orleans tended to strengthen these idle and baseless hopes; and the flatterers of the Queen-mother consequently found little difficulty in persuading her that ere long half the nation would rise to avenge her wrongs; that all the great nobles would rally round the Duc d'Orléans; and that the principal cities, weary of the despotism of Richelieu, would declare in favour of the heir-presumptive, in the event of the King still seeking to support his obnoxious minister.

Marie de Medicis

Misled by these assurances, and consulting only her own passions, Marie de Medicis no longer hesitated. She refused to acknowledge the authority of the Cardinal, not only as regarded her own personal affairs, but also in matters of state; and absented herself from the Council, loudly declaring that her only aim in life hereafter would be to accomplish his ruin. The infatuated Princess had ceased to remember that she was braving no common adversary, and that she was heaping up coals of fire which could not fail one day to fall back upon her own head; for resolute, fearless, and vehement as she was, she had to contend against the first diplomatist of the age, whose whole career had already sufficiently demonstrated that he was utterly uninfluenced by those finer feelings which have so frequently prevented a good man from becoming great. What were to Richelieu the memories of the past? Mere incentives to the ambition of the future. Concini had been his first friend, and he had abandoned him to the steel of the assassin so soon as his patronage had become oppressive. Marie herself had overwhelmed him with benefits, but she had now lost her power, and he, who had won, was resolved to keep it. He had dared to talk of passion to the wife of his sovereign, by whom he had been repulsed, and fearfully had he resented the affront. Such a man was no meet antagonist for the impulsive and imprudent Princess who had now entered the lists against him; and the issue of the conflict was certain.

Richelieu meekly bent his head before the storm of words by which he was assailed, but he did not remain inactive. Having resolved to terminate a rivalry for power which disorganized all his measures and fettered all his movements; and, moreover, to retain the influence which he had acquired over the mind of the weak and indolent monarch; he held long and frequent conferences with the Capuchin Father Joseph, in which it was finally decided that the Cardinal should induce his royal master to exile his mother to Moulins or some other fortified city at a distance from the capital, under a strong guard; and afterwards to surprise Monsieur and take him prisoner, before he should have time to fortify himself in Orleans, or to establish his residence in a frontier province where he could be assisted by the Emperor of Germany or the King of Spain; both of whom were at that moment earnestly endeavouring to foment discord in the French Court, and would not fail to embrace so favourable an opportunity, should time be allowed for the Prince to solicit their aid.

Had Marie de Medicis possessed more caution, Richelieu might well have doubted his power to induce her to leave the capital, where her popularity would have ensured her safety; but he had not forgotten that when he sought to dissuade her from following her son in his Italian campaign, she had resolutely replied: "I will accompany the King wherever he may see fit to go; and I will never cease to demand justice upon the author of the dissensions which now embitter the existence of the royal family."

Convinced that she would keep her word, and anxious to see her safely beyond the walls of Paris, the Cardinal accordingly began to impress more urgently than ever upon Louis his conviction that a conspiracy had been formed against his authority, if not against his life; and that not only were the Queen-mother and Monsieur involved in this nefarious plot, but also some of the greatest nobles and ladies of the Court. As he had anticipated, the King at once took alarm, and entreated him to devise some method by which he might evade so great a danger.

"Your Majesty may rest assured that I have not neglected so imperative a duty," replied Richelieu with a calm smile which at once tended to reassure his royal dupe. "If the peril be great, the means of escape are easy. You have only, Sire, to leave Paris, and organize a hunt at Compiègne. The Queen-mother will no doubt follow you thither; in which case we will profit by the opportunity to make her such advantageous offers as may induce her to accede to your wishes, and to separate herself from the cabal; and even in the event of her declining the journey, and remaining in Paris during your absence, we may equally succeed in removing from about her person the individuals who are now labouring to excite her discontent; and this object once attained, there can be little doubt that she will become more yielding and submissive. Monsieur is, as I am informed, about to levy troops in the different provinces, and to provoke a civil war; but he will, as a natural consequence, abandon this project when

deprived of the support of the Queen, and will be ready to make his submission when he is no longer in correspondence with her Majesty."

Louis eagerly acceded to the suggestion of the crafty Cardinal, and desired that preparations might be made for his departure in the course of the ensuing month; expressing at the same time his sense of the service rendered to him by the minister. Richelieu felt the whole extent of his triumph. Once beyond the walls of Paris, Marie de Medicis was in the toils, and her overthrow was assured; while, as he had anticipated, on being informed of the projected journey, she at once declared her determination to accompany the King, and resolutely refused to listen to the exhortations of her friends, by whom she was earnestly dissuaded from leaving the capital.

"You argue in vain," she said firmly. "If I had only followed the King to Versailles, the Cardinal would now be out of France, or in a prison. May it please God that I never again commit the same error!"

In accordance with this decision the Queen-mother accordingly made the necessary preparations; and on the 17th of February the Court set forth for Compiègne, to the great satisfaction of the minister; who, well aware of the impossibility of accomplishing any reconciliation with his indignant mistress, lost no time in entreating Louis to endeavour once more to effect this object. Richelieu desired to appear in the *rôle* of a victim, while he was in fact the tyrant of this great domestic drama; but the weak sovereign was incompetent to unravel the tangled mesh of his wily policy; and it was therefore with eagerness that he lent himself to this new subterfuge.

Vautier was, as we have stated, not only the physician but also the confidential friend of Marie de Medicis; and the King consequently resolved to avail himself of his influence. He was accordingly summoned to the royal presence, and there Louis expressed to him his earnest desire that the past should be forgotten, and that henceforward his mother and himself might live in peace and amity; to which end he declared it to be absolutely essential that the Queen should forego her animosity to the Cardinal.

"I have faith in your fidelity, Sir," he said graciously, "and I request of you to urge this upon her Majesty, for I am weary of these perpetual broils. Assure her in my name that if she will consent to my wishes in this respect, and assist as she formerly did at the Council, she will secure alike my affection and my respect. She must, moreover, give a written pledge not to compromise the safety of the state by any political intrigue, and to abandon to my just resentment all such persons as may hereafter incur my displeasure, with the exception only of the members of her immediate household. On these conditions I am ready to forgive and to forget the events of the last few months."

To this proposition Marie de Medicis replied that her most anxious desire was to live in good understanding with her son and sovereign, but that she could not consent to occupy a seat in the Council with Richelieu, nor to give in writing a pledge for which her royal word should be a sufficient guarantee, as she considered that both the one concession and the other would be unworthy of her dignity as a Queen, and her self-respect as a woman.

Such was precisely the result which had been anticipated by the astute Cardinal, who, as he cast himself at the feet of the King, bitterly inveighed against the inflexibility of Marie, and renewed his entreaties that he might be permitted to resign office, and to withdraw for ever from a Court where he had been so unhappy as to cause dissension between the two persons whom he most loved and honoured upon earth. This was the favourite expedient of Richelieu, who always saw the pale cheek of Louis become yet paler under the threat; and on the present occasion it was even more successful than usual. Ever ready to credit the most extravagant reports when they involved his personal safety, the King looked upon the Cardinal as the only barrier between himself and assassination; and impressed with this conviction, he raised him up, embraced him fervently, and assured him that no consideration should ever induce him to dispense with his services; that the enemies of Richelieu were his enemies; the friends of Richelieu his friends; and that he held himself indebted to his devotion not only for his throne,

but for his life. The minister received his acknowledgments with well-acted humility; and encouraged by the success of his first attempt, resolved to profit by the opportunity thus afforded him for completing the work of vengeance which he had so skilfully commenced. He consequently declared that it was with reluctance he was compelled to admit that although by the gracious consent of his Majesty to adopt the measures which he had formerly proposed, the peril at which he had hinted had been greatly lessened, it was nevertheless essential to prevent the reorganization of so dangerous a cabal; and that in order to do this effectually it became imperative upon the King to arrest, and even to exile, certain individuals who had been involved in the intrigue.

At that moment Louis, who considered that he had been delivered from almost certain destruction through the perspicacity and zeal of his minister, felt no disposition to dissent from any of his views, and he unhesitatingly expressed his readiness to sanction whatever measures he might deem necessary; upon which Richelieu, without further preamble, laid before him the list of his intended victims. At the head of these figured Bassompierre, whose recent abandonment the vindictive Cardinal had not forgotten, and the two Marillacs. The Abbé de Foix and the physician Vautier, both of whom were in the confidence of the Queen-mother, were also destined to expiate their fidelity to her cause in the Bastille; while the Princesse de Conti and the Duchesses d'Elboeuf, d'Ornano, de Lesdiguières, and de Roannois, all of whom were her fast friends, were sentenced to banishment; and it was further decided that, on his departure from Compiègne, the King should leave his mother in that city under the guard of the Maréchal d'Estrées, at the head of nearly a thousand men, exclusive of fifty gendarmes and as many light-horse; and that he should be accompanied to the capital by Anne of Austria, in order to separate her from the Queen-mother.

The situation of Marie de Medicis was desperate. Day after day she solicited a private interview with the monarch, and on every occasion of their meeting she found Richelieu in the royal closet, invulnerable alike to her disdain and to her sarcasm. One word from the King would of course have compelled him to withdraw, but that word was never uttered; for with the timidity inherent to a weak mind, Louis dreaded to be left alone with his destined victim. Bigoted and superstitious, he had his moments of remorse, in which his conscience reproached him for the crime of which he was about to render himself guilty towards the author of his existence; but these qualms assailed him only during the absence of his minister, and thus he overcame them by the constant companionship of the stronger spirit by whom he was ruled. Unable to act of himself, the purple robes of the Cardinal were his safeguard and his refuge; nor was Richelieu unwilling to accept the responsibility thus thrust upon him. His Eminence had no scruples, no weaknesses, no misgivings; he knew his power, and he exercised it without shrinking. Had the unhappy Queen been permitted only a few hours of undisturbed communion with her son, it is probable that she might have awakened even in his selfish bosom other and better feelings; she might have taught him to listen to the voice of nature and of conscience; the mother's heart might have triumphed over the statesman's head; but no such opportunity was afforded to her; and while she was still making fruitless efforts to attain her object, the King, at the instigation of the Cardinal, summoned a privy council, at which Châteauneuf, the new Keeper of the Seals and the tool of Richelieu, openly accused her not only of ingratitude to the monarch, but also of conducting a secret correspondence with the Spanish Cabinet, and of having induced Monsieur to leave the country; and concluded by declaring that stringent measures should be adopted against her.

When desired to declare his opinion on this difficult question, Richelieu at first affected great unwillingness to interfere, alleging that he was personally interested in the result; but the King having commanded him to speak, he threw off all restraint, and represented the Queen-mother as the focus of all the intrigues both foreign and domestic by which the nation was convulsed; together with the utter impossibility of ensuring the safety of the King so long as she remained at liberty to pursue the policy which she had seen fit to adopt, alike against the sovereign and the state. In conclusion, he emphatically reminded his hearers that weak remedies only tended to aggravate great evils, which latter on the contrary were overcome by those proportioned to their magnitude; and that consequently, at such a crisis as that under consideration, there was but one alternative: either to effect a peace with foreign powers on

sure and honourable terms, or to conciliate the Queen-mother and the Duc d'Orléans; either to dismiss himself from office, or to remove from about the person of the Queen the individuals by whom she was instigated to opposition against the will of the King and the welfare of the state; and to beg of her to absent herself for some time from the Court, lest, without desiring to do so, she should by her presence induce a continuance of the disorder which it was the object of all loyal subjects to suppress. He then craftily insisted upon the peculiar character of Marie herself, whom he painted in the most odious colours. He declared her to be false and revengeful; qualities which he attributed to her Italian origin, and to her descent from the Medici, who never forgave an injury; and, finally, he stated that all which they had to decide was whether it would be most advantageous for the King to dismiss from office a minister who had unfortunately become obnoxious to the whole of the royal family, in order to secure peace in his domestic circle, or to exile the Queen-mother and those who encouraged her in her animosity against him. As regarded himself, he said proudly, that could his absence from the Court tend to heal the existing dissensions, he was ready to depart upon the instant, and should do so without hesitation or remonstrance; but that it remained to be seen if his retirement would suffice to satisfy the malcontents; or whether they would not, by involving others in his overthrow, endeavour to possess themselves of the supreme authority.

This insinuation, insolent as it was (for it intimated no less than the utter incapacity of Louis to uphold his own prerogative, and the probability that Richelieu once removed, Marie de Medicis would resume all her former power), produced a visible effect upon the King.

"My conviction is therefore," concluded the Cardinal, "that his Majesty should annihilate the faction sanctioned by the Queen-mother, by requesting her to retire to a distance from the capital, and by removing from about her person the evil counsellors who have instigated her to rebellion; but that this should be done with great consideration, and with all possible respect. And as by these means the cabal would be dispersed, and my colleagues in the ministry be thus enabled once more to serve the sovereign and the state in perfect security, I humbly solicit of his Majesty the royal permission to tender my resignation."

This climax, as usual, instantly decided Louis XIII, although as a necessary form he demanded the collective opinion of the Council; who, one and all, represented the retirement of the Cardinal from office as an expedient at once dangerous and impracticable. The die was cast; and after a vague and puerile expressions of regret at the necessity thus forced upon him of once more separating himself from his mother, Louis pronounced the banishment of Marie de Medicis from the Court, and then retired from the hall leaning upon the arm of Richelieu, who found little difficulty in convincing him of the expediency of taking his departure before his intention became known to the ill-fated Queen.

This advice was peculiarly welcome to the cowardly King, who dreaded above all things the reproaches and tears of his widowed and outraged mother; and accordingly, on the 23rd of February, he was on foot at three in the morning; and had no sooner completed his toilet than he sent to desire the presence of the Jesuit Suffren, his confessor.

"When the Queen my mother shall have awoken," he said hurriedly, "do not fail to inform her that I regret to take my departure without seeing her; and that in a few days I will acquaint her with my wishes."

Such was his last greeting to the unhappy Princess, who had gone to rest without one suspicion that on the morrow she should find herself a prisoner, abandoned by her son, and bereft of her dearest friends; and meanwhile another scene was taking place in a distant wing of the palace, which has been so graphically described by Madame de Motteville that we shall transcribe it in her own words:

"At daybreak some one knocked loudly at the door of the Queen's chamber. On hearing this noise, Anne of Austria, whom it had awakened, called her women, and inquired whether it was the King who demanded admittance, as he was the only individual who was entitled to take so great a liberty. While giving this order she drew back the curtain of her bed, and perceiving with alarm that it was scarcely light, a vague sentiment of terror took possession of

her mind. As she was always doubtful, and with great reason, of the King's feeling towards her, she persuaded herself that she was about to receive some fatal intelligence, and felt assured that the least evil which she had to apprehend was her exile from France. Regarding this moment, therefore, as one which must decide the whole of her future destiny, she endeavoured to recall her self-possession in order to meet the blow with becoming courage ... and when the first shock of her terror had passed by, she determined to receive submissively whatever trial Heaven might see fit to inflict upon her. She consequently commanded that the door of her apartment should be opened; and as her first *femme de chambre* announced that the person who demanded admittance was the Keeper of the Seals, who had been entrusted with a message to her Majesty from the King, she became convinced that her fears had not deceived her. This apprehension was, however, dispelled by the address of the envoy, who merely informed the Queen that her royal consort desired to make known to her that, for certain reasons of state, he found himself compelled to leave his mother at Compiègne under the guard of the Maréchal d'Estrées; that he begged her instantly to rise; to abstain from again seeing the ex-Regent; and to join him without loss of time at the Capuchin Convent, whither he had already proceeded, and where he should await her coming.

"Anne of Austria, although alike distressed and amazed by this intelligence, made no comment upon so extraordinary a communication; but after having briefly expressed her readiness to obey the command of the King, she left her bed; and while doing so, despatched the Marquise de Seneçay, her lady of honour, to tell the unfortunate Marie de Medicis that she was anxious to see her, as she had an affair of importance to reveal; while for certain reasons she could not venture to her apartment until she had herself sent to request her to do so. The Queen-mother, who knew nothing of the resolution which had been taken, but who was in hourly apprehension of a renewal of her former sufferings, did not lose a moment in profiting by the suggestion; and Anne of Austria had no sooner received the expected summons than she threw on a dressing-gown and hurried to the chamber of her royal relative, whom she found seated in her bed, and clasping her knees with her hands in a state of bewildered agitation. On the entrance of her daughter-in-law, the unhappy Princess exclaimed in a tone of anguish:

"Ah! my daughter, I am then to die or be made a prisoner. Is the King about to leave me here? What does he intend to do with me?"

"Anne of Austria, bathed in tears, could only reply by throwing herself into the arms of the helpless victim; and for a while they wept together in silence.

"The wife of Louis had, however, little time to spend in speechless sympathy, and ere long she communicated to Marie de Medicis the cruel resolution of the King, and conjured her to bear her banishment with patience until they should be revenged upon their common enemy, the Cardinal. They then parted with mutual expressions of sympathy and affection; and, as it ultimately proved, they never met again."

During the course of this brief and melancholy interview, the young Queen, with the assistance of her royal mother-in-law, completed her toilet; and then after their hurried leavetaking hastened to rejoin the King, who had already evinced great impatience at her delay. But however consoled she might have been by her own escape on this occasion, Anne of Austria was nevertheless condemned to suffer her share of humiliation, for she had no sooner reached the Convent than Louis formally presented to her Madame de la Flotte as her First Lady of Honour, and her grand-daughter Mademoiselle de Hautefort as her next attendant; while upon her expressing her astonishment at such an arrangement, she was informed that the Comtesse du Fargis, who was replaced by Madame de la Flotte, had been banished from the Court, and that other great ladies had shared the same fate.

The will of Richelieu had indeed proved omnipotent. Not one of those whom he had doomed to disgrace was suffered to escape without submitting to humiliations degrading to their rank. The unfortunate Princesse de Conti, the sister of the Duc de Guise, whose only crime was her attachment to her royal mistress, and her love for Bassompierre, was exiled to Eu; where her separation from the Queen, and the imprisonment of the Maréchal, so preyed

Marie de Medicis

upon her mind that she died within two months of a broken heart; while all was alarm and consternation in the capital, where the greatest and the proudest in the land trembled alike for their lives and for their liberties.

Of all the victims of the Cardinal the Queen-mother was, however, the most wretched and the most hopeless. So soon as Anne of Austria had quitted her apartment, feeling herself overcome by the suddenness of the shock to which she had been subjected, she caused her physician M. Vautier to be summoned, and was abruptly informed that he had been arrested, and conveyed a prisoner to Senlis.

"Another!" she murmured piteously. "Another in whom I might have found help and comfort. But all who love me are condemned; and Richelieu triumphs! My history is written in tears and blood. Heaven grant me patience, for I am indeed an uncrowned Queen, and a childless mother."

Her lamentations were interrupted by the announcement of the Maréchal d'Estrées, who having been admitted, communicated to her the will of the King that she should await his further orders at Compiègne.

"Say rather, M. le Maréchal," she exclaimed with a burst of her habitual impetuosity, "that I am henceforth a prisoner, and that you have been promoted to the proud office of a woman's gaoler. What are the next commands which I am to be called on to obey? What is to be my ultimate fate? Speak boldly. There is some new misfortune in reserve, but I shall not shrink. While others suffer for me, I shall find courage to suffer for myself."

"His Majesty, Madame, will doubtless inform you--" commenced the mortified noble.

"So be it then, M. le Maréchal," said Marie haughtily, as she motioned him to retire; "I will await the orders of the King."

Those orders were not long delayed, for on the ensuing morning the Comte de Brienne presented to the imprisoned Princess an autograph letter from Louis XIII, of which the following were the contents:

"I left Compiègne, Madame, without taking leave of you in order to avoid the annoyance of making a personal request which might have caused you some displeasure. I desired to entreat you to retire for a time to the fortress of Moulins, which you had yourself selected as your residence after the death of the late King. Conformably to your marriage contract, you would there, Madame and mother, be at perfect liberty; both yourself and your household. Your absence causes me sincere regret, but the welfare of my kingdom compels me to separate myself from you.

"LOUIS."

As M. de Brienne had received orders to hold no intercourse with the royal captive save in the presence of the Maréchal d'Estrées, it was to the latter noble that Marie de Medicis addressed herself when she had read the cold and heartless letter of her son.

"So, Sir," she exclaimed vehemently, "the King commands me to remove to Moulins! How have I been so unfortunate as to incur his displeasure without having done anything to excite it? Why am I deprived of my physician and the gentlemen of my household? If the King desires to shorten my days he has only to keep me in captivity. It is strange that being the mother of the sovereign I am subjected to the will of his servants; but God will grant me justice. These are not the wishes of my son, but I am the victim of the hatred and persecution of the Cardinal. I know," she pursued, weeping bitterly, "why I am sent to Moulins; it is because it would be easy from that city to compel my departure for Italy; but rest assured, Maréchal d'Estrées, that *I will sooner be dragged naked from my bed than give my consent to such a measure.*"

Marie de Medicis

"Madame," interposed the Comte de Brienne, "had there been any intention to treat you with disrespect, it could have been done with as much facility at Compiègne as at Moulins. I entreat of your Majesty to reflect before you give us your final answer."

Marie profited by this advice; and the result of her deliberations was a determination to make a final effort towards a reconciliation with the King. In the letter which she addressed to him she declared that it was her most anxious desire to merit his favour, and to conform to his wishes. She besought him to remember that she was his mother; to recall all the exertions which she had made for the welfare and preservation of his kingdom; and finally she urged him to disregard the counsels of the Cardinal-Minister in so far as they affected herself, since she knew, from personal experience, that where he once hated he never forgave, and that his ambition and his ingratitude were alike boundless.

The only effect produced by this appeal was an offer to change her place of exile to Angers, should she prefer a residence in that city to Moulins; and in either case to confer upon her the government of whichever of those two provinces she might select. The proposal was indignantly rejected. It was evident that the sole aim of Richelieu was to remove her to a distance from the capital which might impede her communication with the few friends who remained faithful to her; and the anxiety of the Cardinal to effect his object only rendered the Queen-mother the more resolute not to yield.

Meanwhile the position of the Maréchal d'Estrées and M. de Brienne was onerous in the extreme. They had received stringent commands to treat their royal captive with every demonstration of respect and deference, while at the same time they were instructed to prevent her correspondence with the Duc d'Orléans, who had already reached Besançon in Franche-Comté on his way to the duchy of Lorraine, pursued by the royal troops, but nevertheless persisting in his purpose. They were, moreover, to use every argument to induce her consent to leave Compiègne for Moulins; a proposition that never failed to excite her anger, which it was frequently difficult to appease; and the unfortunate Maréchal soon became so weary of the perpetual mortifications to which he was subjected, that he daily wrote to the Cardinal representing the utter impossibility of success. Richelieu, however, would not be discouraged; and he merely replied by the assurance: "I know her well; continue to exert yourself, persist without cessation, and you will at last effect your object."

Meanwhile the King, by the advice of his minister, declared all the nobles by whom Monsieur was accompanied guilty of *lèse-majesté*; a sentence which was considered so extreme by the Parliament that when called upon to register it on their minutes they ventured to remonstrate. This act of justice, however, so exasperated the Cardinal that he forthwith induced Louis to proceed to the capital, and to summon the members to his presence, with an express order that they should approach the Louvre *on foot*. This offensive command was no sooner obeyed than the Keeper of the Seals severely reprimanded them for their disloyalty and disobedience; and before time was afforded for a reply, the King demanded that the official register should be delivered up to him, which was no sooner done than he passionately tore out the leaf upon which the decree had been inscribed, and substituted that of his own Council, by which the Court of Parliament was forbidden all deliberation on declarations of state, at the risk of the suspension of its Councillors, and even of greater penalties, should such be deemed advisable.

This proceeding so much incensed the Duc d'Orléans that he in his turn forwarded a declaration to the Parliament, in which he affirmed that he had quitted the kingdom in consequence of the persecution of the Cardinal de Richelieu, whom he accused of an attempt upon his own life, and upon that of the Queen-mother; which was, as he affirmed, to have been succeeded by a third against the sovereign, in order that the minister might ultimately make himself master of the state; and Monsieur had scarcely taken this step when Marie de Medicis adopted the same policy. The Parliament had in past times warmly seconded her interests; and she still hoped that it would afford her its protection. In the appeal which she made, she dilated in the first place upon her own wrongs; and complained that, without having in anywise intrigued against either the sovereign or the nation, she was kept a close prisoner at

Marie de Medicis

Compiègne; while she, moreover, followed up this representation by accusing Richelieu of all the anarchy which existed in the kingdom, and by demanding to be permitted to appear publicly as his accuser.

The appeal was, however, vain. The Parliament, indignant at the insult which had been offered to them, and alarmed at the violence exhibited by Louis in the affair of Monsieur, would not even consent to open her despatch, but sent it with the seal still unbroken to the King; and thus the unfortunate Princess found herself compelled to abandon a hope by which she had hitherto been sustained. She then sought to interest the people in her favour; and for this purpose she did not scruple to exaggerate the sufferings to which she was subjected by a captivity which she represented as infinitely more rigorous than it was in fact.

Her example was imitated alike by the Duc d'Orléans and the Cardinal-Minister; and ere long the whole nation was deluged with pamphlets, in which each accused the other without measure or decency. Richelieu was, throughout his whole career, partial to this species of warfare, and had able writers constantly in his employ for the express purpose of writing down his enemies when he could not compass their ruin by more speedy means; but on this occasion the violence of Monsieur was so great that the Cardinal began to apprehend the issue of the struggle, and deemed it expedient to terminate all further open aggression against Marie de Medicis. In consequence of this conviction, therefore, he forwarded an order to the Maréchal d'Estrées to withdraw from Compiègne with the troops under his command, and to leave the Queen-mother at perfect liberty, provided she were willing to pledge herself to remain in that town until she should receive the royal permission to select another residence.

It is probable that when the minister exacted this promise he was as little prepared for its observance as was Marie when she conceded it; for she had no sooner become convinced that her star had waned before that of Richelieu, than she determined to effect her escape so soon as she should have secured a place of refuge, whence she could, should she see fit to do so, retire to the Spanish Low Countries, and throw herself upon the protection of the Archduchess Isabella. Having once arrived at this decision, the Queen-mother resolved, if possible, to seek an asylum at La Capelle, which, being a frontier town, offered all the necessary facilities for her project; and for this purpose she despatched a trusty messenger to Madame de Vardes, whose husband was governor of the place during the temporary absence of his father, and who was herself a former mistress of Henri IV, and the mother of the Comte de Moret. Flattered by the confidence reposed in her, Madame de Vardes lost no time in exerting her influence over the ambitious spirit of her husband, whom the Duc d'Orléans promised to recompense by the rank of Gentleman of Honour to the Princess to whom he was about to be united; and ere long M. de Vardes, who saw before him a career of greatness and favour should the faction of Monsieur finally triumph, suffered himself to be seduced from his duty to the King, and consented to deliver up the town which had been confided to his keeping to the Queen-mother and her adherents. This important object achieved, Marie, who was aware that should the royal troops march upon La Capelle it would be impossible to withstand their attack, hastened to entreat the help of the Archduchess in case of need, and also her permission to retire to the Low Countries should the persecution of the Cardinal ultimately compel her to fly from France.

The rapid successes of the King of Sweden in Germany, and the extraordinary strength of the States-General in the United Provinces, had greatly alarmed both the Emperor and the King of Spain; who were consequently well pleased to encourage any internal agitation which might so fully tend to occupy the attention of Louis as to prevent him from rendering effective aid either to Gustavus, the United Provinces, or the Protestant Princes of Germany, nearly the whole of whom were in arms against the Emperor; and thus the request of Marie was eagerly welcomed alike by Ferdinand, Philip, and Isabella, who pledged themselves to assist her to the full extent of their power. The Court of Brussels especially made her the most unqualified promises; and the Archduchess, while assuring her that on her arrival she should be received with all the honour due to her distinguished rank, was profuse in her expressions of sympathy.

