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978-1-108-02038-1 - The Life of Marie de Medicis, Queen of France, Volume 2

Julia S. H. Pardoe

Excerpt

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BOOK I.

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MARIE DE MEDICIS AS QUEEN.

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THE LIFE  
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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 Henry 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 Countess de Moret, his late favourite.

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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;

\* Mademoiselle de Montmorency was the daughter of Henry, first of the name, Duke de Montmorency, marshal and constable of France, celebrated in the history of the civil wars under the name of Damville, who died on the 2nd of April, 1614, and of Louise de Budos, his second wife, who had, on her appearance at court, attracted the attention of the King. This lady, who became the wife of the maréchal, in 1593, died in 1598. Charlotte Marguerite was born in 1594, and was consequently but fifteen years of age when she entered the household of the Queen.

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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 Duke 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 regarded 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 authorise his own marriage with the latter, while the remnant of the League continued so formidable as to threaten

\* Bentivoglio, *Della Fuga del Principe de Condé*.

† Bassompierre, *Mém.*, p. 53.

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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 constable 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 Duke de Bellegarde. The chance of the rivals in the favour of the lady herself could scarcely be doubtful, as the Duke 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

\* Bassompierre, *Mém.*, p. 55.

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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 Duke de Bellegarde.

On the morrow, however, he proved less insensible to the surpassing loveliness of the young lady of honour; her modest dignity in a private saloon 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 Duke de Bellegarde, and Montespan,\* the captain of his body-guard.

The extraordinary loveliness of the young Princess, combined with her exquisite grace and dignified bear-

\* Hector de Pardaillan, Seigneur de Montespan, who died in 1611, at the advanced age of eighty years. He was the father of Antoine-Arnauld de Pardaillan, first Marquis d'Antin, grandfather of Roger-Hector, Marquis d'Antin, great-grandfather of Louis-Henri, Marquis de Montespan, the husband of Françoise Athénaïs de Rochechouard Mortemart, the celebrated favourite of Louis XIV.



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ing, at once fascinated the King, who declared to the Duke 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 gout, to which he had been occasionally subject for the last four years, and which declared itself on this occasion with so much violence that during fifteen days he was compelled to keep his bed. Meanwhile, the Duke de Bouillon was not idle. Considering himself aggrieved by the *con-  
nétable* in not having been selected as the husband of his daughter, he complained loudly and bitterly of the slight; and even induced the Duke 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 *con-  
nétable*, 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

\* *Mémoires*, p. 55.

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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 Duke 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 Duchess d'Angoulême; who was, on every