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978-1-108-02403-7 - Prince Eugene of Savoy
George Bruce Malleson
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PRINCE EUGENE OF SAVOY.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY DAYS.

IN the first half of the seventeenth century Thomas Francis, youngest son of Charles Emanuel I., Duke of Savoy, founded the branch-line of the House of Savoy-Carignan. Thomas Francis was one of the most restless politicians of a very restless age, and, being absolutely devoid of principle, he gave his sword and his talents to the cause which promised to advance his own interests, and fought alternately for and against the countries warring against each other, even for and against his own. He married Mary of Bourbon, sister and heiress of the last Count of Soissons. From this marriage he had two sons. The elder of these, Emanuel Philibert, though deaf and dumb from his birth, possessed talents so great as to enable him to overcome even this great natural disadvantage. He had a very quick comprehension, wrote gracefully and with force, easily made himself understood, and in all the circumstances of life displayed a very remarkable shrewdness and power. At a rather advanced period of life he married, to continue his line, the Princess Maria Katherina of Este. The younger son, Eugene Maurice, took the title descending to him from his mother, of Count of Soissons.

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Naturalised in France, he spent his youth at the Court of Versailles, where, regarded and treated as a Prince of the Blood, he occupied a considerable position. Brave as his father, he did not possess his unsteady and ever-changing temperament. On the contrary, his genial amiability and his sympathy with the courtly customs of the period, though unaccompanied by great abilities, made him many friends and caused him to be a very acceptable person at Versailles.

Whilst the Count of Soissons was still a young man, Cardinal Mazarin brought his nieces to France to finish their education. The advent of five sisters of the Mancini family and two of the Martinozzi, all closely related to the great statesman who governed France, all well educated—some of them even beautiful—caused no small excitement. They became at once queens of all the *fêtes*. What wonder that the heart of Louis XIV., then in his early youth, should be touched by their charms? She who first attracted him was the second of the Mancini sisters, the favourite of the Cardinal, the beautiful and gifted Olympia.

The Count of Soissons married Olympia Mancini. She bore him five sons and three daughters. The sons were Thomas Louis—who succeeded his father as Count of Soissons—Philip, Louis Julius, Emanuel Philibert, and Eugene Francis. The daughters were Johanna, Louisa Philiberta, and Franziska. None of them married. It is to a record of the deeds of the youngest son, Eugene Francis, born the 18th October, 1663, that the following pages will be devoted.

The admiration which the young King of France had felt for Olympia Mancini had survived her marriage. Interrupted for a moment by the still warmer feeling which caused the fickle monarch to dream of bestowing the crown of France upon her sister, Maria, it returned with double force when, to prevent the possibility of such an event Anne of Austria and the Cardinal caused Maria to quit

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France. The King's marriage with Maria Theresa, eldest daughter of Philip IV. of Spain, seemed even to heighten his consideration for Olympia. She became superintendent of the household of the Queen, and by her office as first lady of the Court, her influence and her connections, wielded enormous power. The King, but little attracted by his wife, used to seek in the Hôtel Soissons distraction and amusement. Nothing equalled the magnificence, says Saint Simon, which the Countess of Soissons displayed. The King was constantly with her. She was the supreme ruler of the Court and of his *fêtes*; she was regarded as the one being upon whose word depended the dispensing of the most earnestly-desired favours.

With such a man as Louis XIV., then in the hot blood of youth and surrounded by all the beauties of France, the permanent sway of the Countess of Soissons was scarcely possible. Not so, however, thought Olympia. To maintain that sway she had recourse to exertions and intrigues of a very questionable character. In carrying out one of these she forced her husband, who was entirely under her influence, to quarrel with the Duke of Navailles. A challenge was the consequence, and this coming to the ears of the King, he banished the Count from his Court.

The banishment did not last long, but it was the first symptom of the waning influence of Olympia. It is true that for a time the previous friendship was renewed on its former footing. Again was the Countess of Soissons the organiser and the leader of the pleasures of the King and of the Court. But the new reign was a comparatively short one. The rising star of the Duchess de la Vallière eclipsed the planet which had so long dominated Versailles. Vain were the struggles of Olympia to retain her position. The Cardinal, who might have saved her, was long since dead. The courtiers, true to their nature, repeated the indiscretions of the lady at whose shrine they had wor-

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shipped. They even whispered that it was due to her malevolence that the Queen had become acquainted with the love of the King for the new favourite.

There could be but one ending to such a state of affairs. On the 30th March, 1665, the Count and Countess of Soissons quitted the Court, furnished with an order from the King to reside only on their estates.