Marie de Medicis

Thus, as we have shown, when Richelieu demanded and received the promise of Marie de Medicis that she would not seek to leave Compiègne, she was only awaiting a favourable opportunity to effect her escape, and this was afforded by the evacuation of the garrison. Fearful, however, that this new order might only be a snare laid for her by the Cardinal, and aware that although the troops had left the town they were still quartered in the environs, she affected to discredit the assurance of the Maréchal that thenceforth he exercised no control over her movements.

"I am not to be thus duped, Monsieur," was her cold reply. "Your men are not far off; and I believe myself to be so thoroughly a prisoner that henceforward I shall never leave the castle; even my walks shall be restricted to the terrace."

When this determination on the part of his mother was communicated to the King, he hastened to inform her that the troops should be withdrawn to a distance from Compiègne; and to entreat that, in consideration for her health, she would occasionally take the exercise by which alone it could be preserved.

To this request she replied that she should obey his pleasure in all things; and having thus, as she believed, removed all suspicion of her purpose, she only awaited the conclusion of the necessary preparations to carry it into execution.

On the 18th of July, at ten o'clock at night, the widow of Henri IV, attended only by Madame du Fargis, who had secretly reached Compiègne in order to bear her company during her flight, and by M. de la Mazure the lieutenant of her guard, stepped into a carriage which had been prepared for her, rapidly crossed the ferry, and took the road to La Capelle; but before she could reach her destined haven, she was met by M. de Vardes, who, with every demonstration of regret, informed her that her design having by some extraordinary chance been suspected by Richelieu, the Marquis his father, who was devoted to the minister, had been hurriedly ordered to return to La Capelle, where he had arrived on the previous evening; had shown himself to the garrison and magistrates; and had commanded his son to leave the town upon the instant.

Agitated as she was, the Queen-mother did not fail even at that moment, and, as some historians state, most justly, to suspect that she had been betrayed either by the fears or the venality of the very individual before her; but hastily offering her acknowledgments for his timely warning, she repressed her resentment, and gave instant directions to her attendants to proceed with all speed to Avesnes in Hainault. So well was she obeyed that on the first day of her journey she travelled a distance of twenty leagues, disregarding the entreaties of Madame du Fargis, who represented to her the necessity of some temporary repose; and persisting in her purpose so resolutely that on the 20th of July she reached her destination, and placed herself beyond the reach of her pursuers, who had, however, so languidly performed their duty that it was openly declared that they had rather been despatched by Richelieu to drive her from the kingdom than to compel her to remain within it.

On her arrival at Avesnes the royal fugitive was received with all imaginable honour by the Marquis de Crèvecoeur, the Governor of the fortress; the troops were under arms; and she was escorted by the dignitaries of the city to the Hôtel-de-Ville, where she took up her temporary residence. The Baron de Guépé was instantly despatched to Brussels to announce her arrival to the Archduchess; and the Prince d'Épinoy, the Governor of the county, waited upon her Majesty, to entreat that she would remove to Mons, where Isabella was preparing to welcome her. During her sojourn at Avesnes, Marie despatched three letters to Paris, in which she respectively informed the King, the Parliament, and the municipality of her reasons for leaving the country.

"Perceiving," she wrote in that which she addressed to her son, "that my health was failing from day to day, and that it was the Cardinal's intention to cause me to die between four walls, I considered that in order to save my life and my reputation, I ought to accept the offer which was made to me by the Marquis de Vardes, to receive me in La Capelle, a town of which he is the Governor, and where you possess absolute power. I therefore determined to go there.

Marie de Medicis

When I was within three leagues of La Capelle the Marquis de Vardes informed me that I could not enter that place, because he had given it into the hands of his father. I leave you to imagine what was my affliction when I saw myself so deceived, and pursued by a body of cavalry in order to hasten me more speedily out of your kingdom. God has granted that the artifices of the Cardinal should be discovered. The very individuals who negotiated the affair have confessed that it was a plot of the Cardinal's, in order to compel me to leave the country; an extreme measure which I dreaded above all things, and which he passionately desired."

In reply to this letter Louis XIII wrote thus: "You will allow me, if you please, Madame, to say that the act which you have just committed, together with what has occurred for some time past, clearly discovers to me the nature of your intentions, and that which I may in future expect from them. The respect which I bear towards you prevents me from being more explicit."

The other letters of the Queen-mother, although calculated to excite upon their publication a general hatred of the Cardinal, availed her personal cause as little as that which she had addressed to the monarch. Her flight was blamed by all classes throughout the country; and not the slightest movement was made in her favour either by the Parliament or the people. Richelieu was triumphant. He had at length succeeded in throwing suspicion upon her movements, and in compelling her to share the odium which he had hitherto borne alone; and although she saw herself the honoured guest of the Princes with whom she had taken refuge, the unfortunate Marie de Medicis soon became bitterly conscious that she had lost her former hold on the affections of that France over which she had once so proudly ruled. It is true that with the populace the ill-fated Princess yet retained her popularity, but she owed a great portion of this still-lingering affection to the general aversion of the masses towards the Cardinal; and while they mourned and even wept over her wrongs, they made no effort to enforce her justification.

On the invitation of the Prince d'Epinoi, Marie de Medicis, after a short sojourn at Avesnes, proceeded to Mons, where she was welcomed with salvos of artillery, and found all the citizens under arms in honour of her arrival; and it was in the midst of the rejoicing consequent upon her entry into that city, that she received the cold and stern reply of Louis, of which we have quoted a portion above, and to which she hastened to respond by a second letter, wherein she bitterly complained of the harshness with which she had been treated; and refused to return to France until the Cardinal should have been put upon his trial for "his crimes and projects against the state." The letter thus concludes: "I am your subject and your mother; do me justice as a King, love me as a son. I entreat this of you with clasped hands."

The reception of the self-exiled Queen by the Archduchess Isabella, whose noble and generous qualities have been extolled by all the contemporary historians, was as warm and as sincere as though she had welcomed a sister. The two Princesses wept together over the trials and sufferings of the ill-fated Marie; nor was the sympathy of the Archduchess confined to mere words. Every attention which the most fastidious delicacy could suggest was paid to the wants and wishes of the royal fugitive; and after a few days spent in the most perfect harmony in the capital of Hainault, the Court removed to the summer palace of Marimont, whence they ultimately proceeded to Brussels, where the French Queen made her entry with great pomp, and was enthusiastically received by all classes of the population.

From Brussels the illustrious ladies visited Antwerp, on the occasion of the annual *kermesse*, or fair, where the inhabitants vied with each other in doing honour to their distinguished guests. Six thousand citizens, magnificently apparelled, were under arms during their stay; and from the galleries of the quaint and picturesque old houses hung draperies of damask, tapestry, and velvet, which blended their rich tints with those of the banners that waved above the summits of the public buildings, and from the masts of the shipping in the harbour.

Little could the unfortunate Marie de Medicis anticipate, when she thus saw herself surrounded by the most unequivocal exhibition of respect and deference ever displayed towards greatness in misfortune, that she should but a few short years subsequently enter the

city in which she was now feasted and flattered, a penniless wanderer, only to be driven out in terror and sickness, to seek a new shelter, and to die in abject despair!

Ever sanguine, the Queen-mother even yet hoped for a propitious change of fortune. She would not believe that Richelieu could ultimately triumph over the natural affection of a son, evil as her experience had hitherto proved; and when Isabella, in order to comply with the necessary observances of courtesy, wrote to assure Louis XIII that so far from intending any disrespect towards him by the reception which she had given to his mother, she begged him rather to regard it as a demonstration of her deference for himself; and at the same time offered to assist by every means in her power in effecting a reconciliation between them, Marie de Medicis deceived herself into the belief that such a proposition coming from such a source would never be rejected; while it is probable that had Louis been left to follow the promptings of his own nature, which was rather weak than wicked, her anticipations might at this period have been realized; but the inevitable Richelieu was constantly beside him, to insinuate the foulest suspicions, and to keep alive his easily-excited distrust of the motives of the Queen-mother.

The despatches of Isabella were, moreover, entrusted to the Abbé Carondelet, Deacon of the Cathedral of Cambrai, who, as the Cardinal was well aware, considered himself aggrieved by the refusal to which he had been subjected on his application for the bishopric of Namur; and who would in consequence, as he did not fail to infer, be readily prevailed upon to abandon the interests of the fugitive Queen. The event proved the justice of his previsions. Carondelet was not proof against the extraordinary honours which he received at the French Court, nor the splendid presents of the King and his minister; and the man to whose zeal and eloquence Isabella had confidently entrusted the cause of her royal guest was, after the lapse of a few short days, heart and soul the creature of Richelieu.

The Cardinal found little difficulty in persuading the monarch that Marie de Medicis must have had a full and perfect understanding with the Spanish Cabinet before she would have ventured to seek an asylum within their territories; an assertion which was so faintly combated by the treacherous envoy of the Archduchess, that thenceforward the protestations of the Queen-mother were totally disregarded, and the triumph of Richelieu was complete. In consequence of this conviction, Louis XIII published, in the month of August, a declaration which was most injurious alike towards Marie de Medicis and Gaston d'Orléans. Among other accusations, it asserted that "the evil counsellors of his brother had driven him, contrary to the duty imposed by his birth, and the respect which he owed to the person of his sovereign, to address to him letters full of calumnies and impostures against the Government; that he had accused, against all truth and reason, his very dear and well-beloved cousin the Cardinal de Richelieu of infidelity and enterprise against the person of his Majesty, that of the Queen-mother, and his own; that for some time past the Queen-mother had also suffered herself to be guided by bad advice; and that on his having entreated of her to assist him by her counsels as she had formerly done, she had replied that she was weary of public business; by which he had discovered that she was resolved to second the designs of the Due d'Orléans, and had consequently determined to separate from her, and to request her to remove to Moulins, to which request she had refused to accede; that having subsequently left Compiègne, she had taken refuge with the Spaniards, and was unceasingly disseminating documents tending to the subversion of the royal authority and of the kingdom itself; that for all these reasons, confirming his previous declarations, he declared guilty of *lèse-majesté* and disturbers of the public peace all those who should be proved to have aided the Queen-mother and the Duc d'Orléans in resisting his authority, and of having induced them to leave the kingdom, as well as those who had followed and still remained with them; and that it was his will that proceedings should be taken against them by the seizure of their property, and the abolition of all their public offices, appointments, and revenues."

By this arbitrary act not only were the adherents of Marie de Medicis and Gaston d'Orléans deprived of their property, but their own revenues were confiscated to the Crown, and they at once found themselves without pecuniary resources. The calculations of Richelieu had been able, for the faction of the fugitives was instantly weakened by so unexpected an act

of severity. Crippled in means, they could no longer recompense the devotion of those individuals who had followed their fortunes, many of whom had done so from a hope of future aggrandizement, and who immediately retired without even an attempt at apology, in order to secure themselves from ruin. When the unfortunate Queen would have sacrificed her jewels to liquidate the claims which pressed the most heavily upon her, she found the measure impossible, lest the King should redemand them as the property of the Crown; and she consequently soon saw herself reduced to the undignified expedient of subsisting upon the generosity of the powers from whom she had sought protection.

While Louis was, to use the words of Mézeray, thus "dishonouring his mother and his brother," and depriving them of the very means of subsistence, he was overwhelming the Cardinal de Richelieu alike with honours and with riches. The estate whence he derived his name was erected into a duchy-peerage, and he was thenceforward distinguished by the title of the Cardinal-Duke; while the government of Brittany having become vacant by the death of the Maréchal de Thémines, it was also conferred upon the omnipotent minister.

At this period, indeed, it appeared as if Richelieu had overcome all obstacles to his personal greatness; and although the crown of France was worn by the son of Henri IV, the foot of the Cardinal was on the neck of the nation. That he was envied and hated is most true, but he was still more feared than either. No one could dispute his genius; while all alike uttered "curses not loud but deep" upon his tyranny and ambition.

The King had long become a mere puppet in his hands, leaving all state affairs to his guidance, while he himself passed his time in hunting, polishing muskets, writing military memoirs, or wandering from one palace to another in search of amusement. Perpetually surrounded by favourites, he valued them only as they contributed to his selfish gratification, and abandoned them without a murmur so soon as they incurred the displeasure of the Cardinal, to whom in his turn he clung from a sense of helplessness rather than from any real feeling of regard.

Bitterly, indeed, had Marie de Medicis deluded herself when she imagined that anything was to be hoped from the affection of Louis XIII, who was utterly incapable of such a sentiment; but who, in all the relations of life, whether as son, as husband, as friend, or as sovereign, was ever the slave of his own self-love.

On her arrival at Brussels, the Queen-mother had despatched M. de la Mazure to inform the Duc d'Orléans of her flight from France, and of the gracious reception which she had met from the Archduchess Isabella; assuring him at the same time that having been apprised of his intention to espouse the Princesse Marguerite, she not only gave her free consent to the alliance, but was of opinion that it should be completed without delay.

The Oratorian Chanteloupe, in whom she reposed the most unlimited confidence, had followed Monsieur to Lorraine, and was empowered to declare in her name to the Duke Charles that the contemplated marriage met with her entire approval, upon certain conditions which were immediately accepted, although it was considered expedient to defer their execution until Gaston should, with the aid of his ally, have placed himself at the head of a powerful army, which was to march upon the French frontier in order to compel the King to withdraw his opposition.

The marriage portion of the Princess had been fixed at a hundred thousand pistoles, the greater portion of which sum was expended in levying troops for the proposed campaign; and in less than six weeks an army of ten or twelve thousand foot-soldiers and five thousand horse was raised; while Gaston, full of the most extravagant hopes, prepared to commence his expedition.

Meanwhile commissaries had been appointed by Richelieu to proceed with the trial of the adherents of the Queen-mother and the Duc d'Orléans, and the first victims of his virulence were two physicians and astrologers accused of having, at the request of the royal exiles, drawn the horoscope of the King, and predicted the period of his death. These unfortunate men were condemned to the galleys for life. The Duc de Roannois, the Marquis de

la Vieuville, and the Comtesse du Fargis were executed in effigy; while the property of the Comte de Moret, the Comtesse his mother, the Ducs de Roannois, d'Elboeuf, and de Bellegarde, the Marquises de Boissy, de la Vieuville, and de Sourdeac, and the President Le Coigneux, was confiscated to the Crown.

The government of Picardy was transferred from the Duc d'Elboeuf to the Duc de Chevreuse, and that of Burgundy from the Duc de Bellegarde to the Prince de Condé; and thus the faction of the malcontents found itself crippled alike in pecuniary resources and in moral power.

Towards the close of the year, intelligence of the designs of the Duc d'Orléans having reached Paris, the King proceeded to Lorraine, in order to arrest his movements; and despatched a messenger to Charles, demanding to be informed of his motive for raising so strong an army; and also if it were true that Monsieur contemplated a marriage with the Princesse Marguerite, as he had been informed. In reply, the Lorraine Prince assured the royal envoy that the troops had been levied with a view to assist the Emperor against the King of Sweden; and that the rumour which had spread in the French capital of an intended alliance between his august guest and the Princess his sister was altogether erroneous. No credence was, however, vouchsafed to this explanation, the Cardinal already possessing sufficient evidence to the contrary; and being, moreover, quite as anxious to deprive the Emperor of all extraneous help as he was to circumvent the projects of Monsieur. A second express was consequently forwarded a few days subsequently, summoning Charles de Lorraine immediately to march his army beyond the Rhine; and threatening in the event of his disobedience that the King would forthwith attend the nuptials of his brother at the head of the best troops in his kingdom.

This intimation sufficed to convince the Lorraine Prince that his only safety was to be found in compliance, all the hopes which Gaston had indulged of succour from France having failed him; and it was accordingly resolved that the little army should proceed at once to Germany under the command of Charles himself. Montsigot, the private secretary of Monsieur, was at that period at Brussels, whither he had been sent to inform the Queen-mother and the Archduchess Isabella of the progress of affairs in Lorraine, and to solicit assistance in the projected irruption into France which had been concerted with the Spanish Cabinet. His application proved successful, and on different occasions the Prince received from the sovereigns of the Low Countries upwards of five hundred thousand florins. The threat of the King, however, rendered a change of measures imperative; Puylaurens, one of the favourites of the Prince, was despatched in all haste to acquaint the Court of Brussels with the failure of the contemplated campaign, and to concert measures for a similar attempt during the ensuing year with the ministers of Philip and Isabella; as well as to secure a retreat for Monsieur in Flanders, should he find himself compelled to quit the duchy of Lorraine.

At the same time Marie de Medicis despatched the Chevalier de Valençay to Madrid, with orders to explain to Philip of Spain the precise nature of her position, and to solicit his interference in her behalf; but after long deliberation the Spanish ministers induced his Majesty not to compromise himself with France by affording any direct assistance to the Queen-mother, and to excuse himself upon the plea of the numerous wars in which he was engaged, especially that against the Dutch which had been fomented by the French Cabinet, and which had for some time cruelly harassed his kingdom. He, however, assured the royal exile of his deep sympathy, and of his intention to urge upon the Infanta Isabella the expediency of alleviating to the utmost extent of her power the sufferings of her august guest.

Philip and his Cabinet could afford to be lavish of their words, but they did not dare to brave the French cannon on the Pyrenees.

At the close of the year Charles de Lorraine led back his decimated army from Germany; and the marriage of Gaston with the Princesse Marguerite shortly afterwards took place. There was, however, nothing regal in the ceremony, the presence of Louis XIII at Metz rendering the contracting parties apprehensive that should their intention transpire, they would be troubled by a host of unwelcome guests. Thus the Cardinal de Lorraine, Bishop of Toul, and brother to

the reigning Duke, dispensed with the publication of the banns, and permitted the ceremony to take place in one of the convents of Nancy, where a monk of Cîteaux performed the service at seven o'clock in the evening; the only witnesses being the Duc de Vaudemont, the father of the bride, the Abbess de Remiremont by whom she had been brought up, Madame de la Neuville her governess, and the Comte de Moret.

It is asserted that the old Duc de Vaudemont was so apprehensive of the unhappy results of a marriage contracted under such circumstances, that on receiving the congratulations of those around him, he replied calmly: "Should my daughter not be one day eligible to become Queen of France, she will at least make a fitting Abbess of Remiremont."

While Gaston d'Orléans was engrossed by his personal affairs, his unhappy mother was engaged in making a fresh appeal to the justice and affection of the King. Powerless and penniless in a foreign land, she pined for a reconciliation with her son, and a return to her adopted country. But the hatred and jealousy of Richelieu were still unappeased. He had already robbed her of her revenues, caused an inventory of her furniture, pictures, and equipages to be made, as though she were already dead; imprisoned or banished the members of her household; and had bribed the pens of a number of miserable hirelings to deluge France with libellous pamphlets to her dishonour. There was no indignity to which she had not been subjected through his influence; and on this last occasion she was fated to discover that even the poor gratification of justifying herself to her son and sovereign was to be henceforth denied to her; as at the instigation of the Cardinal, instead of vouchsafing any reply to the long and affecting letter which she had addressed to him, Louis coldly informed the bearer of the despatch that should the Queen again permit herself to write disparagingly of his prime minister, he would arrest and imprison her messenger.

A short time subsequently, having learnt that the King had once more offended the Parliament, Marie de Medicis, who had received information that Richelieu was desirous of declaring war against Spain, and who was naturally anxious to prevent hostilities between her son and the husband of her daughter, resolved once more to forward a letter to the Parliament, and to entreat of them to remonstrate with the King against so lamentable a design. Yielding to a natural impulse she bitterly inveighed in her despatch against the Cardinal-Duke, who, in order to further his own aggrandizement, was about, should he succeed, to plunge the nation into bloodshed, and to sever the dearest ties of kindred. This letter was communicated to Richelieu, whose exasperation exceeded all bounds; and it is consequently almost needless to add that it only served to embitter the position of the persecuted exile.

On the 26th of December Charles de Lorraine, anxious to appease the anger of the French King, proceeded to Metz, where he was well received by Richelieu, who trusted, through his influence, to secure the neutrality of the Duke of Bavaria. He, however, warned the Prince that Louis would never consent to the marriage of Monsieur with the Princesse Marguerite, nor permit him to make his duchy a place of refuge for the French malcontents; and, finally, despite the banquets and festivals which were celebrated in his honour, Charles became convinced that unless he complied with the conditions of a treaty which was proposed to him, he would not be allowed to return to his own territories.

Under this well-grounded impression the unfortunate young Prince had no other alternative than to submit to the humiliation inflicted on him, and on the 31st of December he signed a document by which he abjured for the future every alliance save that with France; accorded a free passage to the French armies through his duchy at all times; and pledged himself not to harbour any individuals hostile to Louis, particularly the Queen-mother or Monsieur; and, as a pledge of his promised obedience, he delivered up his fortress of Marsal. Such was the result of his trust in the clemency of the French King and his minister; but, far from having been gained over to their cause, the Duc de Lorraine returned to Nancy with a deep and abiding wrath at the indignity which had been forced upon him; and an equally firm resolve to break through the compulsory treaty on the first favourable opportunity.

CHAPTER IX

1632

By the Treaty of Vic, Charles de Lorraine was, as we have shown, compelled to refuse all further hospitality to his royal brother-in-law; while Gaston found himself necessitated to submit to a separation from his young wife, and to proceed to the Spanish Low Countries, where Isabella had offered him an asylum. The amiable Archduchess nobly redeemed her pledge; and the reception which she accorded to the errant Duke was as honourable as that already bestowed upon his mother.

The Marquis de Santa-Cruz, who had recently arrived from Italy to command the Spanish forces in Flanders, was instructed to place himself at the head of all the nobility of the Court, and to advance a league beyond the city to meet the French Prince; while the municipal bodies of Brussels awaited him at the gates. He was lodged in the State apartments of the Palace, and all the expenses of his somewhat elaborate household were defrayed by his magnificent hostess.

"I am sorry, Sir," said Isabella gracefully, as Gaston hastened to offer his acknowledgments on his arrival, "that I am compelled to quarrel with you on our first interview. You should have deferred your visit to me until you had seen the Queen your mother."

"Madame," replied the Prince, "it will be infinitely more easy for me to justify myself for having previously paid my respects to yourself, than to recognize in an efficient manner the debt of obligation which I have incurred towards you."

After the compliments incident to such a meeting had been exchanged between Isabella and her new guest, Gaston received those of the Spanish grandees and the Knights of the Golden Fleece; and at the close of this ceremony he proceeded to the residence of Marie de Medicis, who embraced him tenderly, and bade him remember that all her hopes of vengeance against Richelieu, and a triumphant return to France, were centred in himself. The vain and shallow nature of the Prince was flattered by the position which he had thus suddenly assumed. Thwarted and humbled at the Court of his brother by the intrigues of the Cardinal; distrusted by those who had formerly espoused his cause, and who had suffered the penalty of their misplaced confidence; and impoverished by the evil issue of his previous cabals, he had long writhed beneath his enforced insignificance; whereas he had now, in his new retreat, suddenly grown into authority, and been the object of general homage; his wishes had become laws, and his very follies met with applause and imitation. The little Court of Brussels awoke into sudden animation; and pleasure succeeded pleasure with a rapidity which afforded constant occupation to his frivolous and sensual nature.

His arrival had filled the Spanish Cabinet with joy, as they foresaw that the war which he contemplated against his brother promised to weaken the power of the French King, who, while occupied in reducing this new enemy, would for the time be rendered unable to continue the powerful aid which he had hitherto afforded to the opponents of the House of Austria; a circumstance whence their own prospects in Flanders could not fail to profit largely.

The project of this contemplated war was based upon two conditions: in the first place, on the help promised by Philip of Spain himself; and in the second, upon the pledge given by the Duc de Montmorency to embrace the cause of Monsieur, and to receive him in Languedoc,

of which province he was the Governor, and which afforded immense facilities for carrying out his purpose.

Of the defection of the Duc de Montmorency from his interests, Richelieu, generally so well informed upon such subjects, did not entertain the most remote suspicion, as during all the factions of the Court, Montmorency had hitherto acted as a mediator, and had consequently upon several occasions done good service to the minister; but, proud as he was, alike of his illustrious descent and of his personal reputation, the Duke, like all the other nobles about him, still sought to aggrandize himself. The descendant of a long line of ancestors who had successively wielded the sword of Connétable de France, he desired, in his turn, to possess it; and disregarding the fact that Richelieu, whose policy led him to oppose all increase of power among the great nobles, had definitely abolished so dangerous a dignity, he suffered himself to be induced, by his representations, to resign the rank which he already held of Admiral of the French fleet, in order that it might prove no impediment to his appointment to the coveted Connétable. The result of this imprudence had been that while the Cardinal possessed himself of the vacated post under another title, Montmorency found that he had resigned the substance to grasp a shadow; as, on his application for the sword so long wielded by the heads of his family, he was met by an assurance that thenceforward no such function would be recognized at the Court of France. The mortified noble then applied for the post of Marshal-General of the King's camps and armies, which, save in name, would not have differed from the rank to which he had previously aspired; and again he was subjected to a resolute refusal. Indignant at the rejection of his claim, the Duke had, at the close of the preceding year, retired to his government of Languedoc; and his anger against the Court was heightened by a third repulse which he experienced when soliciting the government of the city and fortress of Montpellier.

The irritation which he felt under this complicated disappointment, combined with the consciousness that he had been duped by the Cardinal, and compelled to act as the subordinate of an individual so inferior to himself in rank, created a disgust which, carefully as he endeavoured to conceal it, soon became evident to those about him; nor was it long ere Marie de Medicis and Monsieur were informed of his disaffection. Confidential messengers were immediately despatched to invite the Duke to espouse their cause, and they found a powerful ally in the Duchess, Maria Felicia d'Ursini, who was a near relative of the Queen-mother.

Weary of inaction, anxious for revenge, and, perhaps, desirous of emulating the generous example of the Duc d'Epéron, who had previously declared himself the champion of Marie, Montmorency was at length prevailed upon to consent to their solicitations, and even to pledge himself to receive Gaston in Languedoc; although at the same time he urged him not to quit Brussels until the end of August, in order that he might have time to complete the necessary preparations.

The prospect of possessing so powerful an ally strengthened the hopes of the royal exiles; and immediately upon the arrival of Monsieur in the Low Countries, the mother and son began to concert measures for the success of their difficult and dangerous undertaking. The first impediment which they were called upon to surmount was their total inability to defray the expenses of a powerful army, and to secure the necessary funds for maintaining a secret correspondence with their French adherents. The munificence of Isabella supplied all their personal wants, but even her truly regal profusion could not be expected to extend beyond this point; and it was ultimately agreed that both parties should forward at all risks their jewels by a trusty messenger to Amsterdam for sale.

This had scarcely been accomplished when intelligence reached the Archducal Court of the trial of the Maréchal de Marillac, ostensibly for peculation, but, as the Queen-mother and her son were only too well aware, simply for his adherence to their own cause. In vain did they protest against so iniquitous a measure; in vain did they entreat the interference of their friends in his behalf, and even menace his judges with their personal vengeance, individually and collectively, should they be induced to pronounce his condemnation; Richelieu in his

plenitude of present power overruled all their efforts; and the unfortunate Maréchal, who had incurred the hatred of the Cardinal from his favour with Marie de Medicis, was sentenced to lose his head by the majority of a single voice, and was executed on the following day; while his unhappy brother expired a short time subsequently in the fortress of Châteaudun.

Meanwhile the Court of Brussels became a scene of dissension and violence. The favourites of the Queen-mother and those of the Duc d'Orléans were engaged in constant struggles for supremacy; the Duc de Bellegarde and the President Le Coigneux had refused to accompany Monsieur, who was consequently entirely under the influence of Puylaurens, with whom he passed his nights in the most sensual and degrading pleasures; while Marie de Medicis, under the direction of her constant companion and confidant Chanteloupe, spent her time in devotional duties, and in dictating to the hired writers by whom she had surrounded herself, either pamphlets against the Cardinal, or petitions to the Parliament of Paris.

Alarmed by the execution of Marillac, Monsieur, however, roused himself from his trance of dissipation; and disregarding the entreaties of the Duc de Montmorency, resolved to join the army which Gonzalez de Cordova, the Spanish Ambassador, was concentrating at Trèves, at the instigation of Charles de Lorraine, who was anxious to delay the threatened invasion of his own duchy by the French troops.

On the 18th of May Gaston d'Orléans accordingly took leave of the Court of Brussels; when the Infanta, not satisfied with having during the space of four months defrayed all the outlay of his household, accompanied her parting compliments with the most costly and munificent gifts, not only to the Prince himself, but also to every nobleman and officer in his service. About the neck of Monsieur she threw a brilliant chain of carbuncles and emeralds, from which was suspended a miniature portrait of the King of Spain. Numerous chests of wearing apparel, linen, and other requisites for the forthcoming campaign, swelled his slender baggage to a thoroughly regal extent; while her treasurer was instructed to deliver into his hands the sum of one hundred thousand *patagons*, with which to defray the expenses of the journey.

Having spent a fortnight at Trèves, and received the troops promised by Philip of Spain, the Prince resolved at once to prosecute his intention of entering France; a resolution which was earnestly combated by Montmorency, who represented that he was yet unprovided with the necessary funds for the maintenance of the troops, and with the means of defence essential to the success of the enterprise. Urged, however, as we have stated, by the Duc de Lorraine, and presuming upon the prestige of his name, Gaston refused to listen to this remonstrance; and after having traversed the territories of his brother-in-law, he hurriedly pursued his march through Burgundy at the head of his slender body of Spanish cavalry. Contrary, however, to his expectations, he was not joined by a single reinforcement upon the way, although his position as heir-presumptive to the Crown secured him from any demonstration of resistance. Langres and Dijon closed their gates against him, the magistrates excusing themselves upon the plea that they held those cities for the King; and on his arrival in the Bourbonnais, after devastating all the villages upon his route, the imprudent Prince was met by a request from M. de Montmorency that he would march his troops through some other province, as no sufficient preparations had yet been completed for his security in Languedoc. Once embarked in his rash attempt, however, Gaston disdained to comply with this suggestion; and pursued his way towards the government of the Duke, closely followed by ten thousand men, who had been despatched against him by Richelieu, under the command of the Maréchal de la Force.

Our limits will not permit us to do more than glance at the progress of this rash and ill-planned campaign, which, in its result, cost some of the best and noblest blood in France. Suffice it that the Cardinal, alarmed by the rapidity with which Monsieur advanced towards Languedoc, and rendered still more apprehensive by the defection of the Maréchal-Duc de Montmorency, lost no time in inducing the sovereign to place himself at the head of his army, in order to intimidate the rebels by his presence; while, on the other hand, the States of Languedoc had been induced through the persuasions of their Governor to register (on the 22nd of July) a resolution by which they invited the Duc d'Orléans to enter their province, and

to afford them his protection; they pledging themselves to supply him with money, and to continue faithful to his interests.

Montmorency, on his side, had received from Spain a promise that he should be forthwith reinforced by six thousand men, and a considerable amount of treasure for the payment of the troops; but Philip and his ministers, satisfied with having kindled the embers of intestine war in the rival kingdom, suddenly abated in their zeal; no troops were furnished, and the whole extent of their pecuniary aid did not exceed the sum of fifty thousand crowns, which did not, moreover, reach their destination until the struggle was decided.

Thus Montmorency found himself crippled on all sides; and when the rashness of Gaston had directed the march of the royal army upon Languedoc, he was in no position to make head against them. Nevertheless the brave spirit of the Duke revolted at the idea of submission, and he accordingly prepared to protect himself as best he might by the seizure of a few fortresses; and, finally, he received Monsieur at Lunel, on the 30th of July. Their combined forces amounted only to two thousand foot-soldiers, three thousand horse, and a number of volunteers, together with three pieces of ordnance; while, being totally destitute of funds, there could remain but little doubt as to the issue of the expedition.

One faint hope of success, however, still animated the insurgents. The King, although upon his march, had not yet joined the little army of the Maréchal de Schomberg, which consisted only of a thousand infantry and twelve hundred horse, while he was totally destitute of artillery; and Montmorency at once perceived that hostilities must be commenced before the junction of the royal forces could take place. Schomberg had taken up his position near Castelnaudary, in order of battle, on the 1st of September; and, acting upon the conviction we have named, Montmorency determined on an attack, which, should it prove successful, could not fail to be of essential service to the interests of Monsieur. It was accordingly resolved that the Maréchal-Duc should assume the command of the vanguard, while Gaston placed himself at the head of the main body. Montmorency was accompanied by the Comtes de Moret, de Rieux, and de la Feuillade, who, after some slight skirmishes, abandoning the comparatively safe position which they occupied, recklessly pushed forward to support a forlorn hope which had received orders to take possession of an advantageous post. M. de Moret, whose impetuosity always carried him into the heart of the *mêlée*, was the first to charge the royal cavalry, among whom he created a panic which threw them into the utmost disorder; and this circumstance was no sooner ascertained by Montmorency than, abdicating his duties as a general, he dashed forward at the head of a small party to second the efforts of his friend. The error was a fatal one, however, for he had scarcely cut his way through the discomfited horsemen when some companies of Schomberg's infantry, who had been placed in ambush in the ditches, suddenly rose and fired a volley with such precision upon the rebel troop, that De Moret, De Rieux, and La Feuillade, together with a number of inferior officers, were killed upon the spot, while Montmorency himself fell to the ground covered with wounds, his horse having been shot under him. And meanwhile Gaston looked on without making one effort to avenge the fate of those who had fallen in his cause; and he no sooner became convinced that his best generals were lost to him than, abandoning the wounded to the tender mercies of the enemy, he retreated from the scene of action without striking a blow.

As, faint from loss of blood, Montmorency lay crushed beneath the weight of his heavy armour, he gasped out: "Montmorency! I am dying; I ask only for a confessor." His cries having attracted the attention of M. de St. Preuil, a Captain of the Guards, who endeavoured to extricate him, he murmured, as he drew an enamelled ring from his finger: "Take this, young man, and deliver it to the Duchesse de Montmorency." He then fainted from exhaustion, and his captors hastened to relieve him of his cuirass and his cape of buff leather, which was pierced all over by musket balls. While they were thus engaged, the Marquis de Brézé, who had been informed of his capture, hastened to the spot, and, taking his hand, bade him be of good cheer; after which he caused him to be placed upon a ladder covered with cloaks and straw, and thus conveyed him to Castelnaudary.

The retreat of Gaston from this ill-fated field was accomplished in the greatest disorder; on every side whole troops of his cavalry were to be seen galloping madly along without order or combination; and it was consequently evident to Schomberg that nothing could prevent Monsieur and the whole of his staff from falling into his hands, should he see fit to make them prisoners. The Maréchal possessed too much tact, however, to make such an attempt, as in the one case he must incur the everlasting enmity of the heir-presumptive to the Crown, or, in the other, Gaston, roused by a feeling of self-preservation, might attempt to renew the conflict, and finally retrieve the fortunes of the day. By the fall of Montmorency, moreover, sufficient had been accomplished to annihilate the faction of Monsieur; and thus the royal general offered no impediment to the retreat of the Prince, whom he permitted to retire in safety to Béziers with the remnant of his army.

The subsequent bearing of Gaston d'Orléans was worthy of his conduct at Castelnaudary; as, only three days after the battle, he suffered himself to be persuaded that his best policy would be to throw himself upon the clemency of the King. His infantry disbanded themselves in disgust, and he was compelled to pawn his plate in order to defray the arrears of his foreign allies; while the province of Languedoc, which regarded him as the destroyer of its idolized Governor, returned to its allegiance, and refused to recognize his authority.

Yet, notwithstanding these circumstances, there was a romance and an interest attached to the position of the Prince, combating and struggling as he affected to be, not merely for a recognition of his own rights, but also for those of a widowed and outraged mother, which, had he proved himself worthy of his exalted station, must have ensured to him the regard and co-operation of a brave and generous nation; but Gaston d'Orléans had been weighed in the balance, and had been found wanting in all the attributes of his rank and birth, and a deep disgust had replaced among the people the enthusiasm which his misfortunes had previously excited. He sacrificed his friends without a pang, save in so far as their fall involved his own success; he was ever as ready to submit as he had been to revolt, when his personal interests demanded the concession; and thus, satisfied that in every case he was wholly governed by a principle of self-preservation, all save those whose individual fortunes were hinged upon his own fell from him without hesitation and without remorse.

Convinced that by the capture of the Duc de Montmorency he was rendered powerless, the weak and selfish Prince, as we have said, sought only to protect himself from the effects of his revolt; and, accordingly, when he became aware that he could no longer contend, he expressed an earnest desire to effect a reconciliation with his royal brother; although, still infatuated by vanity, he proposed conditions as exaggerated as though his position enabled him to enforce them in the event of their rejection. It was, however, an easy task for the negotiators to convince him that he overestimated his power, and to induce him in a few days to make concessions as dishonourable as they were humiliating. Not only did he consent to discontinue all intercourse with the Courts of Spain and Lorraine, but also to forsake the interests of the unhappy Queen-mother, who had fondly hoped to find in him a protector and an avenger, and to abandon to the justice of the King all those of his adherents who had incurred the royal displeasure, with the sole exception of his personal household; in whose joint names M. de Puylaurens pledged himself to reveal "all the particulars of such of their past transactions as might prove injurious to the state or to the interests of the sovereign, and to those who had the honour of being in his service."

Even Richelieu himself could demand no more; and, accordingly, upon these degrading terms, Monsieur received a written assurance from the King that thenceforward he would receive him once more into favour, re-establish him in his possessions, and permit him to reside upon that one of his estates which should be selected by the royal pleasure, together with the members of his household who were included in the amnesty.

This treaty was signed on the 29th of September, and the residence assigned to Gaston was Champigny, a château which had originally belonged to the ducal family of Montpensier.

Justice must, however, be rendered to the Duc d'Orléans in so far that before he could be induced to put his hand to this degrading document he made a vigorous effort to procure

the pardon of the Maréchal de Montmorency; but the attempt was frustrated by Richelieu, who, feeling that the Prince was in the toils, would admit of no such concession.

The agents of the Cardinal were instructed to assure Monsieur that he had no hope of escape for himself save in an entire submission to the will of the sovereign; and this argument proved, as he was aware that it would do, all powerful with the individual to whom it was addressed; while he was, moreover, assured that his own pertinacity upon this point could only tend to injure the interests of Montmorency, which might be safely confided to the clemency of his royal master, and that his personal submission and obedience must exercise the most favourable influence upon the fortunes of both.

Easily persuaded where his own interests were involved, Gaston accordingly ceased to persist, and the young and gallant Duke was abandoned to the vengeance of the Cardinal. Louis XIII was at Lyons when he received intelligence of the defeat of Monsieur; and he was no sooner assured that the rebels had not taken a single prisoner, than he determined to make an example of every leader who had espoused their cause whom he might encounter on his journey. Ere he reached his destination three noble heads fell by the hand of the executioner; but still his vengeance was not sated; nor did the exalted rank and brilliant reputation of Montmorency serve for an instant to turn him from his purpose. Private animosity closed all the avenues of mercy; and the indiscretion of one meddling spirit sealed the death-warrant of the gallant prisoner. It is asserted that when he was captured Montmorency wore upon his arm a costly diamond bracelet, containing the portrait of Anne of Austria, which having been perceived by Bellièvre, the commissary of Schomberg's army, who was greatly attached to the noble captive, he affected, in order to conceal the circumstance from less friendly eyes, to consider it expedient to subject the prisoner to a judicial interrogatory preparatory to his trial; and when he had seated himself beside him, ostensibly for this purpose, he succeeded with some difficulty in wrenching the miniature from its setting. But, notwithstanding all his precaution, the desired object was not accomplished without exciting the attention of some individual who hastened to apprise the Cardinal of what he had discovered, who at once communicated the fact to Louis, embittering his intelligence by comments which did not fail to arouse the indignation of the King, and to revive his jealousy of his wife, while they at the same time increased his exasperation against the rebel Duke.

Montmorency was removed from Castelnaudary to Lectoure, and thence, still suffering cruelly from his wounds, to Toulouse, reaching the gates at the very moment when the bells of the city were ringing a joyous peal in honour of the arrival of the King, who had hastened thither in order to counteract by his presence any efforts which might be made by the judges to save his life. The Duke had been escorted throughout his journey by eight troops of cavalry well armed, his great popularity in the province having rendered the Cardinal apprehensive that an attempt would be made to effect his rescue; and while the glittering train of the sovereign was pouring into the streets amid the flourish of trumpets and the acclamations of the populace, the unfortunate prisoner was conveyed to the Hôtel-de-Ville, where he was confined in a small chamber on the summit of the belfry-tower, "so that," says a quaint old historian, "the ravens came about him to sport among the stone-crop. A hundred of the Swiss Guards were on duty near his person night and day to prevent his holding any communication with the *capitouls*, the citizens, and the public companies of the great city of Toulouse."

Immediate preparations were made for the trial of the illustrious captive; Richelieu, who could ill brook delay when he sought to rid himself of an enemy, having prevailed upon the King to summon a Parliament upon the spot, instead of referring the case to the Parliament of Paris, by whom it should fitly have been tried. Nor was this the only precaution adopted by the vindictive Cardinal, who also succeeded in inducing Louis to nominate the members of the Court, which was presided over by Châteauneuf, the Keeper of the Seals, who had commenced his career as a page of the Connétable de Montmorency, the father of the prisoner.

As the Marshal-Duke had been taken in arms against the sovereign, and frankly avowed his crime, his fate was soon decided. He was declared guilty of high treason, and condemned to

Marie de Medicis

lose his head, his property to be confiscated, and his estates to be divested of their prerogative of peerage.

Not only during his trial, however, but even after his sentence had been pronounced, the most persevering efforts were made by all his friends to obtain its revocation. But Louis, as one of his historians has aptly remarked, was never so thoroughly a King as when he was called upon to punish, a fact of which Richelieu was so well aware that he did not hesitate to affect the deepest commiseration for the unhappy Duke, and even to urge some of the principal nobles of the Court to intercede in his behalf.

The Princesse de Condé--to win whose love Henri IV had been about to provoke a European war--deceived by the treacherous policy of the Cardinal, threw herself at his feet to implore him to exert his influence over the monarch, and to induce him to spare the life of her beloved brother; but Richelieu, instead of responding to this appeal, in his turn cast himself on his knees beside her, and mingled his tears with hers, protesting his utter inability to appease the anger of his royal master.

The Duc d'Epéron, who, notwithstanding his affection for Montmorency, had declined to join the faction of Monsieur, despite his age and infirmities also hastened to Toulouse, and in the name of all the relatives and friends of the criminal, implored his pardon as a boon. Nothing, however, could shake the inflexible nature of Louis, and although he did not attempt to interrupt the appeal of the Duke further than to command him to rise from his kneeling posture, it was immediately evident to all about him, from his downcast eyes, and the firm compression of his lips, that there was no hope for the culprit.

The resolute silence of the King ere long impressed M. d'Epéron with the same conviction; and, accordingly, having waited a few moments for a reply which was not vouchsafed, he requested the royal permission to leave the city.

"You are at liberty to do so at your pleasure, M. le Duc," said Louis coldly; "and I grant your request the more readily that I shall shortly follow your example."

Nor were the citizens less eager to obtain the release of their beloved Duke; and the house in which the King had taken up his temporary residence was besieged by anxious crowds who rent the air with cries of "Mercy! Mercy! Pardon! Pardon!" On one occasion their clamour became so loud that Louis angrily demanded the meaning of so unseemly an uproar, when the individual to whom he had addressed himself ventured to reply that what he heard was a general appeal to his clemency, and that should his Majesty be induced to approach the window, he would perhaps take pity upon the people.

"Sir," replied Louis haughtily, "were I to be governed by the inclinations of my people, I should cease to be a King!"

From any other sovereign than Louis XIII a revocation of the sentence just pronounced against one so universally beloved as Montmorency might well have been anticipated, but the son of Henri IV was inaccessible to mercy where his private feelings were involved; and not only did he resist the entreaties and remonstrances by which he was overwhelmed, but he even refused to suffer the Duchesse de Montmorency, the Princesse de Condé, and the Duc d'Angoulême--the wife, sister, and brother-in-law of the prisoner--to approach him. He was weary of the contest, and eager for the termination of the tragic drama in which he played so unenviable a part.

While all was lamentation and despair about him, and the several churches were thronged with persons offering up prayers for the preservation of the condemned noble, the King coldly issued his orders for the execution, only conceding, as a special favour, that it should take place in the court of the Hôtel-de-Ville, and that the hands of the prisoner should not be tied.

Thus, on the 30th of October, the very day of his trial, perished Henri de Montmorency, who died as he had lived, worthy of the great name which had been bequeathed to him by a long line of ancestry, and mourned by all classes in the kingdom.

Marie de Medicis

The unfortunate Marie de Medicis, who received constant intelligence of the movements of the rebel army, had wept bitter tears over the reverses of her errant son; but she had no sooner ascertained that by the Treaty of Béziers he had pledged himself to abandon her interests, than her grief was replaced by indignation, and she complained vehemently of the treachery to which she had been subjected. With her usual amiability, the Archduchess Isabella sought by every means in her power to tranquillize her mind, representing with some reason that the apparent want of affection and respect exhibited by Gaston on that occasion had probably been forced upon him by the danger of his own position, and entreating that she would at least suffer the Prince to justify himself before she condemned him for an act to which he was in all probability compelled by circumstances. But the iron had entered into the mother's soul, and the death of the Comtesse du Fargis, which shortly afterwards took place, added another pang to those which she had already endured.

The beautiful lady of honour had never been seen to smile since she was made acquainted with the fact of her mock trial and her execution in effigy in one of the public thoroughfares of Paris. The disgrace which, as she believed, would thenceforward attach to her name, not only wounded her sense of womanly dignity, but also broke her heart, and a rapid consumption deprived the unhappy Queen-mother of one of the most devoted of her friends.

It can scarcely be matter of surprise that, rendered desperate by her accumulated disappointments and misfortunes, Marie de Medicis at this moment welcomed with avidity the suggestions of Chanteloupe, who urged her to revenge upon the Cardinal the daily and hourly mortifications to which she was exposed. At first she hearkened listlessly to his counsels, for she was utterly discouraged; but ere long, as he unfolded his project, she awoke from her lethargy of sorrow, and entered with renewed vigour into the plan of vengeance which he had concerted. Whether it were that she hoped to save the life of Montmorency, of whose capture she had been informed, or that she trusted to effect her own return to France by placing herself in a position to make conditions with Richelieu, it is at least certain that she did not hesitate to subscribe to his views, and to lend herself to the extraordinary plot of the reverend Oratorian.

"Your Majesty is aware," said Chanteloupe, "that Monsieur has not dared to avow his marriage with the Princesse Marguerite; and I have sure information that the minister who endeavoured to effect a union between his favourite niece and the Cardinal de Lorraine without success, has now the audacity to lift his eyes to your own august son. The Queen is childless, and Richelieu aspires to nothing less than a crown for La Comballet."

"*Per Dio!*" exclaimed Marie, trembling with indignation.

"The lady is at present residing in the Petit Luxembourg," pursued the monk calmly; "in the very hôtel given by your Majesty to his Eminence during the period when he possessed your favour--"

"Given!" echoed the Queen-mother vehemently. "Yes, given as you say, but on condition that whenever I sought to reclaim it, I was at liberty to do so on the payment of thirty thousand livres; and have you never heard what was the result of this donation? When he proved unworthy of my confidence I demanded the restoration of the hôtel upon the terms of the contract, but when the document was delivered into my hands, I discovered that for livres he had substituted crowns, and that in lieu of 'whenever she shall desire it,' he had inserted 'when the King shall desire it.' I remonstrated against this treachery, but I remonstrated in vain; Louis pronounced against me, and the Cardinal established his wanton niece in my desecrated mansion, where she has held a Court more brilliant than that of the mother of her sovereign. Nay," continued the Queen, with increasing agitation, "the lingering atmosphere of royalty which yet clings to the old halls has so increased the greatness of the low-born relative of Jean Armand du-Plessis, that she has deemed it necessary to destroy one of the walls of my own palace in order to enlarge the limits of that which she inhabits."

"It were well," said Chanteloupe, with a meaning smile, "to prove to the lady that it is possible to exist in a more narrow lodging. The King is absent from Paris. The Luxembourg is thinly peopled; and La Comballet would serve admirably as a hostage."

Marie de Medicis

"*Veramente, padre mio*," exclaimed Marie de Medicis, bounding from her seat; "the thing is well imagined, and cannot fail to do us good service. Richelieu loves his niece--too well, if we are to credit the scandal-mongers of the Court--and with La Comballet in our hands we may dictate whatever terms we will. To work, *padre*, to work; there is little time to lose."

Such was the plot to which the Queen-mother imprudently accorded her consent; and for a time everything appeared to promise success. The nephew of Chanteloupe and a confidential valet of Marie herself were entrusted with the secret, and instructed to make the necessary arrangements. Relays were prepared between Paris and Brussels, and nine or ten individuals were engaged to assist in the undertaking. Carefully, however, as these had been selected, two of their number, alarmed by the probable consequences of detection, had no sooner arrived in the French capital than they revealed the plot, and the whole of the conspirators were committed to the Bastille, while information of the intended abduction was immediately forwarded to the King. Irritated by such an attempt, Louis commanded that they should instantly be put upon their trial; and at the same time he wrote with his own hand to congratulate Madame de Comballet on her escape, and to assure her that had she been conveyed to the Low Countries, he would have gone to reclaim her at the head of fifty thousand men. In return for this condescension the niece of Richelieu entreated the King to pardon the culprits, a request with which he complied the more readily as the names of several nobles of the Court were involved in the attempt, as well as that of the Queen-mother.

The Cardinal, however, proved less forgiving than the destined victim of this ill-advised and undignified conspiracy. Enraged against Marie de Medicis, and anxious to make her feel the weight of his vengeance, he found little difficulty in inducing Louis to request Isabella to deliver up to him Chanteloupe and the Abbé de St. Germain; but the Archduchess excused herself, declaring that as the two ecclesiastics in question were members of the Queen-mother's household, she could not consent to be guilty of an act of discourtesy towards her Majesty by which she should violate the duties of hospitality; and the only immediate result of the notable plot of the reverend Oratorian was the increased enmity of Richelieu towards his former benefactress.

Monsieur had no sooner ascertained the fate of Montmorency, whose life he had been privately assured would be spared in the event of his acknowledging his fault, than he at once felt that should he remain longer in France, not only his own safety might be compromised, but that he must also sacrifice the confidence of his few remaining adherents; as no one would be rash enough to brave the vengeance of the minister in his cause, should he not openly testify his indignation at so signal an offence. A rumour, moreover, reached him that several of the officers of his household were to be withdrawn from his service; and Puylaurens soon succeeded in convincing him that should he not leave the kingdom, he must be satisfied to live thenceforward in complete subjection to Richelieu; who, when he should ultimately ascertain the fact of his marriage with the Princesse Marguerite, would not fail to have it dissolved.

Already predisposed to the measure, the Prince yielded at once to the arguments of his favourite, and secretly left Tours on the 6th of November, accompanied only by fifteen or twenty of his friends. On his way to Burgundy, at Montereau-faut-Yonne, he wrote a long letter to the King, declaring that should his Majesty feel any displeasure at his thus leaving the country, he must attribute his having done so to his indignation against those who had caused him to take the life of the Duc de Montmorency, to save which he would willingly have smothered his just resentment, and sacrificed all his personal interests. He also complained bitterly that he had received a pledge to that effect which had been violated; and declared that he had been assured in the name of the King that should he march towards Roussillon it would seal the fate of the Duke, from which declaration he had inferred that by obeying the will of his Majesty he should ensure his safety; whereas, after having condescended to the most degrading proofs of submission, no regard had been shown to his feelings, and no respect paid to his honour. Finally, he announced his intention of seeking a safe retreat in a foreign country, alleging that from the treatment to which he had been subjected in France, he had every reason to dread the consequences of the insignificance into which he had fallen there.

Marie de Medicis

In reply to this communication Louis coldly observed: "The conditions which I accorded to you are so far above your pretensions, that their perusal alone will serve as an answer to what you have advanced. I will not reply to your statement that the prospect which was held out to you of Montmorency's life caused you to submit to those terms. Every one was aware of your position. Had you another alternative?"

Had Gaston been other than he was, the King would have been spared the question; for it is certain that had Monsieur only possessed sufficient courage to make the attempt, nothing could have prevented him after his retreat from Castelnaudary from retiring into Roussillon; but to the very close of his life, the faction-loving Prince always withdrew after the first check, and sought to secure his own safety, rather than to justify the expectations which his high-sounding professions were so well calculated to create.

CHAPTER X

1633

After having forwarded his manifesto to the King, Gaston d'Orléans proceeded without further delay to the Low Countries, and once more arrived in Brussels at the close of January 1633, where he was received by the Spaniards (who had borne all the expenses of his campaign, whence they had not derived the slightest advantage) with as warm a welcome as though he had realized all their hopes. The principal nobles of the Court and the great officers of the Infanta's household were commanded to show towards him the same respect and deference as towards herself; he was reinstated in the gorgeous apartments which he had formerly occupied; and the sum of thirty thousand florins monthly was assigned for the maintenance of his little Court. One mortification, however, awaited him on his arrival; as the Queen-mother, unable to suppress her indignation at his abandonment of her interests, had, on the pretext of requiring change of air, quitted Brussels on the previous day, and retired to Malines, whither he hastened to follow her. But, although Marie consented to receive him, and even expressed her satisfaction on seeing him once more beyond the power of his enemies, the wound caused by his selfishness was not yet closed; and she peremptorily refused to accompany him back to the capital, or to change her intention of thenceforth residing at Ghent. In vain did Monsieur represent that he was compelled to make every concession in order to escape the malice of the Cardinal, and to secure an opportunity of rejoining her in Flanders; whenever the softened manner of the Queen-mother betrayed any symptom of relenting, a word or a gesture from Chanteloupe sufficed to render her brow once more rigid, and her accents cold.

As the unhappy exile had formerly been ruled by Richelieu, so was she now governed by the Oratorian, whose jealousy of Puylaurens led him to deprecate the prospect of a reconciliation between the mother and son which must, by uniting them in one common interest, involve himself in a perpetual struggle with the favourite of the Prince. The monk affected to treat the haughty *parvenu* as an inferior; while Puylaurens, who had refused to acknowledge the supremacy of individuals of far higher rank than the reverend father, on his side exhibited a similar feeling; and meanwhile Marie de Medicis and Gaston, equally weak where their favourites were concerned, made the quarrel a personal one, and by their constant dissensions weakened their own cause, wearied the patience of their hosts, and enabled the Cardinal to counteract all their projects.

Unable to prevail upon the Queen to rescind her resolution, Monsieur reluctantly returned alone to Brussels, where he was soon wholly absorbed by pleasure and dissipation. All his past trials were forgotten. He evinced no mortification at his defeat, or at the state of pauperism to which it had reduced him; he had no sigh to spare for all the generous blood that had been shed in his service; nor did he mourn over the ruined fortunes by which his own partial impunity had been purchased. It was enough that he was once more surrounded with splendour and adulation; and although he applied to the Emperor and the sovereigns of Spain and England for their assistance, he betrayed little anxiety as to the result of his appeal.

Meanwhile the unfortunate Queen-mother, who had successively witnessed the failure of all her hopes, was bitterly alive to the reality of her position. She was indebted for sustenance and shelter to the enemies of France; and even while she saw herself the object of respect and deference, as she looked back upon her past greatness and contrasted it with her present state of helplessness and isolation, her heart sank within her, and she dreaded to dwell upon the future.

Marie de Medicis

The death of Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden, who was killed at the battle of Lutzen at the close of the previous year, had produced a great change in the affairs of Europe; and, fearing that the Austrian Cabinet might profit by that event, Richelieu represented to the Council the necessity of raising money at whatever cost, and of using every endeavour to effect a continuance of the hostilities in Germany and Flanders, without, however, declaring war against Austria. For this purpose he stated that more troops must necessarily be raised, but that the forfeited dowry of the Queen-mother and the appanage of the Duc d'Orléans would furnish sufficient funds for their maintenance; an expedient which was at once adopted by the Council.