This order changed the nature of Olympia. She, who had revelled in the brilliant *rôle* she had played at Court, felt bitterly the loss of all that had made life endurable. Hers was not the nature to bear such a reverse with equanimity. A complete revulsion of her feelings followed. Where before she had loved, now she hated. Revenge became her watchword. And to carry out that revenge she took pains to inspire her children, especially her two favourites, Julius and Eugene, with an utter abhorrence of the French Court, and especially of the central light which she had once guided, and round which the highest names in France were grouped in adoration.

In spite of these feelings, of this longing for vengeance, Olympia was well aware that to obtain positions for her sons such as their birth entitled them to hope for, it would be necessary for her to turn once again to Versailles. She felt this especially when in 1673 her husband, on his way to join the camp of Turenne, suddenly died. Olympia went to Paris. There, tossed between the desire to regain some of her former influence and the fear that she might not succeed, the unfortunate lady deviated into strange paths. She took to consulting astrologers and wise women. Led on step by step she made the acquaintance of and became associated with a woman named Voisin. Soon after, Voisin was tried and condemned on a charge of poisoning. In the process the name of Olympia became somewhat implicated, and on the condemnation of Voisin an order was issued to convey the Countess of Soissons to the Bastille.

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This was the last blow. Certain of the hostility of two eminent personages all-powerful with the King—of Louvois, to whose son she had refused her daughter's hand, and of Madame de Montespan, then the reigning star—she fled from Paris by night (January, 1680) and escaped to Flanders.

During her absence, a process for being associated in the crime of Voisin was brought against her. Not a tittle of proof inculcating her was brought forward. She even offered to return and submit to the judgment of the ordinary tribunals, provided that she were guaranteed against being lodged in the Bastille or Vincennes before judgment should be pronounced. The condition was refused. It was wished above all things, by those about the King, that she should remain in exile. The vindictive hatred of Louvois pursued her even beyond the French frontier. He carried it so far as to despatch agents to Brussels to excite the people of that city against her; and it was only by the personal exertions of the Spanish viceroy, the Marquis of Monterey, that he failed.

By degrees the utter groundlessness of the charges brought against the Countess became manifest. Her talents, her wit, her beauty—for she was still beautiful—brought to her *salon* the leaders of society in Brussels. The men and women who formed that society strove by their attentions to cause her to forget her wrongs. Under ordinary circumstances they might have to a great extent succeeded. But there was even then brewing in France a storm which was to rouse all her dormant feelings of hatred and revenge.

When the Countess had fled from Paris she had been forced to leave her children behind her. They had remained in France under the care of their grandmother, Mary of Bourbon, Princess of Carignan. This lady had taken a great fancy to the eldest son, Thomas Louis, become, by the death of his father, Count of Soissons, and he, by her interest, had been appointed Colonel of the Regiment of

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Soissons, and, a little later, Brigadier-General (*Maréchal-de-Camp*). The ambitious Princess entertained for some time the hope that her grandson might be elected King of Poland; but this was not to be, and shortly afterwards the Count frustrated all her plans for his advancement by his marriage with Urania de la Cropte, natural daughter of Francis of Beauvais, Master of Horse to the Prince of Condé. This act, which barred to the Count the succession to the Throne of Savoy, greatly enraged not only his grandmother and his mother, but the King himself. To Olympia the agreement between herself and Louis upon this one point seemed for a moment to afford some ground of hope for a reconciliation. But in this she was doomed to be grievously disappointed.

The beauty of the young Countess Urania was of a nature to offer, in the eyes of Louis XIV., some justification even for the rash act of the Count of Soissons. She was beautiful, says the Duke of St. Simon, beautiful as the glorious morn, possessing those large features which one is wont to associate with Sultanas and Roman ladies, tall, with black hair, and a noble yet easy presence. Louis himself, unwilling from the first, by any hardship on his part, to sever the ties which bound the family of Soissons to France, soon became the most passionate admirer of the new beauty. But Urania had none of the ambition of her step-mother Olympia. She repulsed the advances of the King. From the moment when Louis felt he could not triumph over her virtue, the meaner passion of revenge took possession of his soul. Casting aside the interest which France had in retaining a hold over a family of foreign extraction, he abandoned the House of Soissons to its enemies.

Those enemies were many and powerful. Prominent amongst them was the still implacable Louvois, and the Count of Soissons himself and his brothers were made to

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feel that at the Court of Versailles and in France the door to a successful career was permanently closed to them.