In the event of either war or peace, however, the Cardinal was equally uneasy to see the mother of the King and the heir-presumptive to the Crown in the hands of the Spaniards, as their influence might tend to excite an insurrection on the first check experienced by the French army; while, should a general peace be negotiated during their residence in the Low Countries, the Emperor and the King of Spain would not fail to stipulate such conditions for them both as he was by no means inclined to concede; and he was therefore anxious to effect, if possible, their voluntary departure from the Spanish territories. That he should succeed as regarded Gaston, Richelieu had little doubt, that weak Prince being completely subjugated by his favourites, who, as the minister was well aware, were at all times ready to sacrifice the interests of their master to their own; but as regarded Marie de Medicis the case was widely different, for he could not conceal from himself that should she entertain the most remote suspicion of his own desire to cause her removal from her present place of refuge, she would remain rooted to the soil, although her heart broke in the effort. Nor was he ignorant that all her counsellors perpetually urged her never to return to France until she could do so without incurring any obligation to himself; and this she could only hope to effect by the assistance of the Emperor and Philip of Spain.

One circumstance, however, seemed to lend itself to his project, and this existed in the fact that the Queen-mother had, during the preceding year, requested her son-in-law the King of England to furnish her with vessels for conveying her to a Spanish port; and this request, coupled with her departure from Brussels, led him to believe that she was becoming weary of the Low Countries. He accordingly resolved to ascertain whether there were any hopes of inducing her to retire for a time to Florence; but the difficulty which presented itself was how to renew a proposition which had been already more than once indignantly rejected.

After considerable reflection the Cardinal at length believed that he had discovered a sure method of effecting his object; and with this conviction he one day sent to request the presence of M. de Gondi, the envoy of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, when after having greatly extolled the prudence of the Grand Duke throughout the misunderstanding between Louis XIII and his mother, and made elaborate protestations of the sense which that monarch entertained of his moderation and equity, he conversed for a time on the affairs of Italy, and then, as if casually, he reverted to the subject of the Queen-mother.

"À-propos;" he said, "speaking of *the poor woman*, certain persons are endeavouring, I understand, to induce her to visit Florence. What do you think of the project?"

"Your Eminence," replied Gondi, "is the first person by whom I have been informed of this intention on the part of her Majesty; I never heard that she had adopted such a resolution."

"Then I must initiate you into the mystery," pursued Richelieu. "The bad advice of that madman Chanteloupe has been the cause of all the errors of which she has been guilty. The King had requested the Infanta to deliver the man up to him; a demand by which he was so incensed that he forthwith urged the Queen to leave the Low Countries, declaring that she would no longer be safe there, should Isabella, whose health is failing fast, chance to die. The poor woman, listening to this interested counsel, accordingly resolved to go to England, but Charles would not receive her without the consent of her son. Thereupon she asked for some vessels to convey her to Spain, to which the English monarch replied that he would furnish her with a fleet, provided that his brother-in-law approved of her intention, and that Philip would

Marie de Medicis

consent to her remaining in his dominions. His Catholic Majesty has already given the required pledge, but I am not yet aware of the determination of my own sovereign. You see to what a pitiable state she is reduced; she does not know which way to turn; and I really feel for her. I wish with all my heart that I could help her; but so far from seeing her position in its right light, she continues so headstrong that she feels no regret for the past, and declares that she never shall do so."

M. de Gondi remained silent; and after pausing an instant Richelieu resumed: "As the Queen-mother really wishes to change her place of abode, would to God that she would select some country where the King could prove to her the extent of his affection without endangering the interests of the state; and where nothing might prevent me from testifying towards her my own gratitude and respect. Charles of England cannot well refuse the use of his ships after her request, but I cannot bring myself to believe that she actually desires to reside in Spain. Should she ultimately incline towards Florence, and anticipate a good reception from the Grand Duke, do you apprehend that she would be disappointed in her hope?"

"Monseigneur," cautiously replied the envoy, who was not without a suspicion of the motive which urged the Cardinal to hazard this inquiry, and who had received no instructions upon the subject, "I know nothing of the projects of her Majesty, nor do I believe that the Grand Duke is better informed than myself. The Court of Florence entertains such perfect confidence in the affection of the King of France for his mother, that it leaves all such arrangements to the good feeling of his Majesty."

"The aspect of affairs has greatly changed within the last few months," observed Richelieu, "and I am of opinion that the King would be gratified should the Grand Duke consent to receive his niece, in the event of her desiring to pass a short time under his protection, until a perfect reconciliation is effected between them; but you will see that should she once set foot in England, she will never leave it again, and will by her intrigues inevitably embroil us with that country."

Again did M. de Gondi protest his entire ignorance alike of the movements of the exiled Queen and of the wishes of his sovereign, with a calm pertinacity which warned the Cardinal that further persistence would be impolitic, as it could not fail to betray his eagerness to effect the object of which he professed only to discuss the expediency; and, accordingly, the interview terminated without having produced the desired result.

Richelieu had, however, said enough to convince the Tuscan envoy that should the Grand Duke succeed in persuading the Queen-mother to reside at his Court, he would gratify both Louis and his minister; but neither he himself nor Marie de Medicis had ever contemplated such an arrangement. It was true, as the Cardinal had stated, that she had applied to Charles of England for shipping, but she had done so with a view of proceeding by Spain to join the Duc d'Orléans in Languedoc, little imagining that his cause would so soon be ruined. Mortified to find herself left for so long a period in a state of dependence upon Philip and Isabella, and deprived of any other alternative, she had next sought to secure an asylum in the adopted country of her daughter, where her near relationship to the Queen gave her a claim to sympathy and kindness which she was aware that she had no right to exact from strangers; and she consequently felt that the obligation which she should there incur would prove less irksome to support than that which was merely based on political interests; and, which, however gracefully conferred, could not be divested of its galling weight.

Henriette, who had always been strongly attached to her royal mother, and who, in her brilliant exile, pined for the ties of kindred and the renewal of old associations, welcomed the proposal with eagerness; but Charles I., who was apprehensive that by yielding to the wishes of the Queen, he should involve himself in a misunderstanding with the French Court; and who, moreover, disliked and dreaded the restless and intriguing spirit of Marie de Medicis, as much as he deprecated the outlay which her residence in the kingdom must occasion, hesitated to grant her request.

Marie de Medicis

Such was the extremity to which the ingratitude and ambition of a single individual, whose fortunes she had herself founded, had, in the short space of eighteen months, reduced the once-powerful Queen-Regent of France; whose son and sons-in-law were the most powerful sovereigns in Europe.

Since the execution of the Duc de Montmorency all the nobility of France had bowed the head before the power of Richelieu; the greatest and the proudest alike felt their danger, for they had learnt the terrible truth that neither rank, nor birth, nor personal popularity could shield them from his resentment; and while Louis XIII hunted at Fontainebleau, feasted at the Louvre, and attended with as much patience as he could assume at the constant performances of the vapid and tedious dramas with which the Cardinal-Duke, who aspired to be esteemed a poet, incessantly taxed the forbearance of the monarch and his Court, the active and versatile pen of the minister was at the same time spreading desolation and death on every side.

One unfortunate noble, whose only crime had been his adhesion to the cause of Gaston d'Orléans, was condemned to the galleys for life; while the Duc d'Elboeuf, MM. de Puylaurens, du Coudrai-Montpensier, and de Goulas were tried and executed in effigy; the figures by which they were represented being clothed in costly dresses, richly decorated with lace, and glittering with tinsel ornaments

Other individuals who had taken part in the revolt, but who were also beyond the present power of the Cardinal, were condemned *par contumace*, some to be quartered, and others to lose their heads. The Chevalier de Jars, accused of having endeavoured to assist in the escape of the Queen-mother and Monsieur to England, although no proof could be adduced of the fact, perished upon the scaffold; Châteauneuf, whose assiduities to the Duchesse de Chevreuse had aroused the jealousy of the Cardinal, who had long entertained a passion for that lady, was deprived of the seals, which were transferred to M. Séguier; while Madame de Chevreuse was banished from the Court, and the Marquis de Leuville, the nephew of Châteauneuf, and several others of his friends were committed to the Bastille.

Meanwhile Monsieur had considered it expedient to apprise the King of his marriage with the Princesse Marguerite, by which Louis was so greatly incensed that he forthwith resolved to punish the bad faith of Charles de Lorraine by proceeding to his duchy, and laying siege to the capital.

Aware that resistance was impossible, the Prince immediately despatched his brother the Cardinal to solicit the pardon of the King; but Louis remained inexorable, although the unhappy Charles, who foresaw the ruin of his entire family should the hostile army of France invade his territories, even proposed to abdicate in favour of the Cardinal-Duke Francis. Still Louis continued his onward march, and finally, rendered desperate by his fears, the sovereign of Lorraine consented to deliver up the city upon such terms as his Majesty should see fit to propose, provided that he received no help from without during the next ten days; and, moreover, to place his sister the Princesse Marguerite in his hands.

These conditions having been accepted, the Cardinal de Lorraine solicited a passport for himself and his equipage, in order that he might leave Nancy; and his retreat involved so romantic an incident, that it produces the effect of fiction rather [than that of sober history]. The unfortunate bride of Gaston had no sooner ascertained that she was destined to become the prisoner of the King than she resolved, with a courage which her weak and timid husband would have been unable to emulate, to effect her escape. In a few words she explained her project to the Cardinal Francis, whose ambition and brotherly love were alike interested in her success; and within an hour she had assumed the attire of one of the pages of his household. Having covered her own hair with a black wig, and stained her face and hands with a dark dye, she hastened to the convent in which she had been married to Monsieur, in order to take leave of the Abbess de Remiremont, and created great alarm among the nuns, who, while engaged in their devotions, suddenly saw an armed man standing in the midst of them; but the Princess had no sooner made herself known than they crowded about her to weep over her trials, and to utter earnest prayers for her preservation.

Marie de Medicis

On reaching the advanced guard of the French army she incurred the greatest danger, as her person was well known to the officer in command; but fortunately for the Princess he had retired to rest, and the carriage which she occupied was searched by a subordinate to whom she was a stranger. After having traversed the royal camp, the courageous fugitive mounted on horseback, and, accompanied by two trusty attendants, rode without once making a halt as far as Thionville, a town which belonged to the Spaniards; but on arriving at the gates she did not venture to enter until she had apprised the Comte de Wilthy, the governor, of the step which she had taken; and her fatigue was so excessive that, during the absence of her messenger, she dismounted with considerable difficulty and flung herself down upon the grass that fringed the ditch; a circumstance which attracted the attention of the sentinel at the gate, who pointed her out to a comrade, exclaiming at the same time:

"Yon is a stripling who is new to hard work, or I am mistaken."

Meanwhile the errant Princess was faint from exhaustion, and sick with suspense; but she was soon relieved from her apprehensions by the appearance of the Governor and his wife, by whom she was welcomed with respect and cordiality; apartments were assigned to her in their own residence; and under their protection she remained for several days at Thionville, in order to recruit her strength, as well as to inform Monsieur of her approach, and to request an escort to Brussels. Both Gaston and the Queen-mother were overjoyed at her escape; for although estranged by the jealousies and intrigues of those about them, Marie fully participated in the delight of her son, as she trusted that the presence of a daughter-in-law, who shared her enmity towards the Cardinal, would tend to ameliorate her own position. Carriages and attendants were immediately despatched to Thionville, while Monsieur proceeded to Namur to meet the Princess, and to conduct her to Brussels, where she was impatiently expected. On alighting at the palace Madame was received with open arms by her mother-in-law, who had returned to the capital in order to congratulate her on the happy result of her enterprise, and was greeted by the Archduchess with equal warmth. The Spanish Cabinet accorded an augmentation of fifteen thousand crowns monthly to the pension of Monsieur for the maintenance of her household, and this liberality was emulated by Isabella, who overwhelmed her with the most costly presents.

The Duchesse d'Orléans had no sooner received the compliments of the Court of Brussels than the Queen-mother returned to Ghent, where she was shortly afterwards attacked by so violent a fever that her life was endangered. In this extremity Gaston fulfilled all the duties of an affectionate and anxious son, and urged her to quit the noxious air of the marshes and to return to the capital; but his entreaties were powerless, Chanteloupe on his side advising her to remain in the retreat which she had chosen. Louis XIII was soon informed of the illness of his mother, and whether it were that he really felt a renewal of tenderness towards her person, or that he merely deemed it expedient to keep up appearances, it is certain that after some time he despatched two of the physicians of his household to Flanders, with instructions to use their utmost endeavours to overcome the malady of the Queen; while they were, moreover, accompanied by a gentleman of the Court charged with a cold and brief letter, and authorized not only to express the regrets common on such occasions, but also to make proposals of reconciliation to the royal exiles.

The Infanta, who, despite her age and infirmities, was a frequent visitor in the sick room of her illustrious guest, and who saw with alarm the rapid progress of the disease under which the unhappy Marie de Medicis had laboured for upwards of forty days, encouraged by the arrival of the French envoy, at length wrote to inform the King that his mother, who placed the greatest confidence in the skill of her own physician Vautier, had expressed the most earnest desire for his attendance; and it is probable that at so extreme a crisis Louis would not have hesitated to comply with her wishes had not Richelieu opposed his liberation from the Bastille, asserting that Marie de Medicis had induced Isabella to make the request for the sole purpose of once more having about her person a man who had formerly given her the most pernicious advice, and who encouraged her in her rebellion. All, therefore, that the King would concede under this impression was his permission to Vautier to prescribe in writing for the royal invalid; but the physician, who trusted that the circumstance might tend to his liberation,

excused himself, alleging that as he had not seen the Queen-mother for upwards of two years, he could not judge of the changes which increased age, change of air, and moral suffering had produced upon her system; and that consequently he dared not venture to propose remedies which might produce a totally opposite result to that which he intended.

But, at the same time that the Cardinal refused to gratify the wishes of the apparently dying Queen, he was profuse in his expressions of respect and affection towards her. "His Majesty is about to despatch you to Ghent," he had said to the envoy when he went to receive his parting instructions. "Assure the Queen-mother from me that although I am aware my name is odious to her, and conscious of the whole extent of the ill-will which she bears towards me, those circumstances do not prevent my feeling the most profound attachment to her person, and the deepest grief at her indisposition. Do not fail to assure her that I told you this with tears in my eyes. God grant that I may never impute to so good a Princess all the injury which I have suffered from her friends, nor the calumnies which those about her incessantly propagate against me; although it is certain that so long as she listens to these envenomed tongues I cannot hope that she will be undeceived, nor that she will recognize the uprightness of my intentions."

It appears marvellous that a man gifted with surpassing genius, and holding in his hand the destinies of Europe, should condescend to such pitiful and puerile hypocrisy; but throughout the whole of the Memoirs attributed to Richelieu himself, the reader is startled by the mass of petty manoeuvres upon which he dilates; as though the dispersion of an insignificant cabal, or the destruction of some obscure individual who had become obnoxious to him, were the most important occupations of his existence.

Not content with insulting his royal victim by words which belied the whole tenor of his conduct, the Cardinal, before he dismissed the envoy, seized the opportunity of adding one more affront to those of which he had already been so lavish, by instructing the royal messenger not to hold the slightest intercourse with any member of her household, and even to turn his back upon them whenever they should address him; a command which he so punctiliously obeyed that when, in the very chamber of Marie de Medicis, one of her gentlemen offered him the usual courtesies of welcome, he retorted by the most contemptuous silence, to the extreme indignation of the Queen, who, in reply to the message of Richelieu, haughtily exclaimed, "Tell the Cardinal that I prefer his persecution to his civility."

Silenced by this unanswerable assurance, the envoy next proceeded to deliver the despatch with which he had been entrusted by the King. "I am consoled for my sufferings," said the unhappy mother, as she extended her trembling and withered hand to receive it, "since I am indebted to them for this remembrance on the part of his Majesty. I will on this occasion be careful to return my acknowledgments by a person who will not be displeasing to him."

Such, however, was far from her intention; as, convinced that the insult offered to her attendants had been suggested by the Cardinal, she selected for her messenger the same individual who had formerly delivered to the Parliament of Paris her petition against Richelieu, in order to convince him that should she effect her reconciliation with the monarch on this occasion, she had no inclination to include his minister in the amnesty. Even past experience, bitter as it was, had not yet taught her that the contest was hopeless.

Her reply to the letter of her son ran thus:

"Monsieur mon fils, I do not doubt that had you been sooner apprised of my illness, you would not have failed to give me proofs of your good disposition. Those which I formerly received have so confirmed this belief, that even my present misfortunes cannot weaken it. I am extremely obliged by your having sent to visit me when the rumour of my indisposition reached you. If your goodness has led you to regret that you were not sooner made acquainted with so public a circumstance, my affection induces me willingly to receive the intelligence which you send me, at any time. Your envoy will inform you that he reached me on the fortieth day of a continuous fever, which augments throughout the night. I was anxious that he should

Marie de Medicis

see me out of my bed, in order that he might assure you that the attack was not so violent, and that my strength is not so much exhausted, as to deprive me, with God's help, of all hope of recovery. Having been out of health for the last year, and the fever from which I formerly suffered every third week having changed and become continuous, the physicians apprehend that it may become more dangerous. I am resigned to the will of God, and I shall not regret life if I am assured of your favour before my death; and if you love me as much as I love you, and shall always love you."

As regarded the proposals of reconciliation brought by the royal envoy, the best-judging among the friends of the Queen-mother were of opinion that she should accept them; but Chanteloupe earnestly opposed the measure.

"Many of your attendants, Madame," he said coldly, "desire to see you once more in France, even should you be shut up in the fortress of Vincennes. They only seek to enjoy their own property in peace."

The reverend father made no mention of his own enjoyment of a pension of a thousand livres a month, paid to him by Spain during his residence in the Low Countries, and which must necessarily cease should Marie de Medicis withdraw from the protection of that power.

Before the departure of the King's messenger, he informed the Queen-mother that he was authorized by his sovereign to offer her pecuniary aid should she require it; insinuating at the same time that, in the event of her consenting to dismiss certain of her attendants who were displeasing to the monarch, their misunderstanding might be at once happily terminated.

"I am perfectly satisfied with the liberality of my son-in-law, the King of Spain," was her brief and cold reply. "He is careful that I shall feel no want."

The Abbé de St. Germain, on ascertaining the terms offered to his royal protectress, earnestly urged her not to reject them. "It is not just, Madame," he said frankly and disinterestedly, "that you should suffer for us. When your Majesty is once more established in France, you will find sufficient opportunities of serving us, and of enabling us to reside either here or elsewhere. Extricate yourself, Madame, from your painful situation, and spend the remainder of your life in your adopted country, where you will be independent of the aid of foreigners."

Unhappily for herself, however, Marie de Medicis disregarded this wholesome and generous advice; and although Richelieu, in order to save appearances, from time to time repeated the proposal, she continued to persist in an exile which could only be terminated at his pleasure.

Having succeeded by this crafty policy in inducing a general impression that the unfortunate Queen persisted from a spirit of obstinacy in remaining out of the kingdom, when she could at any moment return on advantageous conditions, the Cardinal next exerted himself to create a misunderstanding between Marie de Medicis and Monsieur, for which purpose he secretly caused it to be asserted to the Prince and Puylaurens that the Queen-mother, anxious to make her own terms to the exclusion of Gaston, had despatched several messengers to the French Court with that object. Monsieur affected to discredit the report, but Puylaurens, who was weary of an exile which thwarted his ambition, eagerly welcomed the intelligence, and soon succeeded in inducing Gaston to give it entire credence. Thenceforward all confidence was necessarily at an end between the mother and the son; and the favourite, apprehensive that should Marie de Medicis conclude a treaty with the sovereign before his master had made his own terms, she might, in order to advance her own interests, sacrifice those of the Prince, hastened to despatch a trusty messenger to ascertain the conditions which Louis was willing to accord to his brother. The reply which Puylaurens received from the Cardinal was most encouraging; Richelieu being anxious that Monsieur should act independently of the Queen-mother, and thus weaken the cause of both parties, while his gratification was increased by the arrival of a second envoy accredited by Gaston himself, who offered in his name, not only to make every concession required of him should he be restored to the favour of the King, but even to allow the minister to decide upon his future place of

Marie de Medicis

abode; while Puylaurens, on his side, offered to resign his claim to the hand of the Princesse de Phalsbourg, the sister of the Duc de Lorraine, which had been pledged to him, if he could induce his Eminence to bestow upon him that of one of his own relatives.

In reply to the last proposition the Cardinal declared himself ready to secure to the favourite of Monsieur, should he succeed in making his royal patron fulfil the promises which he had volunteered, a large sum of money, and his elevation to a dukedom; but Puylaurens demanded still better security. He could not forget that if he still existed, it was simply from the circumstance that the minister had been unable to execute upon his person the violence which had been visited upon his effigy, and he accordingly replied:

"Of what avail is a dukedom, since his Eminence is ever more ready to cut off the head of a peer than that of a citizen?"

"If you are still distrustful," said the negotiator, "the Cardinal, moreover, offers you an alliance with himself as you propose; and will give you in marriage the younger daughter of his kinsman the Baron de Pontchâteau."

"That alters the case," replied the young noble, "as I am aware that his Eminence has too much regard for his family to behead one of his cousins."

One impediment, however, presented itself to the completion of this treaty, which proved insurmountable. Monsieur refused to consent to the annulment of his marriage with the Princesse Marguerite; while the King, who had just marched an army into Lorraine, and taken the town of Nancy, on his side declined all reconciliation with his brother until he consented to place her in his hands.

On his return from Lorraine Louis XIII halted for a time at Metz, and during his sojourn in that city an adventurer named Alfeston was put upon his trial, and broken on the wheel, for having attempted to assassinate the Cardinal. The culprit had only a short time previously arrived in Metz from Brussels, accompanied by two other individuals who had been members of the bodyguard of the Queen-mother, while he himself actually rode a horse belonging to her stud. As he was stretched upon the hideous instrument of torture, he accused Chanteloupe as an accessory in the contemplated crime; and the Jesuit, together with several others, were cited to appear and defend themselves; while, at the same time, the horse ridden by the principal conspirator was restored to its royal owner, with a request from the King that she would not in future permit such nefarious plots to be organized in her household, as "not only was the person of the Cardinal infinitely dear to him," but rascals of that description were capable of making other attempts of the same nature; and, not contented with thus insulting his unhappy and exiled mother, Louis, in order to show his anxiety for the safety of the minister, added to the bodyguard which had already been conceded to him an additional company of a hundred musketeers, the whole of whom he himself selected.

The constant indignities to which Marie de Medicis was subjected by Monsieur and his haughty favourite at length crushed her bruised and wearied spirit. Outraged in every feeling, and disappointed in every hope, she became in her turn anxious to effect a reconciliation with the King, even upon terms less favourable than those to which she had hitherto aspired. Gaston seldom entered her apartments, nor was his presence ever the harbinger of anything but discord; while Puylaurens and Chanteloupe openly braved and defied each other, and the two little Courts were a scene of constant broils and violence. Monsieur, moreover, forbade his wife to see her royal mother-in-law so frequently, or to evince towards her that degree of respect to which she was entitled both from her exalted rank and her misfortunes. The gentle Marguerite, however, refused to comply with a command which revolted her better nature; and even consented, at the instigation of Marie de Medicis and Isabella--whose dignity and virtue were alike outraged by the dissolute excesses of the favourite--to entreat her husband to dismiss Puylaurens from his service.

"Should you succeed, Madame," said the Queen-mother, "you will save yourself from ruin. He is sold to the Cardinal; who, in addition to other benefits, has promised to give him his own cousin in marriage. But on what conditions do you imagine that he conceded this

demand? Simply that Monsieur should unreservedly comply upon all points, and particularly on that which regards his marriage, with the will of Richelieu; that he should place you in the hands of the King, or leave you here, if it be not possible to convey you to France; that he should authorize an inquiry into the legitimacy of your marriage; and, finally, that Monsieur should abandon both myself and the King of Spain. Such are the terms of the treaty; and were they once accepted, who would be able to sustain your claims?"

The unfortunate Princess understood only too well the dangers of her position, and she accordingly exerted all her influence to obtain the dismissal of Puylaurens, but the brilliant favourite had become necessary to the existence of his frivolous master, far more so, indeed, than the wife who was no longer rendered irresistible by novelty; and the only result of her entreaties was a peevish order not to listen to any complaints against those who were attached to his person.

With a weakness worthy of his character, Gaston moreover repeated to his favourite all that had taken place; and the fury of Puylaurens reached so extreme a point that, in order to prove his contempt for the unhappy Queen--about to be deprived of the support and affection of her best-loved son, who had, like his elder brother, suffered himself to be made the tool of an ambitious follower--he had on one occasion the audacity to enter her presence, followed by a train of twenty-five gentlemen, all fully armed, as though while approaching her he dreaded assassination.

Marie de Medicis looked for an instant upon him with an expression of scorn in her bright and steady eye beneath which his own sank; and then, rising from her seat, she walked haughtily from the apartment. Once arrived in her closet, however, her indignant pride gave way; and throwing herself upon the neck of one of her attendants, she wept the bitter tears of humiliation and despair.

Nor was this the only, or the heaviest, insult to which the widow of Henri IV was subjected by the arrogant *protégé* of Monsieur, for anxious to secure his own advancement, and to aggrandize himself by means of Richelieu, since he had become convinced that his only hope of future greatness depended on the favour of the Cardinal, Puylaurens once more urged upon Gaston the expediency of accepting the conditions offered to him by the King. Weary of the petty Court of Brussels, the Prince listened with evident pleasure to the arguments advanced by his favourite; the fair palaces of St. Germain and the Tuileries rose before his mental vision; his faction in Languedoc existed no longer; with his usual careless ingratitude he had already ceased to resent the death of Montmorency; his beautiful and heroic wife retained but a feeble hold upon his heart; and he pined for change.

Under such circumstances it was, consequently, not long ere Puylaurens induced him to consent to a renewal of the negotiations; but, with that inability to keep a secret by which he was distinguished throughout his whole career, although urged to silence by his interested counsellor, it was not long ere Monsieur declared his intention alike to his mother and his wife, and terminated this extraordinary confidence by requesting that Marie de Medicis would give him her opinion as to the judiciousness of his determination.

"My opinion!" exclaimed the indignant Queen. "You should blush even to have listened to such a proposition. Have you forgotten your birth and your rank? What will be thought of such a treaty by the world? Simply that it was the work of a favourite, and not the genuine reconciliation of a Prince of the Blood Royal of France, the heir-presumptive to the Crown, with the King his brother. Your own honour and the interests of your wife are alike sacrificed; and should you ever be guilty of the injustice and cowardice of taking another wife before the death of Marguerite, who will guarantee that the children who may be born to you by the last will be regarded as legitimate? I do not speak of what concerns myself. When such conditions shall be offered to you as you may accept without dishonour, even although I may not be included in the amnesty, I shall be the first to advise you to accept them."

Gaston attempted no reply to this impassioned address, but it did not fail to produce its effect; and on returning to his own apartments he withdrew the consent which Puylaurens had

Marie de Medicis

extorted from him. The favourite, convinced that the answer of the Queen-mother had been dictated by Chanteloupe, hurried to her residence, insulted and menaced the Jesuit whom he encountered in an ante-room, and forcing himself into the chamber of Marie de Medicis, accused her in the most disrespectful terms of endeavouring to perpetuate the dissension of the King and his brother, in order to gratify her enmity towards Richelieu.

"Never," exclaimed the Queen-mother, quivering with indignation, "did even my enemy the Cardinal thus fail in respect towards me! He was far from daring to address me with such an amount of insolence as this. Learn that should I see fit to say a single word, and to receive him again into favour, I could overthrow all your projects. Leave the room, young madman, or I will have you flung from the windows. It is easy to perceive that your nature is as mean as your birth."

Puylaurens retired; but thenceforward the existence of the Queen-mother became one unbroken tissue of mortification and suffering; and so bitterly did she feel the degradations to which she was hourly exposed, that she at length resolved to despatch one of the gentlemen of her household to the King, to ascertain if she could obtain the royal permission to return to France upon such terms as she should be enabled to concede. In the letter which she addressed to her son she touchingly complained of the indignities to which she was subjected by Monsieur and his favourite, and implored his Majesty to extricate her from a position against which she was unable to contend.

In his reply Louis assured her that he much regretted to learn that the Duc d'Orléans had been wanting in respect towards her person, but reminded her that such could never have been the case had she followed his own advice and that of his faithful servants; and terminated his missive by an intimation that in the event of her placing in his power all her evil counsellors, in order that he might punish them as they deserved, and of her also pledging herself to love, as she ought to do, the good servants of the Crown, he might then believe that she was no longer so ill-disposed as she had been when she left France.

The disappointed Queen-mother at once recognized the hand of the Cardinal in this cold and constrained despatch, which was merely a renewal of her sentence of banishment; as Richelieu well knew that the high heart and generous spirit of the Tuscan Princess would revolt at the enormity of sacrificing those who had clung to her throughout her evil fortunes, in order to secure her own impunity.

Unfortunately, alike for Marie de Medicis and Gaston d'Orléans, the amiable Infanta, who had proved so patient as well as so munificent a host--and who had, without murmur or reproach, seen her previously tranquil and pious Court changed by the dissipation and cabals of her foreign guests into a perpetual arena of strife and even bloodshed--the Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia, whose very name was revered throughout the whole of the Low Countries, expired on the 1st of December at the age of sixty-eight, after having governed Flanders during thirty-five years.

This event was a source of alarm as well as of sorrow to the royal exiles, who could not anticipate an equal amount of forbearance from the Marquis d'Ayeta, by whom she was provisionally replaced in the government; and who had long and loudly expressed his disgust at the perpetual feuds which convulsed the circles of the Queen-mother and her son, and declared that they had caused him more annoyance than all the subjects of the King his master in the Low Countries. In this extremity both Marie and Monsieur became more than ever anxious to procure their recall to France; and Gaston soon succeeded in ascertaining the conditions upon which his pardon was to be accorded. Letters of abolition were to be granted for his past revolt: his several appanages were to be restored to him: the sum of seven hundred thousand crowns were to be paid over to meet his immediate exigences: he was to be invested with the government of Auvergne, and to have, as a bodyguard, a troop of gendarmes and light-horse, of which the command was to be conferred upon Puylaurens, to whom the offer of a dukedom was renewed; and, in the event of Monsieur declining to reside at Court, he was to be at liberty to fix his abode either in Auvergne or in Bourbonnais, as he saw fit; while, in any and every case, he was to live according to his own pleasure alike in Paris or the provinces.

Marie de Medicis

And--in return for this indulgence--Monsieur was simply required to abandon his brother-in-law Charles de Lorraine to the vengeance of the King, without attempting any interference in his behalf; to detach himself wholly and unreservedly from all his late friends and adherents both within and without the kingdom of France; to resign all alliance either personal or political with the Queen-mother; to be guided in every circumstance by the counsels of the Cardinal-Minister; and to give the most stringent securities for his future loyalty.

Such were the conditions to which the heir-presumptive to the Crown of France ultimately consented to affix his name, although for a time he affected to consider them as unworthy of his dignity; and meanwhile as the year drew to a close, a mutual jealousy had grown up between the mother and son which seconded all the views of Richelieu, whose principal aim was to prevent the return of either to France for as long a period as he could succeed in so doing.

CHAPTER XI

1634

The early months of the year 1634 were passed by Marie de Medicis in perpetual mortification and anxiety. The passport which she had obtained for the free transport of such articles of necessity as she might deem it expedient to procure from France was disregarded, and her packages were subjected to a rigorous examination on the frontier; an insult of which she complained bitterly to Louis, declaring that if the Cardinal sought by such means to reduce her to a more pitiable condition than that in which she had already found herself, and thus to bend her to his will, the attempt would prove fruitless; as no amount of indignity should induce her to humble herself before him.

The unhappy Princess little imagined that in a few short weeks she should become a suppliant for his favour! Meanwhile the struggle for pre-eminence continued unabated between Puylaurens and Chanteloupe; and the life of the former having been on one occasion attempted, the faction of Monsieur did not hesitate to attribute the contemplated assassination to the adherents of the Queen-mother; whence arose continual conflicts between the two pigmy Courts, which rendered unavailing all the efforts of the Marquis d'Ayeta to reconcile the royal relatives. Moreover, Marie was indignant that the Marquis constantly evinced towards her son a consideration in which he sometimes failed towards herself; and, finding her position becoming daily more onerous, she at length resolved to accomplish a reconciliation, not only with the King, but even with the minister, on any terms which she could obtain. In pursuance of this determination she gave instructions to M. Le Rebours de Laleu, her equerry, to proceed to Paris with her despatches, which consisted of three letters, one addressed to the sovereign, another to the Cardinal, and the third to M. de Bouthillier, all of which severally contained earnest assurances of her intention to comply with the will and pleasure of the King in all things, and to obey his commands by foregoing for the future all enmity towards Richelieu. In that which she wrote to the minister himself she carefully eschewed every vestige of her former haughtiness, and threw herself completely on his generosity. "Cousin"--thus ran the letter of the once-powerful widow of Henri IV to her implacable enemy--"the Sieur Bouthillier having assured me in your name that my sorrows have deeply affected you, and that, regretting you should for so long a time have deprived me of the honour of seeing the King, your greatest satisfaction would now be to use your influence to obtain for me this happiness, I have considered myself bound to express to you through the Sieur Laleu, whom I despatch to the King, how agreeable your goodwill has been to me. Place confidence in him, and believe, Cousin, that I will ever truly be, etc. etc."

In addition to this humiliation, the heart-broken Queen at the same time gave instructions to her messenger to declare to the King that, "having learned that his Majesty could not be persuaded of her affection for his own person so long as she refused to extend it to the Cardinal, he was empowered to assure his Majesty that the Queen-mother, from consideration for the King her son, would thenceforward bestow her regard upon his minister, and dismiss all resentment for the past."

Both the verbal and written declarations addressed to Louis on this occasion were, as will at once be evident, a mere matter of form, and observance of the necessary etiquette. It was not the monarch of France whom Marie de Medicis sought to conciliate, but the Cardinal-Duke, who, as she was conscious, held her fate in his hands. It was before him, consequently, that she bowed down; it was to his sovereign pleasure that she thus humbly deferred; for she felt that the long-enduring struggle which she had hitherto sustained against him was at once impotent and hopeless. Alas! she had, as she was fated ere long to experience, as little to

Marie de Medicis

anticipate from the abject concession which she now made, bitter as were the tears that it had cost her. The most annoying impediments were thrown in the way of her messenger when he solicited an audience of the sovereign, nor was he slow in arriving at the conviction that his mission would prove abortive. Nevertheless, as the command of Marie de Medicis had been that he should also deliver the letter to Richelieu in person, and, as he had already done in the case of the King, add to its written assurances his own corroborative declarations in her name, and even communicate to him the offer of Chanteloupe to retire to a monastery for the remainder of his life in the event of his exclusion from the treaty, he was bound to pursue his task to its termination, hopeless as it might be.

When the envoy of the Queen-mother had delivered his despatches, and fulfilled the duty with which he had been entrusted, the embarrassment of the Cardinal became extreme. That the haughty Marie de Medicis should ever have compelled herself to such humiliation was an event so totally unexpected on his part that he had made no arrangements to meet it; and it appeared impossible even to him that, under the circumstances, the King could venture to refuse her immediate return to France. The crisis was a formidable one to Richelieu, who, judging both his injured benefactress and himself from the past, placed no faith in her professions of forgiveness; for, on his side, he felt that he should resent even to his dying hour much that had passed before she fled the kingdom, as well as the libels against him which she had sanctioned during her residence in Flanders. He had, moreover, as he asserted, on several occasions received information that Chanteloupe meditated some design upon his life; and that the Jesuit had stated in writing that he could never induce the Queen-mother to consent to separate herself from him, although he had entreated of her to leave him in the Low Countries when she returned to France. Despicable, indeed, were such alleged terrors from the lips of the Cardinal-Duc de Richelieu--the first minister of one of the first sovereigns of Europe. What had he to fear from a powerless and impoverished Princess, whose misfortunes had already endured a sufficient time to outweary her foreign protectors; to subdue the hopes, and to exhaust the energies of her former adherents; and to reduce her to an insignificance of which, as her present measures sufficiently evinced, she had herself become despairingly conscious? Even had Louis XIII at this moment been possessed of sufficient right feeling and moral energy to remember that it was the dignity of a mother which he had so long sacrificed to the ambition of a minister--that it was the widow of the great monarch who had bequeathed to him a crown whom he ruthlessly persecuted in order to further the fortunes of an ambitious ingrate--all these trivial hindrances might have been thrust aside at once; but the egotistical and timid temperament of the French King deadened the finer impulses of honour and of nature; and he still suffered himself to be governed, where he should have asserted his highest and his holiest prerogative.

It is impossible to contemplate without astonishment so extraordinary an anomaly as that which was presented by the King, the Queen-mother, and the Cardinal de Richelieu at this particular period. An obscure priest, elevated by the favour of a powerful Princess to the highest offices in the realm, after having reduced his benefactress to the necessity of humbling herself before him, and so unreservedly acknowledging his supremacy as to ask, as the only condition of his forgiveness, that he would do her the favour to believe in the sincerity of her professions.--The widow of Henry the Great, the mother of the King of France, and of the Queens of Spain and England, in danger of wearing out her age in exile, because Armand Jean du Plessis, the younger son of a petty noble of Poitou, who once considered himself the most fortunate of mortals in obtaining the bishopric of Luçon, feared that his unprecedented power might be shaken should his first friend and patroness be once more united to her son, and restored to the privileges of her rank.--And, finally, a sovereign, who, while in his better moments he felt all the enormity of his conduct towards the author of his being, now fast sinking under the combined weight of years and suffering, was yet deficient in the energy necessary to do justice alike to her and to himself.

Such, however, was the actual position of the several individuals; and the fate of Marie de Medicis was decided.

Marie de Medicis

A desire of repose, consequent upon his failing health, self-gratulation at his triumph over an inimical and powerful faction, and a desire to exculpate himself from the charge of ingratitude, would have led the Cardinal to accede to a reconciliation with his long-estranged benefactress; but he soon silenced these natural impulses to dwell only upon the dangers of her reappearance in France, which could not, as he believed, fail to circumscribe his own absolute power--a power to which he had laboriously attained not more by genius than by crime--which had been cemented by blood, and heralded by groans. Nor was this the only consideration by which Richelieu was swayed when he resolved that the Queen-mother should never again, so long as he had life, set foot upon the soil of France. His high-soaring ambition had, within the last few weeks, grasped at a greatness to which even she had not yet attained. For a time, as is asserted by contemporary historians, he indulged visions of royalty in his own person, and had in imagination already fitted the crown of one of the first nations in Europe to his own brow; but the dream had been brief, and he had latterly resolved to transfer to one of his relatives the ermined purple in which he was not permitted to enfold himself. That relative was his niece and favourite, Madame de Comballet, whose hand he had offered to the Cardinal-Duc François de Lorraine, when that Prince succeeded to the sovereignty of the duchy on the abdication of his unfortunate brother Charles; but to avoid this alliance the new Duke had contracted a secret marriage with his cousin the Princesse Claude; a disappointment which the minister of Louis XIII was desirous of repairing by causing the dissolution of the marriage of Gaston d'Orléans with Marguerite de Lorraine, and making Monsieur's union with his own beautiful and unprincipled niece the condition of his restoration to favour.

Aware that the Queen-mother would resent such an indignity even to the death, Richelieu was consequently resolved to put at once a stop to a negotiation of which the result could not be otherwise than fatal to his project, should the King in some moment of piety and contrition suffer himself to remember that it was a mother as well as a Queen who appealed to his indulgence; and who, however she might have erred, had bitterly expiated her faults. Thus then, the Cardinal no sooner saw the agitation of Louis on reading the letter of the exiled Princess, and marked the flashing of his eyes as he became aware that she promised, as he had required of her, to restore the Cardinal to her affection, than the latter hastened to remind him that he must not overlook the fact that he was a sovereign as well as a son; and that the safety of the state required his attention no less than the gratification of his natural feelings.

This was a point upon which Richelieu knew his royal master to be peculiarly susceptible; for the more thoroughly the weak monarch suffered himself to be stripped of his actual authority, the more anxiety did he evince to retain its semblance, and the argument thus advanced instantly sufficed, as the minister had anticipated, to change the whole current of his feelings. It was, moreover, easy to convince Louis that the professions of Marie de Medicis were hollow and unmeaning words so long as she refused to deliver up to his Majesty the obnoxious members of her household; for, in truth, as the Cardinal did not fail to remark, had not Monsieur abandoned his adherents when required to do so as a pledge of his sincerity? And as he asked the insidious question, the distrustful Louis, trembling for his tranquillity, forgot, or did not care to remember, that the egotism and cowardice of his brother in thus building up his own fortunes on the ruin of those who had confided in him, had deeply wounded the dignity of the Queen-mother.

The result of the conference between the King and his minister was an order to the envoy of Marie de Medicis to repair to the residence of the Cardinal at Ruel, where he was informed that he would have an audience, at which both Louis XIII and Richelieu would personally deliver to him their despatches for his royal mistress. On his arrival at the château, however, he was surprised to find the Cardinal alone, and to learn that his Majesty was not expected. To counteract this disappointment, De Laleu was received with such extraordinary distinction that he could not avoid expressing his astonishment at the honours which were lavished upon him, when Richelieu, with one of those bland smiles which were ever at his command, declared that the respect due to the illustrious Princess whom he served demanded still greater demonstrations on his part had it been in his power to afford them on such an occasion. He then proceeded to inform the envoy that the Queen-mother could never be otherwise than welcome, whenever she might see fit to return to France, but that, in order to

Marie de Medicis

be convinced that she would never again suffer herself to be misled by those who had so long induced her to oppose his wishes, the King desired that she would previously deliver up to him the Jesuit Chanteloupe, the Abbé de St. Germain, and the Vicomte de Fabbroni, as his Majesty could not place any confidence in the stability of her affection so long as those individuals were still alive. On his own part, the Cardinal declared his extreme gratification at the proof afforded by the letter of the Queen-mother to himself that his enemies had been unable to undermine her regard for him, and earnestly urged her to comply with the pleasure of the King on the subject of her above-named servants, by which means she could not fail to convince every one that she had disapproved of their disloyalty and evil designs.

"Nor can I forbear reminding her Majesty," he concluded, "with the same frankness as I formerly used towards her, that, after what has passed, it would be impossible for the King not to feel great distrust, which it will be expedient to exert all her energies to overcome, in order to build up the desired reconciliation on a solid foundation. This once effected, she will soon receive sufficient evidence that she possesses one of the most affectionate sons on earth, and she will become aware of the sincere attachment of one of her servants, although he is unable under the present circumstances to urge her cause more zealously than he has already done without incurring the serious displeasure of his sovereign. The difficulties which I have now explained, however, are mere clouds which her Majesty can readily disperse, and the King will further declare to you to-morrow at St. Germain-en-Laye, where you will be admitted to an audience, whatever he may deem it expedient to communicate to his august mother."

On the following day the equerry of Marie de Medicis accordingly proceeded to the Palace of St. Germain, where he found Louis with a brow so moody, and an eye so stern, that he was at no loss to discover the utter futility of all hope of success. The promised communication proved indeed to be a mere repetition of what had already been stated by the Cardinal; but, contrary to custom (his difficulty of articulation rendering the King unwilling on ordinary occasions to indulge in much speaking, diffuse as he was on paper), he enlarged at greater length, and with infinitely more violence than Richelieu had done, upon the misdemeanours of the three individuals whom he claimed at the hands of the Queen-mother, as well as on the necessity of her prompt obedience, which alone could, as he declared, tend to convince him that she had been guiltless of all participation in their crimes.

As the mission of the envoy was accomplished, he commenced his preparations for leaving France; but before they were completed he received fresh despatches from Marie de Medicis, in which she confirmed her former promises both to her son and his minister, in terms still more submissive than those of her previous letters, and requested a passport for Suffren, her confessor, in order that he might plead her cause.

Richelieu was, however, too well aware of the timid and scrupulous nature of the King's conscience, and of the eagerness with which the able Jesuit would avail himself of a similar knowledge, to suffer him to approach the person of Louis; and he consequently replied that "it would be useless for the Queen-mother to send her confessor, or any other individual, to the French Court, unless they brought with them her consent to the condition upon which his Majesty had insisted; as the King had come to an irrevocable determination never to yield upon that point, and to refuse to listen to any other envoy whom she might despatch to him, until she had afforded by her obedience a proof of submission which was indispensable alike to her own reputation, the tranquillity of the royal family, and the welfare of the kingdom."

While awaiting the reappearance of De Laleu, all the household of Marie de Medicis, with the exception of Chanteloupe and one or two others, began to anticipate a speedy return to France. The concessions which she had made were indeed so important and so unforeseen, that it seemed idle to apprehend any further opposition on the part either of the King himself, or of his still more obdurate minister. Great, therefore, was their dismay when they discovered that their unhappy mistress had sacrificed her pride in vain, and that she still remained the victim of her arch-enemy the Cardinal. But among the murmurs by which she was surrounded not one proceeded from the lips of the persecuted exile herself. Never had she so nobly asserted herself as on this occasion. Her resignation was dignified and tearless. In a few

Marie de Medicis

earnest words she declared her determination never to abandon those who had clung to her in her reverses; and, as a pledge of her sincerity, she appointed the Abbé de St. Germain to the long-vacant office of her almoner.

From Monsieur she experienced no sympathy; while Puylaurens openly expressed his gratification at a failure which could but tend to render the negotiations then pending between the Prince his master and the King more favourable to the former. One serious impediment presented itself, however, in the fact that Gaston had, at the entreaty of the Princesse de Phalsbourg (in order to counteract the attempt of Richelieu, who sought to contest its legitimacy), consented to celebrate his marriage a second time, in the presence of the Duc d'Elboeuf, and all the principal officers of his household. He had also solicited the Queen-mother to confirm the approval which she had given to the alliance when it had been originally celebrated at Nancy, and to affix her seal to the written contract; but Marie de Medicis, who was aware that the King would deeply resent this open and formal defiance, declined to comply with his request, having, as she assured him, resolved to abide by the pleasure of the sovereign in all things, and to avoid every cause of offence.

As the Prince still continued to urge her upon the subject, she said coldly, "You persist in vain. You have evinced so little regard for me, and you reject with so much obstinacy the good advice which I give you, that I have at length determined never again to interfere in your affairs. My decision is formed, and henceforward I shall implicitly obey the will of the King."

This circumstance was immediately reported to Richelieu, who, delighted to maintain the coldness which had grown up between the mother and son, hastened to insinuate to Marie de Medicis that Louis had expressed his gratification at her refusal, and to assure her that should she suffer the Prince to extort her consent to such an act of wilful revolt against the royal command she would inevitably ruin her own cause.

Having publicly ratified his marriage by this second solemnization, Monsieur next proceeded to have it confirmed and approved by the doctors of the Faculty of Louvain; to write to the Sovereign-Pontiff, declaring that the alliance which he had formed was valid; and to entreat of his Holiness to disregard all assurances to the contrary, from whatever quarter they might proceed.

In order to give additional weight to these declarations, Gaston sent them by an express to the Papal Court; but his messenger, having been arrested on the frontier, was conveyed to Paris, and committed to the Bastille; upon which a second envoy was despatched, who succeeded in accomplishing his mission. This obstacle to the coveted establishment of his niece enraged the almost omnipotent minister, while Gaston, in his turn, encouraged by the representations of his favourite, communicated to the Marquis d'Ayeta the conditions of the treaty which had been proposed to him, and declared that he would enter into no engagement without the sanction of the Spanish sovereign. The past career of Monsieur had by no means tended to induce an unreserved confidence in those whom he affected to regard, and the able Governor accordingly replied, with an equal degree of sincerity, that he strongly advised the Prince to terminate a struggle which could only tend to distract the kingdom over which he would, in all probability, soon be called upon to rule; but at the same time to insist upon the royal recognition of his marriage, as well as upon holding a fortified town as a place of refuge, should he thereafter require such protection. He, moreover, pointed out Chalon-sur-Saône as an eligible stronghold; and having thus indicated conditions which he was well aware would never be conceded, the Marquis flattered himself that he had, for a time at least, rendered a reconciliation between the royal brothers impracticable.

He was greatly encouraged in this belief when Monsieur, who affected to regard his return to France as a mere chimera, subsequently consented to sign a treaty with Spain, by which he pledged himself not to enter into any agreement with Louis XIII, be the conditions what they might; and, in the event of a war between the two nations, to attach himself to the cause of Philip, who was to place under his orders an army of fifteen thousand men.

Marie de Medicis

This treaty was signed by the Duc d'Orléans and the Marquis d'Ayetona, and countersigned by the Duque de Lerma and Puylaurens; and the Spaniards had no sooner succeeded in obtaining it, than both the Marquis and the Prince of Savoy, who had recently entered the Spanish service, urged the Queen-mother to join the faction. Marie, however, rejected the proposition without the hesitation of a moment, declaring that she could not permit herself to form any alliance so prejudicial to the interests of the King her son; an act of prudence and good feeling on which she had soon additional cause to congratulate herself, as the Marquis d'Ayetona, immediately on its completion, forwarded the treaty to Madrid, where it was ratified and returned without delay; but the vessel by which it was sent having been driven on shore near Calais, the despatches fell into the hands of the French authorities, by whom they were forwarded to the minister, whose alarm on discovering the nature of their contents determined him to lose no time in effecting the recall of the false and faction-loving Prince.

A second attempt which was made upon the life of Puylaurens at this precise period admirably seconded his views, as the favourite, who persisted in attributing the act to the friends of the Queen-mother, declared that he would no longer remain at Brussels, where his safety was constantly compromised; and Gaston, who was equally unwilling to consent to a separation, accordingly resolved to waive the conditions upon which he had previously insisted--namely, the recognition of his marriage, and the possession of a fortified place--and to submit to the degrading terms which had been offered by Richelieu.

On this occasion, however, Monsieur was careful not to seek advice either from his mother or his wife. For once he had self-control enough to keep his secret, although the constant passage of the couriers between the two Courts of Paris and Brussels did not fail to alarm the Spaniards; but as the anxiety of the Cardinal to secure the person of the Prince had induced him to insist that the prescribed conditions should be accepted within a fortnight, and that Gaston must return to France within three weeks, little time was afforded to Ayetona for elucidating the apparent mystery; and on the 1st of October the treaty of reconciliation was signed by the King at Écouen.

It would appear, moreover, that the Prince and his favourite were as little desirous of delay as the Cardinal himself, for on the 8th of the same month, profiting by the temporary absence of the Marquis, Monsieur, pretexting a fox-hunt, left Brussels early in the morning, accompanied only by a few confidential friends; and so soon as they were fairly beyond the city, they set spurs to their horses, and never drew bridle until after sunset, when they reached La Capelle, the frontier town of France, not having taken the slightest refreshment throughout the day. For some time previous to his flight Gaston had estranged himself not only from the Queen-mother, but also from Madame; and their astonishment was not unmingled with indignation when they became aware that he had thus heartlessly abandoned both in order to secure his own safety. A hurried and brief letter in which he solicited the protection of Marie de Medicis for his ill-requited wife was the only proof which he vouchsafed of his continued interest in their welfare; and this despatched, he pursued his rapid journey to St. Germain-en-Laye, having previously apprised the King of his approach to the capital.

Louis was at table when the arrival of his brother was announced, but he instantly rose, and hastened to meet him at the door of the palace.

When he alighted and recognized the King, Gaston bowed low, but did not attempt to bend his knee. "Sir," he said reverently, "I know not if it be joy or fear which renders me speechless, but I have at least words enough left to solicit your pardon for the past."

"Brother," replied the King, "we will not speak of the past. God has given us the happiness of meeting once more, and the moment is a joyful one to me."

The two Princes then embraced each other with every appearance of sincerity and goodwill, after which Louis led Monsieur to his private closet, where they were shortly joined by the Cardinal.

Marie de Medicis

As the latter was announced Louis XIII exclaimed earnestly: "Brother, I entreat of you to love M. le Cardinal."

"I will love him," was the reply of the Prince, "as I love myself, and I will follow his advice in all things."

Richelieu fell on his knees, and kissed the hands of Monsieur.

Gaston d'Orléans was, for the moment, gained.

The first few days of this royal reunion were entirely devoted to festivity, after which the minister endeavoured to induce the Prince to consent to the annulment of his marriage with the Princesse de Lorraine; but upon this point Gaston evinced a firmness which astonished all those who were able to appreciate the recklessness and instability of his general character, and, finding himself pressed beyond his power of endurance, he retired, accompanied by Puylaurens, to Blois, whence he wrote to remonstrate against the delay which had taken place in the fulfilment of the promises made to his favourite. Uneasy lest the restless spirit of the Prince should induce him once more to revolt if his claims remained disregarded, Richelieu caused him to be informed that M. de Puylaurens was awaited in Paris in order that his marriage might be concluded with the younger daughter of the Baron de Pontchâteau, on the same day that the Duc de la Valette was to espouse the elder; while the Comte de Guiche, son of the Comte de Grammont, was also to give his hand to Mademoiselle du Plessis-Chivray, another relative of the Cardinal-Minister. This intelligence caused the greatest satisfaction to Monsieur, who forthwith proceeded to the capital with Puylaurens; and on the 19th of November both the Prince and his favourite were magnificently entertained at Ruel, whence they subsequently departed for St. Germain, in order to sign the contract in the presence of the King.

On the 26th of the same month the triple ceremony of betrothal took place at the Louvre. A full and unreserved pardon was publicly declared in favour of all the adherents of Monsieur, and two days subsequently the several marriages were celebrated with great pomp at the Arsenal. The lordship of Aiguillon, which had been purchased from the Princesse Marie de Gonzaga for six hundred thousand livres, was erected into a duchy-peerage under the name of Puylaurens, upon whom it was conferred, and who took his seat in the Parliament on the 7th of December as Duc de Puylaurens; after which Gaston once more returned to Blois, in order to avoid the persevering persecutions of the minister on the subject of his marriage.

CHAPTER XII

1635-38

Richelieu, however, was far from intending that the Duc d'Orléans should remain unmolested in his retreat. Puylaurens was the first individual who had dared to dictate his own terms, and to enforce their observance; and although his Eminence had a great affection for his niece, he was by no means inclined to pardon the arrogance of her husband. An opportunity of revenge soon presented itself. The attractions of the Carnival proved too great for the prudence of Gaston, who accordingly proceeded to the capital, in order to share in its delights; and when, on the 14th of February 1635, he reached the Louvre, where he was expected to attend the rehearsal of a ballet, his favourite, by whom he was accompanied, was arrested in the royal closet by the captain of the guard, and conveyed to Vincennes. This act of severity was as unexpected at the moment as it remained unexplained in the sequel. Suffice it that Monsieur did not permit the disgrace of his chosen and trusted friend to interfere with his own amusement and gratification at so exciting a season, although he could not fail to feel that, once in the grasp of the Cardinal, the unhappy Puylaurens was doomed.

The result proved the truth of this apprehension; nobler and prouder lives than that of the spoiled favourite of Gaston had been sacrificed to the enmity of Richelieu. The tears and supplications of the heart-broken bride were disregarded; and four months after his arrest Puylaurens expired in his prison of, as it was asserted, typhus fever--the same disease to which, by an extraordinary coincidence, two former enemies of the Cardinal, the Maréchal d'Ornano and the Grand-Prieur de Vendôme, had both fallen victims when confined at Vincennes.