This conviction stole gradually over the minds of the brothers. Two of them, when they awoke to it, came to the resolve to seek in other countries the career denied to them in the land of their birth. The third brother, Louis Julius, known as the Chevalier of Savoy, and the fourth, Emanuel Philibert, called the Count of Dreux, took service under the head of their family, the Duke of Savoy. Emanuel Philibert died shortly afterwards. Then Louis Julius, yearning for a wider field of activity, transferred his services, shortly before the outbreak of the war of 1683 with Turkey, to the Emperor Leopold, by whom he was received with distinction.

The conviction which had driven two of his elder brothers from France dawned likewise, in due time, on the mind of the youngest, Eugene. As that prince is the hero of this book, it seems proper that, before proceeding further, I should describe his appearance and his early training.

Eugene Francis, born the 18th October, 1663, was small of stature but strongly built. He had the dark olive complexion of a son of Italy. His somewhat turned-up nose and his short upper lip gave him the appearance of a man whose mouth was never quite shut, whilst the exposure of the front teeth thus caused was ill calculated to impress favourably one who saw him for the first time. But his eyes were large, well shaped, full of fire and of expression, and, noting them, the more acute observer could scarcely fail to divine the great spirit which lay hid under the outer shell.

He had received a careful education. From his early youth he had displayed a great partiality for the profession of arms. With an energy which knew no rest he had applied himself to the mastery of the subjects necessary

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for the acquisition of military knowledge. In mathematics he took a special delight, and it is said that Joseph Sauveur, who in late years obtained the chair of mathematics at the Royal College of France (1686) and became a member of the Academy of Science (1696), was his preceptor in geometry. The perusal of the lives of the great warriors of ancient Greece and Rome filled up the time not devoted to more serious studies and to bodily exercise. To the latter he paid special attention. Like the illustrious Turenne, he endeavoured, by hard work and exposure, to inure a frame not naturally strong to support fatigue. Feeling that a military life was his vocation, he devoted all his energies to fit himself to excel in it.

To a boy so endowed by nature, possessing a predilection so marked and a will so resolved, the announcement made to him on behalf of the King, that he must prepare himself for a priestly life, sounded like a death warrant. Eugene was ten years old when the decision was made known to him. It was a decision from which there was apparently no escape. The order of Louis XIV. was neither to be disputed or questioned. From that time Eugene was known at the Court of Versailles as the Abbé of Carignan, and jestingly spoken of by the King as "the little Abbé." For the moment he was too young to resist. Not for an instant, however, did he abandon his intention or neglect his studies, his reading, or his exercises. Years passed by and the Abbé of Carignan still cherished the secret wish of his heart. The time at length arrived when it could no longer be concealed. Towards the end of 1682 Eugene took the opportunity personally to thank the King for the favours he had designed for him in the Church, and to beg that, in place of those favours, of which he was not worthy, His Majesty would deign to grant him rank befitting his position in his army. Louis not only refused his request, but he refused it in a manner which roused to

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white heat the anger of the young aspirant. Suddenly there rushed to his brain the thought of the wrongs of years, the long-suppressed feeling of indignation at the indignities suffered by his family, the two banishments of his father, the bitter reproaches of his mother. He could not, indeed, give expression to these burning thoughts, but he inwardly, on the spot, it is said, registered an oath that he would at once quit France, and never return to her unless as an enemy with his good sword in his hand!

Whither should he turn his steps? Before he had made his decision the news reached him of the reception accorded by the Emperor Leopold to his brother Louis Julius. Not only had that reception been gracious, but it had been followed by the bestowal on the Chevalier of the command of a regiment. This news decided Eugene. He abruptly quitted France for Vienna.

The earnestness of character, the dislike of the hollow ceremonies of courtly life, and the want of susceptibility which, even in his youth, had rendered him callous to the influence of the ladies of Versailles, and had tended to lessen the consideration for him of the courtiers of Louis XIV., produced an opposite effect on the statesmen of Vienna. On the Emperor Leopold, himself described as "the most virtuous and pious monarch of his time, endowed especially with composure, gentleness, sincerity, and a love of truth and order," the result was striking. He felt at the very first interview a sympathy for the young stranger. Doubtless with this feeling of sympathy was united the joy of welcoming, at a period when his relations with France were somewhat strained, when the question of war between the two countries had always to be considered, a near relative of the reigning Duke of Savoy. Eugene came to him, moreover, at a moment when all Hungary was in insurrection, and when the insurgent nobles of that country were imploring, with an almost certain prospect of

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success, the intervention of the Ottoman Porte. Alike, then, from sympathy and policy, Leopold received Eugene with the greatest cordiality, bestowed upon him the commission of Lieutenant-Colonel in a regiment of cavalry, and bade him join the army then posted on the Raab, under the orders of Duke Charles of Lorraine. Eugene obeyed with alacrity. He had now an object in life. The career for which he had prepared himself during long years had begun!