During this time the unhappy Queen-mother, who found herself abandoned on every side, had retired to Antwerp with the Princesse Marguerite, in order to escape the mortifications to which she was constantly subjected by the increasing coldness of her Spanish allies; and thence she wrote earnestly to the Sovereign-Pontiff entreating his interference to effect her reconciliation with the King, and begging him to exert his influence to avert the war with Spain which the Cardinal was labouring to provoke. The answer which she received to this despatch was cold and discouraging, but she still persevered; and in a second letter upon the same subjects she apprised his Holiness that she had appointed the Abbé de Fabbroni (one of her almoners) her resident at the Court of Rome; and had despatched another gentleman of her household to the Emperor of Germany to enforce a similar request. She, moreover, wrote to inform Mazarin, who was at that period nuncio-extraordinary in France, that she had addressed her son-in-law Philip of Spain for the like purpose, and requested him to deliver into the hands of Louis XIII a despatch by which his own was accompanied. Her selection of an agent on this occasion was, however, an unfortunate one, as Mazarin was devoted to the interests of the Cardinal-Minister, to whom he immediately transferred the packet, when the first impulse of Richelieu was to suppress it; but having ascertained that the Queen-mother had caused several copies to be made, and that she could not ultimately fail to secure its transmission, he endeavoured to weaken the effect of her remonstrances by accusing her of an attempt to corrupt the loyalty of the Duc de Rohan, and to induce him to adopt the interests of Spain.

This accusation sufficed to render Louis insensible alike to the entreaties and the arguments of his mother; and when Mazarin, in order to maintain appearances, requested a reply to the letter with which he had been entrusted, the King declined to furnish one, asserting that should he concede any answer to so seditious, so Spanish, and so hypocritical a

Marie de Medicis

missive, while the Queen was engaged in endeavouring to alienate one of his great nobles, he should be compelled to represent to her the crime of which she was guilty towards the state; and that the affectation with which she had dwelt upon the desire of the late King to maintain a good understanding with Spain was merely an expedient for vilifying his own government, indulging her hatred of the Cardinal, and seeking to create a rebellion among his subjects. He added, moreover, that when the Queen should see fit to act as became his mother, he would honour her as such; and that it was in order not to fail in his respect towards her that he forbore to reply to her communication, although the Nuncio was at liberty to do so in his name should he consider it expedient.

Nor was this the only mortification to which Marie de Medicis was subjected by her attempt to preserve the peace of Europe; for Richelieu, irritated by her interference, no sooner became aware that she had despatched the Abbé de Fabbroni to Rome, than he instructed the French Ambassador at that Court to complain to his Holiness of so unprecedented an innovation; and to remind him that the Queen-mother was not a sovereign, but a subject, and consequently did not possess the privilege of appointing a resident at any foreign Court; but must, on every occasion when treating with his Holiness, avail herself of the services of the accredited envoy of the King her son.

To this expostulation, however, Urban replied that the circumstance was not without precedent, as bishops had agents at the Papal Court; but, notwithstanding the apparent firmness with which he withstood the arguments of the Cardinal, it is asserted that he privately intimated to M. de Fabbroni the expediency of his immediate departure; a suggestion which was obeyed upon the instant.

The indignation of Marie de Medicis at this new insult was unbounded. Again she addressed the Sovereign-Pontiff, and inveighed bitterly on the persecution of which she was the victim; but beyond the mere expression of his sympathy the Pope declined all interference between herself and the minister, whose gigantic power rendered his enmity formidable even to the head of the Church. Once more the widow of one of the most vaunted sovereigns of France was compelled to bow in silence to the enmity of an individual whom she had herself elevated to influence and dignity; and while France was engaged in a war which not only riveted the attention but also involved the interests of the whole of Europe, history is silent as to her sufferings. All that can be gathered concerning her is the fact that the Spaniards, resenting the reverses to which they were subjected by the armies of Louis XIII, became less than ever inclined to sympathize in her sufferings when they discovered her utter helplessness; nor was it until the Duc d'Orléans and the Comte de Soissons entered into a conspiracy (in 1636) to overthrow the Cardinal, that she was once more involved in public affairs.

Meanwhile the piety of the Queen-mother had degenerated into superstition; she had applied to the Pope to authorize the canonization of an obscure nun of Antwerp; and, in accordance with the directions of Suffren her confessor, and Chanteloupe her confidant, she had abandoned herself to the most rigorous observances of her faith. But ambition was "scotched, not killed," in the soul of Marie de Medicis; and she no sooner saw the Princes in open rebellion against the power of Richelieu than her hopes once more revived, and she made instant preparations to join their faction. The design was, however, betrayed, and thus rendered abortive; upon which Gaston, according to his wont, soon submitted to the terms dictated by the minister, and returned to his allegiance, abandoning M. de Soissons, who proved less complying, to the displeasure of the King; when (in 1637) the Queen-mother, whose hopes had been nearly extinguished by the defeat of the Spaniards at Corbie, and their retreat beyond the frontiers of Picardy, wrote to the Count, tendering to him the most advantageous offers, both from the Spanish monarch and Prince Thomas of Savoy, and offering personally to enter into the treaty. This proposition was eagerly accepted by M. de Soissons, and reciprocal promises of assistance and good faith were exchanged; while the Cardinal Infant, on his side, made a solemn compact with the exiled Queen that the Catholic King should conclude neither peace nor truce with France until Marie de Medicis and the Comte de Soissons were re-established in their rights; that the Queen-mother should reject all conditions of reconciliation until after the death or disgrace of Richelieu; that, should either

one or the other event occur before the existing dissension between France and the House of Austria was adjusted, the Queen-mother, the Comte de Soissons, and all their French adherents should remain neutral during the space of four months, which were to be employed by all parties in endeavours to secure a general peace; that, in the event of its not being concluded at the expiration of that period, Marie de Medicis and Soissons should be free to effect their reconciliation with the French King, without incurring the blame of forfeiting their faith to Philip of Spain; that the last-named monarch should furnish two hundred and fifty thousand livres in ready money, and an equal sum a month later in property equivalent to specie; and that if the Comte de Soissons were compelled to retire from France, the King of Spain should afford him his protection, and furnish him with sufficient means to live according to his birth and rank.

A treaty of this nature, so formidable in its conception, and so threatening in its results, could not long remain a secret to the Cardinal-Minister; and accordingly he did not fail to be apprised of the intrigue before it had time to produce its effect, and resolved to conciliate the Comte de Soissons, even were it only for the present moment. Of Marie de Medicis he had long ceased to feel any apprehension, and he consequently made no effort to include her in the amnesty; a demonstration of contempt which so deeply wounded the exiled Princess that she resolved to despatch a messenger to the Court of London to solicit the interposition of Charles I. and Henriette in her behalf; but despite all her disappointments the Queen-mother still sought to obtain conditions which past experience should have sufficed to prove that Richelieu never would accord.

The English monarch had, indeed, yielded to the entreaties of a wife to whom he was at that period devotedly attached, and had consented to exert all his influence in favour of the unhappy Princess, who now saw herself abandoned by both her sons; but the state of his own kingdom was too unsettled to permit of his enforcing terms which he consequently perceived to be hopeless. Nevertheless he acceded to her request, and forwarded to the Court of France the document which was delivered to him by her envoy, but it produced no effect; and while every other state-criminal was reinstated in the favour of the King, on tendering the required submission, and conforming to the stipulated conditions, the Queen-mother found herself excluded from all hope of recall and all prospect of reconciliation.

Richelieu was aware that necessity alone had induced her to pronounce his pardon, and that her wrongs were too great ever to be forgotten. No wonder, therefore, that he shrank from a struggle which, should the voice of popular favour once more be raised in her behalf, might tend to his overthrow; and that struggle, as he well knew, could take place only on the soil of France. Her exile was his safety; and the astute Cardinal had long determined that it should end only with her life.

On every side the unfortunate Marie de Medicis saw herself surrounded by misfortune. Gaston, at the instigation of the Cardinal, had ceased to supply his neglected wife with the means of supporting, not merely her rank, but even her existence, and had left her dependent upon the generosity of the Spanish Government which he had so unblushingly betrayed. He had himself become a mere cypher in the kingdom over which he hoped one day to rule. He seldom appeared at Court; and when he was prevailed upon to do so, he was the obsequious admirer of Richelieu, and the submissive subject of the King. The Spaniards, since the departure of the heir-apparent to the French Crown, had ceased to evince the same respect towards the mother whom he had abandoned; and although they still accorded to her a pension that placed her above want, the munificence with which they had greeted her arrival had long ceased to call forth her gratitude. Her position was consequently desperate; and her only prospect of escaping from so miserable a fate as that by which she was ultimately threatened existed in the hope that should she voluntarily retire from Flanders, and place herself under the protection of England, she might yet succeed in enforcing her claims.

While she was still meditating this project, Christine, the widowed Duchess of Savoy, resolved to make a last effort to effect the recall of her persecuted mother to France; and for this purpose she despatched to Paris a Jesuit named Monod, who succeeded in establishing a

friendship with Caussin, the King's confessor, whom he induced to second the attempt. As both one and the other, however, believed success to be impossible so long as Richelieu retained his influence over the mind of the sovereign, they resolved to undermine his favour. Caussin, like all his predecessors, had great power over the timid conscience and religious scruples of his royal penitent, and the two Jesuits were well aware that through these alone could Louis be rendered vulnerable to their entreaties; while they were, moreover, encouraged in their hopes by the circumstance that the Cardinal-Minister had never evinced the slightest distrust of Caussin, whom he believed to be devoted to his interests, and that the latter consequently possessed ample opportunities for prosecuting his object.

At the close of the year, therefore, the attempt was made; and, as the Jesuit had anticipated, Louis listened with submission and even respect to his expostulations. "Your minister misleads you, Sire," said his confessor, "where your better nature would guide you in the right path. He it is who has induced your Majesty to abandon your mother, who is not only condemned to exile, but reduced to the greatest necessity, and indebted to strangers for the very means of existence."

The King was visibly moved by this assertion, but he remained silent, and suffered the ecclesiastic to proceed. Emboldened by this attention, Caussin did not scruple to declare that the Cardinal had usurped an amount of power which tended to degrade the royal authority; that the subjects of France were reduced to misery by the exorbitant taxation to which they were subjected; and that the interests of religion itself were threatened by Richelieu, who was affording help to the Swedes and the Protestants of Germany.

"Shake off this yoke, Sire," concluded the Jesuit; "exert your royal prerogative, and dismiss the Cardinal-Duke from office. Be the sovereign of your own nation, and the master of your own actions. You will have a more tranquil conscience, and a more prosperous reign."

"You are perhaps right, Father," replied the King with emotion; "but you must give me time for reflection."

Caussin obeyed, auguring well of his mission; but his self-gratulation was premature, for he had scarcely left the closet of his penitent when he was succeeded by the Cardinal, who, perceiving the agitation of the King, experienced little difficulty in extorting from him the subject of the conversation in which he had just been engaged; and a few moments sufficed to restore alike the complacency of Louis and his confidence in his minister.

There is sufficient evidence to prove that the French King never bestowed his regard upon Richelieu; as a boy he had evinced towards him an undisguised aversion which he never overcame, but he had learnt to fear him; the feeble mind of the monarch had bowed before the strong intellect of the minister; the sovereign could not contend against the statesman; the crown of France rested upon the brows of the one, but her destinies were poised in the hand of the other; and the strength of Richelieu grew out of the weakness of his master.

As a natural consequence of his imprudence Caussin was shortly afterwards arrested, and banished to Brittany; and the Cardinal no sooner ascertained the complicity of Monod than, despite the reluctance of the Duchess of Savoy to abandon a man who had hazarded his life in her cause, he was, in his turn, condemned to expiate his error by a rigorous captivity.

The unhopèd-for pregnancy of Anne of Austria at this period once more revived the hopes of Marie de Medicis, who trusted that on such an occasion a general amnesty would necessarily supervene. She deceived herself, however; for although Richelieu professed the greatest desire to see her once more in France, he was in reality as earnest as ever in creating obstacles to a reconciliation so inimical to his own interests. In vain did the unhappy Queen-mother remind him of her advancing age and her increasing necessities; and plead that, whatever might have been her former errors, they must now be considered as expiated by seven weary years of exile; the minister only replied by expressions of his profound regret that the internal politics of the kingdom did not permit him to urge her recall upon the sovereign; and his extreme desire to see her select a residence elsewhere than within the territory of his enemies, where she was subjected to perpetual suspicion; while, should she determine to fix

Marie de Medicis

her abode at Florence, his Majesty was prepared to restore all her forfeited revenues, and to confer upon her an establishment suited to her rank and dignity.

As Richelieu was well aware, no proposal could be more unpalatable than this to the haughty Princess. Eight-and-thirty years had elapsed since Marie de Medicis, then in the full pride of youth and beauty, had quitted her uncle's court in regal splendour to ascend the throne of France; and now--how did the heartless minister urge her to return? Hopeless, friendless, and powerless; with a name which had become a mockery, to a family wherein she would be a stranger. At Florence her existence was a mere tradition. All who had once loved her were dispersed or dead; no personal interest bound her to their survivors; and where long years previously she might have claimed affection, she could now only anticipate pity or dread contempt. The perpetual illnesses of the King, moreover, rendered her averse to such a measure; every succeeding attack had produced a more marked effect upon the naturally feeble constitution of Louis; the astrologers by whom she was surrounded continued to foretell his approaching death; and she yet indulged visions of a second regency, during which she might once more become all-powerful.

Nevertheless, she could not conceal from herself that by persistently remaining in a country at open war with France, she strengthened the hands of Richelieu without advancing her own interests; and although she felt that she could ill dispense with the generosity of her son-in-law Philip of Spain, who, even at a period when he frequently found himself unable to meet the demands of his army, still continued to treat her with a munificence truly royal, she resolved to withdraw from the Low Countries; and, accordingly, on the 10th of August, alleging that she was about to remove to Spa for the restoration of her health, she took her leave of the Court of Brussels; and, suddenly changing her route, proceeded to Bois-le-Duc, where she placed herself under the protection of the Prince of Orange.

The arrival of the Queen-mother in Holland excited universal gratulation, as the Dutch did not for an instant doubt that it was a preliminary to a reconciliation with her son; and once more she found herself the object of universal homage. Municipal processions and civic banquets were hastily arranged in her honour; every *hôtel-de-ville* was given up for her accommodation; burgomasters harangued her, and citizens formed her bodyguard; while so enthusiastic were the self-deceived Hollanders that even Art was enlisted in her welcome, and engravings still exist wherein her reception is commemorated under the most extravagant allegories; one of which represents the aged and broken-hearted Queen as the goddess Ceres, drawn by two lions in a gilded car.

But her advent in Holland was, unhappily, not destined to ensure to her either the power or the abundance with which she was thus gratuitously invested by the pencil of the painter; for on her arrival at the Hague, when, in compliance with her entreaty, the Prince of Orange personally solicited her restoration to favour and her return to France, pledging himself in her name that she would never again interfere in the public affairs of the kingdom, nor enter into any cabal either against the state or the Cardinal-Minister, his application was totally disregarded by Louis XIII; and only elicited an official reply from Richelieu to the effect "that his Majesty could not receive the said lady and Queen into his realm, inasmuch as he had just reason to fear that she would continue under his name, and perhaps unknown to him, to create factions and cabals, not only in his own kingdom, but in those of his allies; but that should it please the said lady and Queen to retire to Florence, where the malcontents could not exert their influence over her mind, or injure either himself or his allies, his Majesty again offered her, as he had already done, a position at once more honourable and inure opulent than that with which she had contented herself in Flanders."

This answer was, as Richelieu had intended that it should be, perfectly decisive to the Prince, who was aware that Marie de Medicis would have preferred death to a return to the banks of the Arno under her present circumstances; while the so-lately enthusiastic Hollanders, on ascertaining that the French Ambassador at the Hague had received orders not to wait upon or recognize their new guest, began to apprehend that her presence in their country might injure their interests with France; while, at the same time, the great outlay

Marie de Medicis

necessary for the maintenance of her establishment alarmed their economy; and it was consequently not long ere they respectfully intimated to her Majesty their trust that she would not prolong her sojourn among them.

This was a new outrage upon her dignity which struck to the very soul of the royal exile, who resolved no longer to defer her departure for England; and, accordingly, on the 19th of November she embarked for that country. Still, however, misfortune appeared to pursue her, for the winter proved one of great severity, and she narrowly escaped shipwreck, after having been tempest-tossed for several days. Her reception, nevertheless, compensated for this temporary suffering, as Charles himself travelled in state to Gravesend to escort her to London, where the most magnificent preparations had been made for her accommodation and that of her retinue in St. James's Palace. The fifty apartments which were appropriated to her use had been arranged under the personal superintendence of her daughter Henrietta of England, and were replete with every luxury which could conduce to the well-being of the illustrious exile; while, as if to compensate alike to her persecuted mother and to herself for the tardiness of their meeting (the advanced pregnancy of the English queen having rendered it inexpedient that she should be exposed to the fatigue of travelling), she no sooner ascertained, by the trumpet-blast which announced its appearance, that the carriage containing her royal consort and his illustrious guest had entered the principal court of the palace, than she hastened, surrounded by her children, to bid them welcome; and as her unhappy parent descended from the coach supported on the arm of the King, Henriette threw herself upon her knees before her, and seizing her hands, pressed them convulsively to her heart, and bathed them with her tears. Marie de Medicis, tutored as she had been in suffering, was scarcely less moved; and thus the meeting between the august mother and daughter was most affecting: Henriette had so long yearned for the companionship of her kindred, while Marie de Medicis had, on her side, been for so great a period cut off from all the ties of family affection, that as they wept in each other's arms, the one was unable to articulate a welcome, and the other to express her acknowledgments for the warm greeting which she had experienced.

Immediately on her arrival in England, Charles I. awarded to the exiled Queen a pension of a hundred pounds a day on the civil list; but her advent had, nevertheless, occurred at an inauspicious moment for the English sovereign, whose resources were crippled, and who abstained from levying subsidies upon his subjects in order not to assemble a Parliament; while he moreover dreaded that the presence of his royal mother-in-law, with her numerous train of priests, would tend to exasperate the spirit of the people, who were already greatly excited against the Roman Catholics.

Nor were these his only causes of anxiety, as many of the French malcontents who had fled their country in order to escape the enmity of Richelieu had selected London as their place of refuge, relying upon the friendship of Henriette (a circumstance which had increased the coldness that already existed between the two Courts); and these at once rallied round Marie de Medicis as their common centre. Among these illustrious emigrants the most distinguished were the Duchesse de Chevreuse and the Ducs de Soubise and de la Valette, all of whom were surrounded by a considerable number of exiles of inferior rank; and as the Queen-mother saw them gathered about her, she easily persuaded herself that their voluntary absence from France was a convincing proof of the general unpopularity of her own arch-enemy Richelieu. Her personal suite, moreover, included no less than two hundred individuals; and thus the palace of the Stuarts presented the anomalous spectacle of a French Court, where the nobles of a hostile land, and the priests of a hostile faith, held undisturbed authority, to the open dissatisfaction of the sturdy citizens of London.

Murmurs were rife on all sides; and the Queen-mother was regarded as a harbinger of misfortune. Henriette herself was obnoxious to the Puritans, but they had been to a certain degree disarmed by her gentleness of demeanour, and the prudence and policy of her conduct; she was, moreover, the wife of the sovereign, and about to become the mother of a prince; but Marie de Medicis possessed no claims on their forbearance, and they did not hesitate to attribute to her views and designs which she was too powerless to entertain.

Marie de Medicis

At this period the Queen-mother was subjected to the mortification of learning that M. de Bellièvre, the ambassador-extraordinary of her son at the Court of England, had received stringent instructions to abstain from all demonstration of courtesy towards her person; and even to avoid finding himself in her presence, whenever the etiquette of his position would permit of his absenting himself from the royal circle; a command which he so scrupulously obeyed, that although, in her anxiety to enlist him in her cause, she had more than once endeavoured to address him, she had constantly failed; until Lord Holland, at her entreaty, on one occasion contrived to detain him in the great gallery at Whitehall, where Marie de Medicis entered accompanied by the King and Queen.

As the royal party passed near him, Bellièvre bowed low, without looking towards the mother of his sovereign. Escape was impossible; and he consequently remained silent and motionless.

"Monsieur l'Ambassadeur," said a well-remembered voice, "I wish to exchange a few words with you."

Charles and Henriette moved on; Lord Holland withdrew; and the Queen-mother at length found herself face to face with the French envoy, who had no alternative but to assume an attitude of profound respect, and to extricate himself from this unexpected difficulty as best he might.

Marie de Medicis was painfully agitated. Her future fate in all probability hinged upon this long-coveted interview, and some seconds elapsed before she could utter a syllable. She continued standing, although her emotion compelled her to lean for support upon a table; and Bellièvre, courtier though he was, could scarcely have looked unmoved upon the wreck of pride and power thus placed before him. Years and sorrows had furrowed the lofty brow, and dimmed the flashing eyes, of the once beautiful Tuscan Princess, but she still retained all that dignity of deportment for which she was celebrated on her arrival in her adopted country. She was a fugitive and an exile, but she was yet every inch a Queen; and her very misfortunes invested her with an interest which no true and honest heart could fail to feel.

"Sir," she said at length, "I have for some time past endeavoured by every means in my power to impress upon the Cardinal de Richelieu my earnest desire to return to France by his interposition; but all my attempts have been useless. I have received no reply."

"Madame," interposed Bellièvre, "I humbly entreat of your Majesty to permit me to explain that although I have the honour to be the representative of my sovereign at this Court, I am not authorized to appear in that character towards yourself. It is possible that your Majesty has the intention of entrusting me with some message, in which case I entreat of you to excuse me when I decline to undertake its transmission. I have express orders not to interfere in anything connected either with the person or with the concerns of your Majesty."

"You have probably not been forbidden to hear what I desire to say," exclaimed the Queen, with a burst of her former spirit.

"I confess it, Madame," conceded the ambassador; "but since I was not commanded to do so, I beg that I may be forgiven should I decline to obey you in the event of your requiring me to make any written communication from yourself to the King my master."

"Enough!" said Marie de Medicis, with a gesture of impatience. "Listen. The afflictions which I have undergone since I took refuge in the Low Countries have inspired me with very different feelings from those with which I left Compiègne. I beg you to inform the Cardinal that I entreat of him to deliver me from the miserable position in which I now find myself, and from the bitter necessity of soliciting my bread from my sons-in-law. I desire to be once more near the King. I do not ask for either power or authority; all that I require is to pass the remainder of my days in peace, and in preparing myself for death. If the Cardinal cannot obtain the permission of the King for my return to Court, let him at least request that I may be allowed to reside in some city within the kingdom, and be restored to the possession of my revenues. I offer to dismiss from my household all such individuals as may be obnoxious to his

Marie de Medicis

Majesty, and to obey him in all things without comment. His orders and the advice of the Cardinal shall regulate my conduct. This is all that I require you to communicate to the latter; as I fear that those to whom I have hitherto addressed myself have been deficient either in courage or in will to perform the errand entrusted to them."

Bellièvre hesitated for a moment. There was a tearful tremor in the voice of the persecuted Princess which it required all his diplomacy to resist; but he soon rallied. "Madame," he replied calmly, "your Majesty shall have no reason to visit the same reproach on me, for it is with extreme regret that I protest my utter inability to serve you on this occasion."

"I fully comprehend the value of your frankness, M. de Bellièvre," said the Queen-mother, as she raised herself to her full height, and fixed upon him her dark and searching eyes. "Such is the usual style of ambassadors. They decline to undertake certain commissions, but they nevertheless report all that has taken place. I had experience of that fact more than once during my regency."

Having uttered these biting words, Marie de Medicis turned from the discomfited courtier, and approached the window to which Charles I. and his Queen had retired; followed, however, by Bellièvre.

"Your Majesties must permit me," he said firmly, "to repeat in your presence what I have already declared to the mother of my sovereign. I dare not undertake the mission with which she desires to honour me. You will, without doubt, remember, Madame," he added, turning towards Henriette, whose emotion was uncontrollable, "that you have on several occasions commanded me to write in your name in behalf of the Queen-mother; and that I have always entreated of your Majesty not to insist on my obedience, in consequence of the stringent orders which I have received to avoid all interference in an affair of which the King my master desires to reserve the exclusive management."

"I do not deny it, sir," said Henriette with dignity; "but since my royal brother will not consent to listen to any solicitations in favour of the Queen my mother, my husband and myself have conceived that the only alternative which remains to her is to compel an explanation with his ministers, with the participation of the several European Courts in which she may see fit to reside."

Again M. de Bellièvre declared his utter inability to meet the wishes of the persecuted Marie; upon which Charles, coldly bending his head to the French envoy, offered a hand to each of the agitated Queens, and led them from the gallery.

Despite all his professions of neutrality, however, Bellièvre, as Marie de Medicis had predicted, lost no time in communicating all the details of the interview to Richelieu, who forthwith dictated a private despatch, to which he obtained the signature of Louis, to repulse the demand of the Queen-mother. The Cardinal had passed the Rubicon. He could no longer hope that his persecuted benefactress would ever again place confidence in his protestations, or quietly permit him to exert the authority which he had so arrogantly assumed; and thus he readily persuaded the weak monarch--who had, moreover, long ceased to reason upon the will of his all-powerful minister--that the return of the ill-fated Marie to France would be the signal of intestine broil and foreign aggression. In vain did Henrietta of England address letter after letter to her royal brother, representing the evil impression which so prolonged a persecution of their common parent had produced upon the minds of all the European princes; the fiat of Richelieu had gone forth; and the only result obtained by the filial anxiety of the English Queen was a series of plausible replies, in which she was complimented upon her good intentions, but at the same time requested not to interfere in the private arrangements of the King her brother.

Desirous, nevertheless, of escaping the odium of so unnatural and revolting an abandonment of his royal benefactress, the Cardinal caused a council to be assembled to consider her demand, and to deliberate upon the measures to be adopted in consequence; declaring his own intention to maintain a strict neutrality, and instructing the several members to deliver to him their opinions in writing. All had, however, been previously

Marie de Medicis

concerted; before the meeting assembled Richelieu informed his coadjutors that the King had voluntarily declared that no reliance was to be placed upon the professions of the Queen-mother, as she had on many previous occasions acted with great dissimulation, and that it was not in her nature long to remain satisfied with any place in which she might take up her abode; that she could not make herself happy in France, where she was both powerful and honoured; that she had been constantly discontented in Flanders, although she had adopted that country as her own; that she had lived in perpetual hostility with the Duc d'Orléans after having induced him to quit the kingdom; and that she was even then at variance with the Princesse Marguerite, although she had countenanced her marriage with Monsieur in opposition to the will of the sovereign; that she had not gone to Holland without some hostile motive to himself and his kingdom; and that she was already becoming weary of England.

Moreover, as the Cardinal further informed them, Louis XIII had himself asserted that since her Majesty had failed to content herself with the exalted position which she had at one time filled in France, it was not to be anticipated that she would rest satisfied with that which, should she return, she must hereafter occupy; but would once more become a rallying point for all the malcontents who were formerly her adherents.

Thus prompted, the members of the council readily came to the conclusion "that the King could not with safety decide upon the proposition of the Queen-mother until the establishment of a solid peace had placed the intentions of that Princess beyond suspicion, being aware of her intelligence with the enemies of his kingdom; and that, from the same motive, as well as from the apprehension that she might be induced to make an ill use of her revenues, they were of opinion that they should only be restored to her on the condition that she should fix her future residence at Florence."

This was, as we have already shown, the invariable expedient of Richelieu, who was aware that the prospect of the Queen-mother's return to France was not more repugnant to himself than the idea of retiring in disgrace and dishonour to her birthplace had ever been to his unhappy victim; and the proposal was accordingly repeated at every opportunity, because the minister was aware that it would never be accepted; while it afforded, from its apparent liberality, a pretext for casting the whole odium of her prolonged exile upon Marie de Medicis herself.

In order to carry out the vast schemes of his ambition, the Cardinal had, at this period, reduced the monarch to a mere cypher in his own kingdom; but he could not, nevertheless, blind himself to the fact that Louis XIII, who was weak rather than wicked, had frequent scruples of conscience, and that during those moments of reflection and remorse he was easily influenced by those about him; while, whenever this occurred, he evinced a disposition to revolt against the ministerial authority which alarmed the Cardinal, and compelled him to be constantly upon his guard. After having throughout fifteen years successfully struggled against the spread of Calvinism, and that remnant of feudal anarchy which still lingered in France; humbled the House of Austria, his most dreaded rival; and, in order to aggrandize the state he served, sowed the seeds of revolution in every other European nation, and thus compelled their rulers to concentrate all their energies upon themselves, he was now constrained to descend to meaner measures, and to enact the spy upon his sovereign; lest in some unlucky moment the edifice, which it had cost him so mighty an amount of time and talent to erect, should be overthrown by a breath.

True, Marie de Medicis was an exile and a wanderer; the royal brothers, through his means, alienated in heart; discord and suspicion rife between the monarch and his neglected wife; while even the first passion of the King's youth had been quenched by Richelieu's iron will. The affection of Louis XIII for Mademoiselle de la Fayette--an affection which did equal honour to both parties from its notorious and unquestioned propriety, but which has been too frequently recorded to require more than a passing allusion--had been crossed and thwarted; the fair maid of honour loved and respected Anne of Austria as much as she feared and loathed the Cardinal-Minister; and she was accordingly an obstacle and a stumbling-block to be removed from his path. She also was immured in a cloister, and was consequently no longer

Marie de Medicis

dangerous as a rival in the good graces of the King; yet still Richelieu was far from tranquil; and the *petit coucher* of the King was to him a subject of unceasing apprehension. He was well aware that Louis was as unstable as he was distrustful; and thus a new mistress, a new favourite, or even a passing caprice, might, when he was totally unprepared for such an event, suffice to annihilate his best-considered projects.

Poor Marie! Under such circumstances as these all her efforts at conciliation were vain; and it is probable that she would have sunk under the conviction, had not her failing courage been sustained by the affectionate and earnest representations of her daughter, Henrietta of England.

CHAPTER XIII

1639-42

Indignant at the prolonged sufferings of her helpless mother, the gentle wife of Charles I. found little difficulty in inducing her royal husband to despatch the Earl of Jermyn to the Court of France, with instructions to use his utmost endeavours to effect a reconciliation; while, in order to render his exertions less onerous, he was enjoined to observe the greatest consideration towards the Cardinal, and to assure him that Marie de Medicis was anxious to owe her success to his good offices alone; and thus to place herself under an obligation which must tend to convince him of her sincere desire to cultivate his regard, and to withdraw herself entirely from all public affairs. Richelieu, however, was, as we have shown, little disposed to incur so great a risk; while the birth of a Dauphin had only tended to strengthen his determination to keep her out of the country, as the declining health of the King had opened up a new channel to his ambition; and he had secretly resolved, should Louis succumb to one of the constantly recurring attacks of his besetting disease, to cause himself to be proclaimed Regent of the kingdom. This idea, calmly considered, appears monstrous; not only because the monarch had not at this period attained his fortieth year, but also because there existed three individuals who had a more legitimate claim to the coveted dignity than the Cardinal--Marie de Medicis, who had already been Regent of France during the minority of her son; Anne of Austria, who was the mother of the future sovereign; and Gaston d'Orléans, who, should the infant Prince fail to survive, would become his successor. Two of these claimants were, however, as Richelieu well knew, both suspected by and odious to Louis--the Queen-consort and Monsieur; and he was resolved not to permit the third to return to France while such a casualty was in abeyance, feeling convinced that, in order to avenge her long and bitter sufferings, she would either league with her daughter-in-law and son to traverse his projects, or perhaps, by grasping at the reins of government, and openly opposing his power, not only remove him from office, but even dispossess him of the immense wealth which he had accumulated during his ministry, and make him amenable for the crimes of which he had been guilty.

On his arrival at the Court of France, Lord Jermyn hastened to wait upon Richelieu, to whom he delivered a letter from his royal mistress; but even this demonstration of respect failed in its object, as the minister, after having assured himself of the contents of the despatch, referred the envoy to the King himself, declaring that he could not take the initiative in an affair of so much importance to the welfare and tranquillity of the kingdom. The English peer accordingly requested an audience of the monarch; but, as may easily be conceived, he did not obtain it until all had been previously concerted between Louis and his minister; while, to the letter addressed to him by his sister, the Cardinal-ridden King returned the following cold and inexorable reply:--

"I have never been wanting in good feeling towards the Queen my mother, but she has so often intrigued against the state, and entered into engagements with my declared enemies, that I cannot come to any determination concerning her until a solid peace with the rest of Europe shall render me less suspicious of her intentions than I am at present."

In order, however, to render the humiliation of the unfortunate Marie de Medicis still more complete, Richelieu subjoined a note to the British envoy, of which these were the contents:--

Marie de Medicis

"If Lord Jermyn should state that the prospect of peace offers no impediment to granting a supply of money to the Queen-mother, his Majesty may safely reply that he has duly considered the subject, and can do nothing more, as he has no assurance that so long as the war continues, the servants of the Queen his mother, by whom she is guided, may not make an evil use of the generosity of his Majesty against his own interests, and in favour of those of Spain."

Despite the unpromising commencement of his mission, Lord Jermyn nevertheless persisted, in obedience to the orders which he had received, in urging the cause of the exiled Queen; but the result of his exertions was a mere repetition of the original objections, coupled moreover with an intimation that until Marie de Medicis had dismissed every member of her household who was obnoxious to the King her son, and had lived for a time out of the country in complete obedience to his will, whatever it might please him to ordain concerning her, he declined all further negotiation; with the assurance, however, that when she had submitted to this ordeal, she was at liberty to solicit his renewed commands, and to enjoy her revenues in whatever place of residence he might see fit to allot to her for the future.

The total want of justice and generosity evinced by this reply revolted Henriette; who was aware that, in order to conciliate Richelieu, the Queen-mother had deprived herself of the services of Chanteloupe and the Abbé de St. Germain, both of whom she had left at Brussels, although, unlike Gaston d'Orléans, she was incapable of sacrificing them to her own interests; and, satisfied that no envoy, however zealous, could cope with the influence of the Cardinal, she accordingly resolved to plead the cause of her persecuted mother in person. In pursuance of this determination the English Queen, whose health had suffered from her recent confinement, availed herself of the circumstance to solicit the permission of her brother to pass a short time at his Court, in order to test the influence of her native air; but Richelieu, who suspected her real motive, induced his sovereign to delay any reply until the summer was considerably advanced, and finally to inform her that he was about to proceed to the frontier, and could not consequently have the happiness of bidding her welcome.

Indignant at so marked a want of respect, Charles I. immediately recalled the Earl of Leicester and Lord Scudamore, who were at that period his representatives at the Court of France, with stringent orders not to receive any present from Louis XIII on their departure; while Richelieu, as he returned their parting compliments, secretly resolved that in order to prevent a league between the English sovereign and Philip of Spain in favour of the Queen-mother, he would leave no measure untried to foment the intestine troubles of England, and to increase those of Scotland, and so compel Charles to confine his attention to his own immediate dominions.

The refusal of Louis XIII to permit the return of his mother to France created great excitement throughout England; but, unhappily, both herself and her daughter were obnoxious to the Puritan party, who were in open revolt against the royal authority; and meanwhile Charles I., in arms against his subjects, crippled in his resources, and deprived of the support of his Parliament, was totally unable to enforce his rights. Day by day his own position became more precarious; he was accused of a tendency towards Romanism, and upbraided with an undue submission to the principles and feelings of a wife to whom he was tenderly attached, but who was regarded by the sectarians with loathing; while, on the other hand, the Court of France considered itself aggrieved, not only by his refusal to enter into an aggressive alliance against Spain, but also by the hospitality which he had accorded to the unfortunate Marie de Medicis; and by his refusal to accede to the dismemberment of the Low Countries.

It is, however, beyond our purpose to dwell upon the intestine troubles of England at this period; and it must consequently suffice that the Queen-mother--painfully aware how greatly her presence in London added to the difficulties of her royal son-in-law, and excited the animosity of the Cardinal, whose agents were actively exasperating the spirit of the people against their sovereign--was unwearied in her efforts at conciliation, all of which, as they had previously done, proved ineffectual; and thus month succeeded month; and as the disaffection

Marie de Medicis

grew stronger throughout the realm of Great Britain, and the animosity of the populace against herself, her daughter, and all who professed their faith, became more undisguised, she was compelled to admit to herself that not even the affection of Henriette could longer afford her a refuge.

The decapitation of the Duc de la Valette, and the death of the Comte de Soissons, had rendered the Cardinal-Minister more powerful than ever; while Gaston d'Orléans had, since the birth of the Dauphin, withdrawn himself from the Court; and although he still conspired, he did so timidly, as though prematurely assured of defeat; and thus no hope remained to Marie of a return to France, while she felt that her longer residence in England was impossible.

Yet still she lingered on, endeavouring by the inoffensiveness of her deportment to disarm the animosity of the people, and enduring not only menaces but even insult; being ignorant in what direction to turn her steps, lest she should throw herself into the power of her arch-enemy. Her proud heart was bruised; her great name had become a byword and a scorn; the wife and the mother of kings, before whose frown the high-born and the powerful had once shrunk, sat shivering in the vast halls of a foreign palace, shrinking beneath the hoarse cries of a hostile multitude, and quailing in terror at their brutal threats.

During the popular commotion induced by the impeachment of the Earl of Strafford, in 1640, the mob, equally incensed against the Romanists, collected about St. James's Palace, and vociferated the most formidable menaces against the priests who had accompanied the Queen-mother from Flanders; while in a short time the crowd augmented so considerably in number as to create great alarm for her personal safety. The Earl of Holland, Lord Lieutenant of Middlesex, to whose vigilance she had been confided, together with her household, immediately ordered out a hundred musketeers to guard her; but many of these obeyed the command reluctantly, declaring that they could find better employment than watching over foreigners. Startled by this demonstration, Lord Holland laid the case before the House of Peers (the royal authority being no longer recognized), and generously represented the indignity of such an insult to so great a Princess, who had, moreover, thrown herself upon the hospitality of the nation to which she was so nearly allied; urging them to avert the reproach which must inevitably fall upon the country should the misguided zeal of the people be permitted to subject the exiled Queen to violence, when her rank, her misfortunes, and her age should alike render her person sacred.

The Peers referred the remonstrance to the Commons, who at once agreed to the necessity of affording protection to the Queen-mother; but, urged by the agents of Richelieu, they at the same time suggested that she should be desired to depart the kingdom; "for the quieting those jealousies in the hearts of his Majesty's well-affected subjects, occasioned by some ill instruments about the Queen's person, by the flowing of priests and Papists to her house, and by the use and practice of the idolatry of the mass, and exercise of other superstitious services of the Romish Church, to the great scandal of true religion."

Incapable of opposing the will of his Parliament, Charles I. had no alternative save to request his unhappy mother-in-law to pardon him if he entreated her to seek another asylum, while Marie de Medicis on her side, compelled to obey this intimation, promised immediate compliance; only imploring him to exert his influence with Philip of Spain to receive her once more in his dominions; or, failing that concession, to permit her passage through the Low Countries into Holland. Philip, however, affecting great displeasure at the manner in which she had left Brussels, refused to concede either favour; upon which the persecuted Princess applied to the States-General of the United Provinces to afford her an asylum; and solicited the Prince of Orange (whose son had recently married her grand-daughter) to second her request. Both the States-General and Frederic Henry, however, stood too much in awe of Richelieu to venture thus to brave his displeasure; and, accordingly, they also, in their turn, requested the Queen-mother to select another retreat.

The iron hand of the Cardinal still pressed upon his victim. Abandoned by her children, and by the ancient allies of the King her husband; forsaken by her friends, and almost despised by her enemies, the wretched Marie de Medicis found herself literally bereft of all support, and

Marie de Medicis

at length, hopeless and heart-stricken, she took leave of her afflicted daughter, who was fated only a few years later to become like herself dependent upon the reluctant hospitality of her relatives; and of her son-in-law, so soon to expiate the errors of his government upon a scaffold; and in the month of August 1641 she quitted the Court of London, under the escort of the Marquis of Arundel, and proceeded to Holland, where the States-General informed her on her landing that the country was so much impoverished by the long war which it had sustained, that they were unable to provide funds for her maintenance.

The English Parliament had not, however, suffered her to leave their shores entirely destitute, but had voted the sum of three thousand pounds for her immediate expenses, pledging themselves, moreover, to supply twice that amount at given periods. On her arrival in Holland Lord Arundel received her final commands, and returned to report her safe passage to her daughter Henriette; while she herself, attended only by a few attached followers, painfully pursued her way to Antwerp, where she resolved, despite the prohibition of the Government, to take up her temporary abode in the house of Rubens, and to remain in perfect seclusion. The unfortunate and desolate Queen felt that she should not experience such utter isolation while she could hold communion with one true and loyal heart; and the past zeal of the artist-prince in her service convinced her that from him she should still receive a welcome.

How does destiny at times mock human greatness, and reverse all social rules! Here was a sovereign Princess, the wife and the mother of kings, who, after eighteen weary years of struggle and suffering, was about to solicit a shelter for her gray hairs from the man whom, in 1622, she had invited to Paris, and upon whom she had lavished both riches and honour, in order that he might perpetuate with his brilliant pencil the short-lived triumphs of her regency. Nor was she, in this instance, fated to disappointment, as her reception by the great painter was as earnest and as respectful as though she still swayed the destinies of France.

As Rubens knelt before her, and pressed her thin hand reverently to his lips, the eyes of Marie de Medicis brightened, and a faint colour rose to her wasted cheeks. For a time she forgot all her sufferings; and they talked together of the proud period of her power, when she had laboured to embellish her beloved city of Paris, and summoned Rubens to the Luxembourg to execute the magnificent series of pictures which formed its noblest ornament; but this happy oblivion could not long endure, and scarcely an hour had elapsed ere they were engaged in concerting new measures to effect her recall to France.

For several weeks the presence of the Queen-mother in Antwerp was not suspected, and during that brief interval of comparative repose not a day passed in which the subject was not earnestly discussed; until at length Rubens, who was aware that the retreat of his royal guest must be ultimately discovered, resolved to undertake in person the mission of peace in which so many others had previously failed.

"Suffer me, Madame," said the painter, "to proceed without delay to Paris charged with a letter from your Majesty to the King your son. The pretext for my journey shall be my desire to execute a portrait of my friend, the Baron de Vicq, our Ambassador at the French Court; and as I do not doubt that his Christian Majesty will honour me with a summons to his presence, I will then deliver your despatch into his own hands. The happy results of my former missions render me sanguine of success on this occasion; while I pledge myself that should I unfortunately fail in my attempt to awaken the affection of the King towards your Majesty, it shall be from no want of zeal or perseverance in your cause."

"My noble Maestro!" exclaimed Marie de Medicis; "I would with confidence trust my life in your hands. My sorrows have at least not alienated your generous heart: and there still remains one being upon earth who can be faithful when my gratitude is all that I can offer in return. Listen to me, Rubens. Even yet I am convinced that Louis loves me; a conviction which is shared by Richelieu; and therefore it is that he condemns me to exile. He fears my influence over the mind of the King my son, and has injured me too deeply to place any faith in my forgiveness. Our mutual struggle has extended over long years, and I have become its victim. Yet would I fain make another effort. I am old and heart-broken, and I pine to terminate my wretched existence on the soil of France. Surely this is not too much to ask, and more I will not

Marie de Medicis

seek to obtain. You were born under a fortunate constellation, Pietro Paolo; and I have confidence in your success. Go then, and may God guide and prosper you: but--beware of the Cardinal!"

"Fear not, Madame," said the painter, as he rose from his knee, and placed writing materials before the agitated Queen. "In so righteous a cause I shall be protected; but as further delay might prove fatal to our hopes, I would venture to implore your Majesty to lose no time in preparing the despatch of which I am to be the bearer."

"It shall be done," replied Marie, forcing a painful smile. "It will in all probability be my last appeal; for should you fail, Rubens, I shall feel that all is indeed lost!"

The artist bowed profoundly, and left the room in order to give the necessary orders for his immediate departure; while his royal guest seized a pen, and with a trembling hand, and in almost illegible characters, wrote the following affecting letter:--

"Sire--During many years I have been deprived of your dear presence, and have implored your clemency without any reply. God and the Holy Virgin are my witnesses that my greatest suffering throughout that period has proceeded less from exile, poverty, and humiliation, than from the estrangement of a son, and the loss of his dear presence. Meanwhile I am becoming aged, and feel that each succeeding hour is bringing me more rapidly to the grave. Thus, Sire, would it not be a cruel and an unnatural thing that a mother should expire without having once more seen her beloved son, without having heard one word of consolation from his lips, without having obtained his pardon for the involuntary wrongs of which she may have been guilty towards him? I do not ask of you, Sire, to return to France as a powerful Queen; should such be your good pleasure, I will not even appear again at Court, and will finish my life in any obscure town which you may see fit to select as my residence; but, in the name of God and all the Saints, I adjure you not to allow me to die out of the kingdom of France; or to suffer me any longer to drag my sorrows and my misery from one foreign city to another; for you are not aware, Sire, that the widow of Henri IV, and the mother of the reigning monarch of France and Navarre, Louis XIII, will soon be without a roof to shelter her head, and a little bread for her support! You are not aware, Sire, that if the hour of my death were now to strike, no one would be beside me to close my eyes, and to say, 'This is the body of Marie de Medicis.' Take then compassion on my very humble request, Sire; and receive, whatever may be your decision, the blessings of your mother.

"In the city of Antwerp, the ninth day of October of the year of our salvation MDCXXI.--I, the Queen-mother, MARIE.

As the painter-prince returned to the apartment, the Queen placed this letter in his hands; and glancing at his travelling-garb, said in a faltering voice: "So soon, Maestro? But you are right, and I may the earlier look for your return."

Alas! once more the persecuted Princess suffered her sanguine temperament to delude her into hope; but by one of those singular coincidences which appear almost fabulous, Rubens had scarcely taken leave of his family, and was about to enter the carriage that awaited him, when a courier in the livery of the Governor of the Low Countries galloped into the yard, and demanded to be ushered into the presence of the Queen. Startled and alarmed by so unexpected an apparition, Rubens had no alternative but to obey; and the messenger no sooner found himself standing before Marie de Medicis, than, with a profound reverence, he placed a letter in her hands, and with a second salutation retired.

The Queen-mother hastily tore open the packet, of which these were the contents:--

"Madame la Reine--We hereby inform you that the city of Antwerp cannot afford you a befitting asylum, and that you would do better to take up your residence at Cologne.

"Upon which, we pray God to keep you under His holy and efficient guard.--I, the Governor of the Low Countries,

"DON FRANCISCO DE MELLO."

Marie de Medicis

Marie de Medicis sank back upon her seat, and silently held the insulting letter towards Rubens.

"There is indeed no time to lose, Madame," exclaimed the artist, as he glanced rapidly over its contents. "The spies of the Cardinal have tracked you hither, and you must quit Flanders without delay. Dare I hope that, in this emergency, your Majesty will deign to occupy a house which I possess at Cologne, until my return from Paris?"

"Rubens, you are my preserver!" faltered the wretched Queen. "Do with me as you will. You will meet your recompense in Heaven."

A few hours subsequently two carriages drove from the courtyard of Rubens; the first contained Marie de Medicis and two of her ladies, and took the way to Cologne; while the second, which was occupied by Rubens, drove towards Paris.

On the 12th of October the Queen-mother reached her final resting-place, and received permission to reside within the city; but this was the only concession accorded to her; and in one of the most ancient and gloomy streets in the immediate vicinity of the Cloth-market and the Church of Saint Margaret, she took possession of a Gothic house in which the greatest genius of the Flemish school had first seen the light. The room in which Rubens was born had been reverently preserved in all its original comfort by his family, and this apartment became the private chamber of the Queen; who, for a time, sanguine as to the result of the painter's mission, and rendered doubly hopeful by the constant reports which reached her of the rapidly-declining health of Richelieu, supported her new misfortunes with courage.

Unfortunately, however, for his victim, it was only physical suffering by which the Cardinal was prostrated, for never had his mental powers appeared more clear or more acute, or his iron will more indomitable, than at this period, when a slow but painful disease was gradually wearing away his existence; while superadded to this marvellous strength and freshness of intellect--marvellous inasmuch as it triumphantly resisted both physical agony and the conception of all those rapidly-recurring and conflicting political combinations by which he had excited alike the wonder and mistrust of every European state--his irritation and impatience under the restraint enforced upon him by his bodily ailments rendered him a more formidable enemy than ever. Prematurely old, ruined in constitution, ever dreading the knife of the assassin and the pen of the satirist, greedy of gold and power, wrapping himself lovingly in the purple and fine linen of earth, while conscious that ere long the sumptuous draperies of pride must be exchanged for a winding-sheet, Richelieu looked with a jaundiced eye on all about him, and appeared to derive solace and gratification only from the sufferings of others. He had pursued the unfortunate Duc de la Valette with his hatred until the Parliament, composed almost entirely of the creatures of his will and the slaves of his passions, had condemned to death the representative of the proud race of Epernon; and he had no sooner accomplished this object than, emboldened by his fatal success, he next ventured to fly his falcon at a still nobler quarry; and he accordingly accused one of the natural sons of Henri IV, the Duc de Vendôme, of conspiring against his life. As, however, the Prince was not within his grasp, so that his condemnation could not consequently involve the loss of life, he contented himself with causing him to be declared guilty *par contumace*, and with subsequently making a display of affected generosity, and soliciting his pardon.

"Had he," said the Cardinal, in his wiry and peculiar tone, which was broken at intervals by a hoarse and hollow cough--"had he conspired against the sovereign or against the state, my duty as a minister, and my devotion as a subject, would have compelled me on this occasion to remain silent; but it was against my person alone that M. de Vendôme threatened violence, and I can forgive a crime which extended no further."

Great was the wonder, and still greater the admiration, expressed by the time-serving sycophants to whom he addressed himself. The several members of the Council argued and remonstrated, assuring his Eminence that he owed it to himself to let justice take its course; and entreating that he would not endeavour to influence the sovereign on so serious an occasion, where his generous self-abnegation might involve his future safety; but Richelieu

only replied with one of his ambiguous smiles that he could not, in order to save his own life, consent to sacrifice that of a Prince of the Blood; while at the same time he induced the King to exile the Duchesse de Vendôme and her two sons, MM. de Mercoeur and de Besançon, from the capital. The members of the Court by which the Duke had been tried and condemned were then commanded to meet at an early hour in the morning on the 22nd of March at St. Germain-en-Laye, where Louis XIII presided over the assembly in person; and they had scarcely taken their seats when it was announced to the King that Le Clerc, the secretary of the Cardinal-Minister, awaited in the ante-room the royal permission to deliver to the Chancellor a letter of which he was the bearer. His entrance having been sanctioned by the sovereign, Le Clerc placed his despatches in the hands of Séguier, who hastily cut the silk by which they were secured, and he had no sooner made himself acquainted with their contents than he addressed a few words in a low voice to the King.

"Gentlemen," said Louis, as the Chancellor fell back into his seat, "his Eminence the Cardinal de Richelieu is desirous that I should pardon M. de Vendôme; but such is not my own opinion; I owe my protection to those who, like M. le Cardinal, have served me with affection and fidelity; and were I not to punish all attempts against his life, I should experience great difficulty in finding ministers who would transact public business with the same courage and devotion as my cousin of Richelieu has done. M. le Cardinal eagerly demands a free pardon for the Duc de Vendôme; but no, no; I will not concede that pardon at present; I will merely suspend the trial; and that measure will, believe me, prove the most efficient one to hold in check so impetuous a character as his. Nevertheless, read the letter aloud," he added, "that the Court may have full cognizance of every circumstance connected with this unhappy affair."

Séguier, after a profound obeisance to the sovereign, once more unfolded the packet, of which these were the contents:

"Monsieur le Chancelier, the interests of the state having ever been the sole object of my attention and anxiety, I consider that the public will not be in any way benefited by a knowledge of the evil design of M. le Duc de Vendôme; and thus I have thought that I might, without any prejudice to the royal service, implore of his Majesty to pardon M. de Vendôme."

Once more did the well-acted generosity and self-abnegation of the wily Cardinal excite a universal and enthusiastic murmur of admiration; while one of the Council, anxious to exhibit his attachment to the person of Richelieu in the presence of the King, even carried his sycophancy so far as to exclaim: "What a noble spirit! I propose that the letter to which we have just listened should be inscribed on the parliamentary register in order that it may descend to posterity." No answering voice, however, seconded the proposition; for few who were present at this extraordinary scene, and who remembered that the relatives of the accused Prince had been driven from Paris at the instigation of the Cardinal, doubted for an instant that they were actors in a preconcerted drama, and they consequently remained silent, until the King, after having glanced rapidly over the assembly, rose from his seat, and said somewhat impatiently: "Gentlemen, you may retire."

Such was the abrupt and indefinite termination of a trial which had, as Richelieu intended that it should do, convulsed the whole aristocracy of France. The son of Henri IV could not again set his foot upon the soil of that kingdom which counted him among its Princes save at the risk of his life; while his unoffending wife and sons were banished to a distance from the capital which was their legitimate sphere of action, and branded as the relatives of a conspirator.

The next victim of the inexorable Cardinal was M. de Saint-Preuil, the Governor of Arras, who had fought valiantly against the Spaniards, and in whom the King had evinced the greatest confidence. Accused upon some frivolous pretext--although M. de Saint-Preuil had been assured by Louis himself that he was at perfect liberty to exercise his authority within the limits of his government as he should see fit, without being amenable to any other individual--he was arrested, tried, and executed, despite the desire of the weak monarch to turn aside the iron hand by which he had been clutched. In this instance the vindictive minister could afford to satiate his hatred, and even to give to his merciless vengeance a semblance of patriotism, for

here at least his own safety or interests were not involved; and thus to all the representations of his royal master he replied by lamenting that he dare not overlook the commission of crime, while the welfare of a great nation and the safety of its sovereign were confided to his care. It was no part of Richelieu's policy to tolerate any individual, however inferior to himself in rank and station, who ventured to place himself beyond the pale of his own jealous authority; and thus the overstrained indulgence of the King to a brave and successful soldier had signed his death-warrant.

Still did the fatal disease which was preying upon the vitals of the Cardinal silently work its insidious way, and reveal its baneful power by sleepless nights, burning fever, and sharp bodily pain; but his powerful mind and insatiable ambition enabled him to strive successfully against these enervating influences; and Saint-Preuil was scarcely laid in his dishonoured grave ere the remorseless minister sought around him for more victims. The Comte de Soissons, who had been exiled from the Court for resenting the arrogance of the Cardinal, had found an asylum with the Duc de Bouillon at Sedan, where it had, after considerable difficulty, been conceded that he should be permitted to remain unmolested for the space of four years, after which time he was to remove to some other residence selected by the King, or in point of fact, by Richelieu himself. The period named had now expired; and the Cardinal, anxious still further to humiliate the great nobles, to whom, as he was bitterly aware, his own obscure extraction was continually matter of contemptuous comment, exacted from the timid and yielding monarch that he should forthwith issue his commands to M. de Bouillon to deliver up his cousin De Soissons to the keeping of his Majesty; or that both Princes should humbly ask forgiveness of the Cardinal-Minister for the affronts which they had put upon him.

The receipt of this offensive order at once determined the conduct of the two friends. That the Comte de Soissons, a member of the haughty house of Condé, and the Duc de Bouillon, the independent sovereign of Sedan, both Princes of the Blood, should condescend to bend the knee, and to entreat the clemency of Armand du Plessis, was an extent of humiliation which neither the one nor the other could be brought to contemplate for an instant; and thus it was instantly decided between them that they would resist the mandate of the King even to the death; while their opposition was strengthened by the impetuous vituperations of the young Duc de Guise, who had, after a misunderstanding with the minister, also claimed the hospitality of M. de Bouillon, and who welcomed with enthusiasm so favourable an opportunity of revenging himself upon his adversary.

The animosity of M. de Guise had grown out of his jealousy, which had been excited by the ostentatious attentions paid by Richelieu to the Princesse Gonzaga de Nevers, to whom he was himself tenderly attached, and who was, moreover, the idol of the whole Court. Eagerly, therefore, did he enter into the views of his aggrieved associates; and, as their determination to resist the presumption of the haughty minister necessarily involved precautionary measures of no ordinary character, they lost no time in despatching a secret messenger to solicit the support of the Archduke and the Spanish agents. With Don Miguel of Salamanca they found little difficulty in concluding a treaty; and this desirable object attained, they effected a second with the Court of Vienna; while Jean François Paul de Gondy, who subsequently became celebrated during the Fronde as the Cardinal de Retz, was instructed to apprise their friends in Paris of the contemplated revolt, and to urge their co-operation. The Duc de Guise meanwhile proceeded to Liége, in order to levy troops for the reinforcement of the rebel army; the several envoys having been instructed to declare that the Princes were still devoted to their sovereign, and that they merely took up arms to protect themselves against the violence and perfidy of the Cardinal-Minister. Anxious to strengthen their faction at home, Soissons, confiding in the frequent professions of attachment which had been lavished upon him by Gaston d'Orléans, wrote to that Prince to explain their motives and purposes, and to induce him to join in the conspiracy. For once, however, Monsieur, much as he delighted in feuds and factions, declined to take any part in their meditated resistance to the ministerial authority, his own position having been rendered so brilliant through the policy of the Cardinal that he feared to sacrifice the advantages thus tardily secured; while, moreover, not satisfied with returning evasive answers to M. de Soissons, which induced that Prince to pursue the correspondence under the belief that his arguments would ultimately induce Monsieur to join their party, he had the

baseness, in order to further his personal interests with the all-powerful minister, to communicate to him the several letters of the Count immediately that they reached him.

Irritated by the contemptuous epithets applied to him in these unguarded epistles, and anxious to avert a danger which the delay of every succeeding hour tended to render still more threatening, Richelieu determined at once to attack the stronghold of his enemies; and an army under the command of the Maréchal de Châtillon was accordingly despatched against Sedan. The result of the expedition proved, however, inimical to the interests of the Cardinal, as the royal general was utterly defeated, and more than two thousand of the King's troops, together with the artillery and the treasure-chest, fell into the hands of the rebels. The battle, fatal as it was in the aggregate, nevertheless afforded one signal triumph to Richelieu in the death of the Comte de Soissons, who was killed by the pistol-ball of a gendarme, to whom, as a recompense for the murder of his kinsman, Louis XIII accorded both a government and a pension. Dispirited by the fate of the young Prince, to whom he was tenderly attached, Bouillon attempted no further resistance, but tendered without delay his submission to the sovereign, and received in return a free pardon, together with all those individuals who had joined his banner, save the Duc de Guise, who, not having been included in the treaty, was condemned *par contumace*.

This result, so strongly opposed to the ordinarily severe policy of Richelieu, was not, as must at once be apparent, obtained through his influence. Powerful as he was through the King's sense of his own helplessness, he had been throughout the whole of his ministerial career thwarted at times by the ruling favourites of Louis, whose puerile tastes rendered him as dependent upon others for mere amusement as he was for assistance and support in the government of his kingdom. We have already seen the projects of the haughty Cardinal at times traversed by the equally arrogant and ambitious De Luynes, who was succeeded in the favour and intimacy of the sovereign by M. de Saint-Simon, from whom the minister experienced equal annoyance; while the platonic attachment of the King for Mademoiselle de Hautefort, whose energetic habits and far-seeing judgment had involved him in still greater difficulties, determined him to select such a companion for Louis as, while he ministered to the idleness and *ennui* of his royal master, should at the same time subserve his own interests. To this end, Richelieu, after mature deliberation, selected as the new favourite a page named Cinq-Mars, whose extraordinarily handsome person and exuberant spirits could not fail, as he rightly imagined, to attract the fancy and enliven the leisure of the moody sovereign.

This young noble, who was the son of an old and tried friend of the Cardinal, had appeared at Court under his auspices, and consequently regarded him as the patron of his future fortunes; a conviction which tended to give to the relative position of the parties a peculiar and confidential character well suited to the views of the astute minister. Cinq-Mars, like all youths of his age, was dazzled by the brilliancy of the Court, and eager for advancement; while he was at the same time reckless, unscrupulous, and even morbidly ambitious; but these defects were concealed beneath an exterior so prepossessing, manners so specious, and acquirements so fascinating; there was such a glow and glitter in his scintillating wit and uncontrollable gaiety, that few cared to look beyond the surface, and all were loud in their admiration of the handsome and accomplished page.

Such was the tool selected by Richelieu to fashion out his purposes, and he found a ready and a willing listener in the son of his friend, when, with warm protestations of his esteem for his father and his attachment to himself, he declared his intention of placing the ardent youth about the person of his sovereign under certain conditions, which were at once accepted by Cinq-Mars. These conditions, divested of the courtly shape in which they were presented to *protégé*, were simply that while the page devoted himself to the amusement of his royal master, he should carefully report to the Cardinal, not only the actions of the King, but also the private conversations which might take place in his presence, and the share maintained by the sovereign in each.

Had Cinq-Mars been less aspiring than he was, it is probable that although yet a mere youth he would have shrunk with disgust from so humiliating a proposition; but he

remembered the career of De Luynes, and he disregarded in the greatness of the end the unworthiness of the means by which it was to be obtained. The brilliant page was accordingly presented to the unsuspecting monarch by the minister, and, as the latter had anticipated, at once captivated the fancy of Louis, who having satisfied himself that Cinq-Mars possessed a sufficient knowledge of those sports in which he himself delighted, at once consented to receive him into his household.

For a time the page served with equal assiduity both the King and the Cardinal, to the former of whom he so soon rendered himself essential that although the confidential friends of Louis were occasionally startled to find their most secret words known to the minister, and did not scruple to express their suspicion that they were betrayed by Cinq-Mars, Louis, too indolent and too selfish to risk the displeasure of Richelieu, or to deprive himself of an agreeable associate, merely laughed at the absurdity of such a supposition, and continued to treat the page with the same confidence and condescension as heretofore.

Gradually did Cinq-Mars meanwhile weary of the complicated *rôle* which he was called upon to perform. He saw the health of the Cardinal failing day by day; and he detected, from the querulous complaints in which Louis constantly indulged against his imperious minister, that although he was feared by his sovereign there was no tie of affection between them. At this period the young courtier began for the first time to reflect; and the result of his reflections was to free himself unostentatiously and gradually, but nevertheless surely, from the thrall of his first patron. This resolution, however, was one which it required more tact and self-government than he yet possessed to reduce to practice, and accordingly the quick eye of Richelieu soon detected in the decreased respect of his bearing, and the scantiness of his communications, the nature of the feelings by which he was actuated.

Nevertheless, the minister was conscious of one advantage over the self-centred monarch of which he resolved to avail himself in order to fix the wavering fidelity of the page. Louis, while jealous of the devotion of those about him, was careless in recompensing their services; while Richelieu, with a more intimate knowledge of human nature, and, above all, of the nature of courts, deemed no sacrifice too great which ensured the stability of his influence, and the fidelity of his adherents. Thus, affecting not to remark the falling-off of affection in his agent, he intermingled his discourse to the ambitious young man with regrets that the monarch had not rewarded his zeal by some appointment in the royal household which would give him a more definite position than that which he then held. This was a subject which never wearied the attention of Cinq-Mars, who with flashing eyes and a heightened colour listened eagerly; and the Cardinal no sooner perceived that by his quasi-condolences he had regained in a great degree his former influence, than he bade the page serve him faithfully, and he would himself atone for the negligence of the King. Nor was the promise an idle one, as within the short space of two years he caused the new favourite to be appointed both Master of the Wardrobe and Grand Equerry.

This promotion proved, however, too rapid for the vanity of Cinq-Mars: who no sooner saw himself in a position so brilliant as to excite the envy of half the Court than, with a self-confidence fatal to the interests of Richelieu, he once more sought deliverance from the yoke of his priest-patron, and devoted himself so earnestly to the service of Louis that ere long the King found his companionship indispensable. When by chance he absented himself for a few hours from Fontainebleau, in order to exchange the monotony of that palace for the dissipation of the capital, the King no sooner became aware of the fact than after having impatiently reiterated more than once, "Cinq-Mars! Where is Cinq-Mars?" he despatched a courier to Paris to recall him: and the pleasure-loving young man was compelled to return upon the instant to attend his royal master in a stag-hunt, or to parade his satins and velvets among the hounds whom Louis delighted to feed and fondle; until he began to be weary of the honours which he had so lately coveted, and to sigh for unrestrained intercourse with his former associates.

With still less patience, however, did he endure the imperious chidings of the Cardinal, who could not brook that one who owed his advancement to his favour should seek to

emancipate himself from his control; and the spoiled child of fortune, when he occasionally passed from the perfumed boudoir of some haughty Court beauty by whom he had been flattered and caressed to the closet of the minister where he was greeted by a stern brow and the exclamation of "Cinq-Mars, Cinq-Mars, you are forgetting yourself!" found considerable difficulty in controlling his impetuosity; but it was even worse when to this rebuke Richelieu at times added in a contemptuous tone: "Remember to whom you owe your fortune, and that it will be quite as easy for me to divest you of the high-sounding titles which have turned your brain as it was to procure them for you. Be warned, therefore; for if you do not conduct yourself with more propriety, and evince more respect for my authority, I will have you turned out of the palace like a lackey."

The constant repetition of these taunts made the impetuous blood of the haughty youth boil in his veins; while the lingering remnant of affection which he had hitherto retained for the friend of his father and his own benefactor became gradually changed to hate, and impelled him to redouble his zeal about the person of the sovereign, in order that he might one day secure sufficient influence over the latter's mind to enable him to revenge the insults offered to his pride.

At this precise period Cinq-Mars--who, had he not been brought into close contact with a more matured and stronger mind than his own, would in all probability have frittered away his vengeance in petty and puerile annoyances which would rather have worried than alarmed the Cardinal--formed a fast friendship with François Auguste de Thou, who had long ceased to conceal his hatred of the minister. In the study of his father, the celebrated historian, M. de Thou had learned to feel an innate contempt for all constituted authorities, even while he professed to be at once a Catholic, a royalist, and a patriot; but, unlike his father, the young scholar was not satisfied with theories; he required active employment for the extraordinary energies with which he was gifted; and abandoning the literary leisure in which the elder De Thou so much delighted, he became in early manhood commissary of the army of the Cardinal de la Valette during his Italian campaign, and subsequently he was appointed Councillor of State, and principal librarian to the King. With his peculiar principles, De Thou could not do otherwise than deprecate and detest the overwhelming power of Richelieu; and long ere he crossed the path of Cinq-Mars, he had entered into several cabals against the minister, a fact which had no sooner been ascertained by the Cardinal than he deprived him of his public offices, and thus rendered his animosity more resolute than ever. It was in this temper of mind that De Thou met the Grand Equerry; nor was it long ere the wild visions of Cinq-Mars's passion were fashioned into probability by the logical arguments of his new acquaintance; a circumstance of which he no sooner became convinced than he forthwith resolved not to suffer his indignation to vent itself in mere annoyance, but to seek some more noble and enduring vengeance.

Thenceforward the two friends became inseparable; and when De Thou at length hinted that Cinq-Mars would in all probability, from his great favour with the sovereign, become the successor of Richelieu in the event of his dismissal, the Equerry sprang at once from a peevish and mortified boy into a resolute and daring conspirator, and his first care was to secure the co-operation of his kinsman the Duc de Bouillon; who, while auguring favourably of the plot, and pledging himself to strengthen it by his own participation, represented to his young relative the absolute necessity of obtaining the support of Monsieur.

Gaston had withdrawn from the Court after the birth of the two Princes; and although he had, with his usual pusillanimity, continued to preserve an apparently good understanding with the Cardinal, few were deceived into the belief that this ostensible oblivion of the past was genuine. Monsieur was, when the subject of the new cabal against Richelieu was mooted to him by Cinq-Mars, residing in the Luxembourg (known at that period as the Palais d'Orléans), whither the Grand Equerry was accustomed to repair in disguise, and generally during the night, to concert with the Prince all the preliminaries of the conspiracy. Gaston, as had been anticipated, evinced no indisposition to lend himself to the views of Cinq-Mars and his friends, when they eventually assured him that they had certain information of the efforts which the Cardinal was at that very period making to secure his own nomination to the regency of the

kingdom, in the event of the then-pending journey to Catalonia, whither Louis was about to proceed early in the ensuing spring, to swear to the inviolate preservation of the ancient laws and privileges of the Catalans; and at the same time to endeavour to possess himself of the province of Roussillon, although the infirm state of his health would have appeared to render such an expedition too hazardous to be contemplated at such a season.

Like his successor Louis XIV, the son of Marie de Medicis was one of the most "unamusable" of monarchs; and like Cinq-Mars himself, he was weary of the unvaried routine of pleasures which made up the sum of his existence while confined to his own capital; and thus he welcomed every prospect of change without caring to investigate the motives of those by whom it was proposed. He did not, therefore, for an instant suspect that the motive of his ambitious minister in urging him to undertake upon the instant, and in a state of excessive bodily suffering, an expedition which might with safety have been deferred until a more genial season, was in reality to remove him to a distance from the Parliament and the citizens of Paris, and to place him between two armies, both of which were commanded by Richelieu's own near relatives and devoted friends, in order that should the already exhausted strength of the invalid sovereign fail him under the fatigue and privation of so severe an exertion, the Cardinal might cause himself to be declared Regent of the kingdom after his death.

Others were, however, less blind to the real views of the Cardinal, which were freely canvassed by the courtiers, who looked upon the expedition with distrust as they studied the plan of the campaign, and reflected on the measures which were to be adopted for the government of the country during the absence of the monarch. These were, indeed, undeniably calculated to awaken their apprehensions; as, acting under the advice of his minister, Louis had determined that he would be accompanied on his journey by the Queen and the Duc d'Orléans; that the Dauphin and the Duc d'Anjou should take up their abode until his return in the Castle of Vincennes, of which the governor was devoted to the interests of Richelieu; while the Prince de Condé, who was also his sworn friend, was appointed to the command of Paris, and authorized, in conjunction with the Council, whose members were the mere creatures of his will, to regulate the internal administration of the kingdom.

All these circumstances, amplified, moreover, by ingenious conjectures and envenomed deductions, Cinq-Mars poured into the willing ear of Monsieur; and while agents were despatched to Spain and Flanders to invite the co-operation of those sovereigns, the Grand Equerry continued his secret visits to the Luxembourg with an impunity that augured well for the success of the perilous undertaking in which he was embarked; and which at length emboldened Monsieur to receive in like manner the emissaries of Ferdinand and Philip. These nocturnal movements were not, however, so unobserved as the conspirators had believed; and the result of the suspicions which they engendered is so quaintly narrated by Rambure that we shall give it in the identical words of the garrulous old chronicler himself:

"One evening," he says, "when I was in the buttery of the Cardinal, where I was eating some sweetmeats, his Eminence entered and asked for a draught of strawberry syrup. While he was drinking it the Comte de Rochefort arrived in his turn, and informed him that during the preceding night, as he was passing the Palace of the Luxembourg, he saw a man come out whom he instantly recognized as a certain Florent Radbod whom he had formerly met at Brussels, and whom he knew to have been frequently employed in secret matters of state. The lateness of the hour, which was, as he further stated, two in the morning, led him to believe that an individual of this description would not be there save for some important reason.

"You were very wrong not to follow him," said his Eminence.

"I did so," replied M. de Rochefort; "but he was on his guard, and soon perceived that he was dogged. Therefore, thinking it better not to excite his suspicions, I turned aside and left him."

"You did well," said Richelieu; "but what description of person is this Radbod? What is his age? his complexion? his height? Tell me every particular by which he may be recognized. M. de Rambure, have you your pencil about you?"

Marie de Medicis

"I have my tablets, Monseigneur.'

"Write down then without loss of time,' said the Cardinal, 'the portrait of this man.'

"I immediately obeyed, and my task was no sooner completed than his Eminence gave orders that at every post-house where carriages could be hired notice should be instantly given to himself if a person answering the description should endeavour to secure the means of leaving Paris. He also stationed men at every avenue leading from the city, who were to watch night and day, lest he might escape in the coach of an acquaintance. On the following morning his Eminence sent to summon me an hour before dawn, and I was surprised on my arrival to find him pacing his chamber in his dressing-gown.

"Rambure,' he said as I entered, 'I confess to you that I suspect some conspiracy is on foot against the King, the state, and myself; and, moreover, if I am not deceived, it is organizing at the Luxembourg with the consent and connivance of the Duc d'Orléans; but as this is mere suspicion, I am anxious, in order to see my way more clearly, to place some confidential person as a sentinel near the palace to watch who goes in and out.'

"After having hesitated for a time, I told his Eminence that I was willing to undertake the adventure, and quite ready to obey his commands.

"I have faith in you, M. de Rambure,' said the Cardinal; 'I am perfectly convinced of the affection which you bear, not only towards the King and the state, but also towards myself; but I have determined to desire M. de Rochefort to disguise himself as a cripple, and to take up his position in front of the Luxembourg, where he must remain day and night until he has discovered whether it were really the Fleming that he saw.'

"Then, summoning a page who was waiting in the antechamber, his Eminence sent for M. de Rochefort, who was not long in coming; and told him what he proposed. Rochefort, who was always ready to comply with every wish of the Cardinal, immediately declared his willingness to play the part assigned to him; and a trusty person who had attended him to the apartment of Monseigneur was instructed to procure without loss of time, and with the greatest secrecy, a pair of crutches, a suit of rags, and all the articles necessary to complete the metamorphosis.

"His Eminence having, on the return of the lackey, expressed his desire to witness the effect of the disguise, M. de Rochefort retired to another chamber, where, with the assistance of his servant, he exchanged his velvet vest and satin haut-de-chausses for the foul garb of a mendicant; this done, he smeared his face with dirt, and crouching down in a corner, he requested me to announce to Monseigneur that he was ready to receive him. His Eminence was astonished at his appearance, as well as to see him act the character he had assumed as if he had studied and practised it all his life. He told him to set forth, and that if he succeeded in his attempt he would render him the greatest service which he had ever received.

"As soon as the Cardinal had taken leave of Rochefort, he said to me: 'In the disguise the Count has on, and when he is crouched upon his dunghill like a miserable cripple, it will be easy for him to look every one in the face; and I hope he will make some discovery of that which troubles me.' His Eminence then told me that he wanted my valet, to place him in disguise in another direction. I therefore called him. He was a very sharp fellow at everything that was required of him; and the Cardinal made him put on a shabby cassock, with a false beard of grizzled hair and eyebrows to match, which were all fastened on with a certain liquid so firmly to the skin that it was necessary to apply vinegar in which the ashes of vine-twigs had been steeped, when they instantly fell off. My Basque was at length dressed in a torn, threadbare cassock, masked by his false beard, with an old hat upon his head, a breviary under his arm, and a tolerably thick stick in his hand, and received an order to post himself near the little gate of the Luxembourg stables. The Cardinal then desired me not to leave him, as he had certain orders to give me which he could not entrust to every one on such an occasion.

"M. de Rochefort took up his station at the corner of the Rue de Tournon, laid himself down on a heap of manure, and began, with his face covered with mud and filth, to cry out

continually and dolefully as if he had been in agony and want; and he played his part so naturally that several charitable folks were touched by his misery and gave him alms. From his dunghill he saw numbers of carriages pass and repass, and he began to be afraid that his prey would escape him. He consequently resolved to approach nearer to the gates of the palace, where his intolerable groans so harassed the Swiss guards of Monsieur that they threatened to drive him away, but upon his promise to be more quiet they permitted him to remain. He continued patiently at his post for three days and three nights without seeing anything to justify the suspicions of the Cardinal, and I was careful to visit him at intervals in order to receive his report; but when I found that so much time had been lost, I began to think that the Fleming would not, in all probability, enter the palace by the gate facing the Carmelite Convent, and Rochefort agreeing with me on this point, he resolved to change his station. The very same night he saw him arrive, and let himself in with a key that he carried about him; and an hour afterwards he observed another man stop at the same door, and enter by the same means. He was wrapped in a cloak so that the Count could not recognize him; but he desired my valet, who was not far off at the time, to follow him when he came out, by which means we ascertained that the individual who was thus tracked to his own residence was the Grand Equerry of France, M. de Cinq-Mars; while before the end of another week we discovered Radbod in the same manner."

Were not this incident recorded by one of the actors in the adventure, it would have been impossible to have related it with any faith in its veracity; as, assuredly, never was the meaning of "secret service" defined more broadly or more unblushingly than in the instance of the sycophantic courtier who divested himself of his brilliant attire to don the tatters of a beggar, and exchanged his velvet-covered couch for the manure-heap of a city street; while as little would it be credited that any man in power would venture to suggest so revolting an expedient to an individual of high birth and position, the companion of princes, and the associate of Court ladies. Nor is it the least singular feature of the tale that the chronicler by whom it is told indulges in no expression of disgust, either at the indelicate selfishness of Richelieu, or the undignified complaisance of his adherent; although he evidently seeks to infer that the Cardinal did not venture to request so monstrous a concession from himself; and dwells with such palpable enjoyment upon all the details of Rochefort's overweening condescension, that it is easy to detect his dread of being suspected by his readers of an equal amount of disgraceful self-abnegation.

The arrest and subsequent execution of the ill-fated Cinq-Mars and his friend M. de Thou, together with the cowardly policy of Monsieur, who no sooner found his treason discovered than he once more wrote to demand his pardon from the King, and to renew his promises of future loyalty and devotion, are circumstances of such universal notoriety that we shall not permit ourselves to enlarge upon them. It must suffice, therefore, to say that this new peril had merely served to increase alike the bodily suffering and the irascibility of Richelieu, who, even on the very brink of the grave, was indulging in schemes of vengeance. He saw on all sides only enemies armed against his life; and by a supreme effort, to which a less vigorous intellect than his own must have proved unequal, he rallied all the failing energies of nature to pay back the universal debt of hatred which he was conscious that he had incurred.

Such was the temper of his mind while the unfortunate Queen-mother was yet dreaming of a reconciliation with her son, and an old age of honour in her adopted country, through the agency of Rubens; but her still sanguine spirit had betrayed her into forgetting the fact that the dying tiger tears and rends its victim the most pitilessly in its death-agony; and this was the case with the rapidly sinking minister, who was no sooner apprised of the arrival of the painter-prince in the capital than he despatched a letter to Philip of Spain to urge him to demand the presence of Rubens on the instant at Madrid, and to detain him in that city until he should hear further from himself. The request of so dangerous an adversary as Richelieu was a command to Philip, who hastened to invite the illustrious Fleming to his Court with all speed, upon an affair of the most pressing nature; and when Rubens would have lingered in order to fulfil a mission which he considered as sacred, he was met by the declaration that Louis desired to defer the audience which he had already conceded until after the return of the Maestro from the Spanish capital. With a heavy heart Rubens accordingly left Paris, aware that

Marie de Medicis

this temporary banishment was the work of the vindictive Cardinal, who was thus depriving his unhappy benefactress of the last friend on earth who had the courage to defend her cause; but as he drove through the city gates he was far from anticipating that his freedom of action was to be trammelled for an indefinite period, and that he was in fact about to become the temporary prisoner of Philip IV.

Nor was the persevering cruelty of Richelieu yet satiated; he knew by his emissaries that the end of Marie de Medicis was rapidly approaching, but he was also aware that through the generous sympathy of Charles of England and the King of Spain she was still in the receipt of a sufficient income to ensure her comparative comfort; and even this was too much for him to concede to the mistress whom he had betrayed; thus, only a few months elapsed ere the pensions hitherto accorded to the persecuted Princess were withheld by both monarchs; who, in their terror of the formidable Cardinal, suffered themselves to overlook their duty and their loyalty to a woman and a Queen, and their affection towards the mother of their respective consorts.

Overwhelmed by this new misfortune, Marie de Medicis found herself reduced to the greatest extremity. Unable to liquidate the salaries of those members of her household who had accompanied her into exile, she was abandoned by many among them; while the few jewels which she had hitherto retained were gradually disposed of in order to support those who still clung with fidelity to her fallen fortunes; but even this resource at length failed; and during the winter months, unable any longer to purchase fuel, she was compelled to permit her attendants to break up all such articles of furniture as could be made available for that purpose.

This extreme of wretchedness, however, which would have sufficed to exhaust the most robust health and the most vigorous youth, was rapidly sapping the toil-worn and tortured existence of Marie de Medicis; and, aware that she had nearly reached the term of her sufferings, on the 2nd of July 1642 she executed a will which is still preserved in the royal library of Paris, wherein she expressed her confidence that Louis XIII would cause the mortuary ceremonies consequent upon her decease to be solemnized in a manner befitting her dignity as Queen of France; and bequeathed certain legacies to her servants, and to the several charitable institutions of Cologne. This duty performed, she consented at the entreaty of her attendants to undergo a painful operation, and to submit to such remedies as were likely to prove most efficient, although she herself expressed a conviction of their utter uselessness. She then received the last sacraments of the church; tenderly embraced those who stood about her; and after a violent accession of fever, expired at mid-day on the morrow, with the breath of prayer upon her lips. Once or twice, blent with the pious outpourings of her departing spirit, her attendants had distinguished the name of her son--of that son by whom she had been abandoned to penury; and on each occasion a shade of pain passed across her wasted features. Her maternal love did not yield even to bodily agony; but the struggle was brief. Her eyes closed, her breath suddenly failed: and all was over.

Thus perished, in a squalid chamber, between four bare walls--her utter destitution having, as we have already stated, driven her to the frightful alternative of denuding the very apartment which was destined to witness her death--agony of every combustible article that it contained, in order by such means to prepare the scanty meal that she could still command--and on a wretched bed which one of her own lackeys would, in her period of power, have disdained to occupy; childless, or worse than childless; homeless, hopeless, and heart-wrung, the haughty daughter of the Medici--the brilliant Regent of France; the patroness of art; the dispenser of honours; and the mother of a long line of princes.

Surely history presents but few such catastrophes as this. The soul sickens as it traces to its close the career of this unhappy and persecuted Princess. Whatever were her faults, they were indeed bitterly expiated. As a wife she was outraged and neglected; as a Queen she was subjected to the insults of the arrogant favourites of a dissolute Court; as a Regent she was trammelled and betrayed; the whole of her public life was one long chain of disappointment,

Marie de Medicis

heart-burning, and unrest; while as a woman, she was fated to endure such misery as can fall to the lot of few in this world.

The remains of the ill-fated Marie de Medicis were, in a few hours after her decease, transported to the Cathedral of Cologne, where they lay in state an entire week, during which period Rosetti, the Papal Nuncio, whose dread of Richelieu had caused him to absent himself from the dying bed, as he had previously done from the wretched home, of the persecuted Princess, each day performed a funeral service for the repose of her soul. Her heart was, by her express desire, conveyed to the Convent of La Flèche; while her body was ultimately transported to France and deposited in the royal vaults of St. Denis.

The widow of Henri IV had at last found peace in the bosom of her God; and she had been so long an exile from her adopted country that the circumstances of her death were matter rather of curiosity than of regret throughout the kingdom.

The King was apprised of her demise as he was returning from Tarascon, where he had been visiting the Cardinal, who was then labouring under the severe indisposition which, five months subsequently, terminated in his own dissolution. For the space of four days Louis XIII abandoned himself to the most violent grief, but at the expiration of that period he suffered himself to be consoled; while Richelieu, who, even when persecuting the Queen-mother to the death, had always asserted his reverence for, and gratitude towards, his benefactress, caused a magnificent service to be performed in her behalf in the collegiate church.

Tardy were the lamentations, and tardy the orisons, which reached not the dull ear of the dead in the gloomy depths of the regal Abbey.

Marie de Medicis

