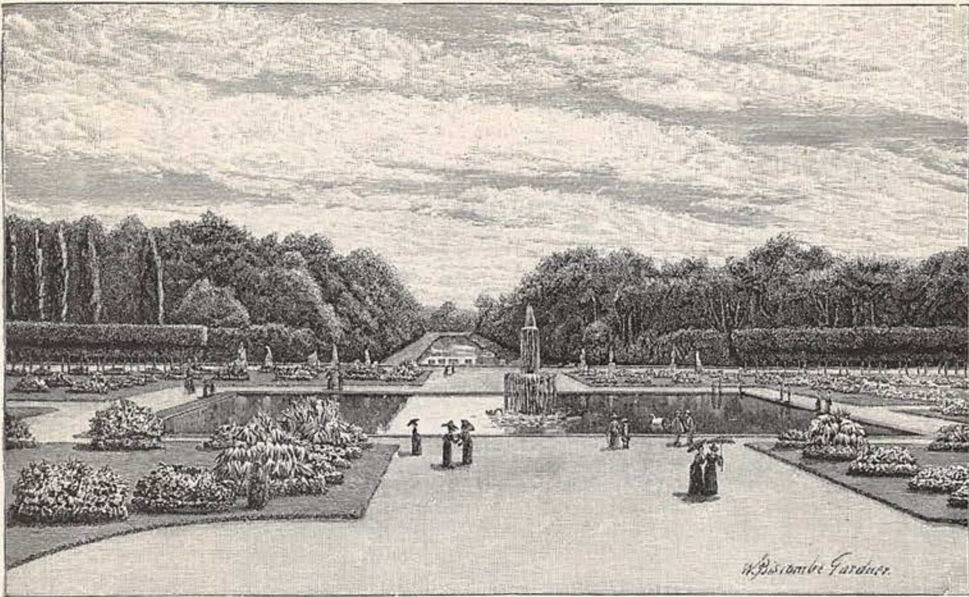


THE GARDENS ON THE SOUTH FRONT.

MEMORIES OF FONTAINEBLEAU.

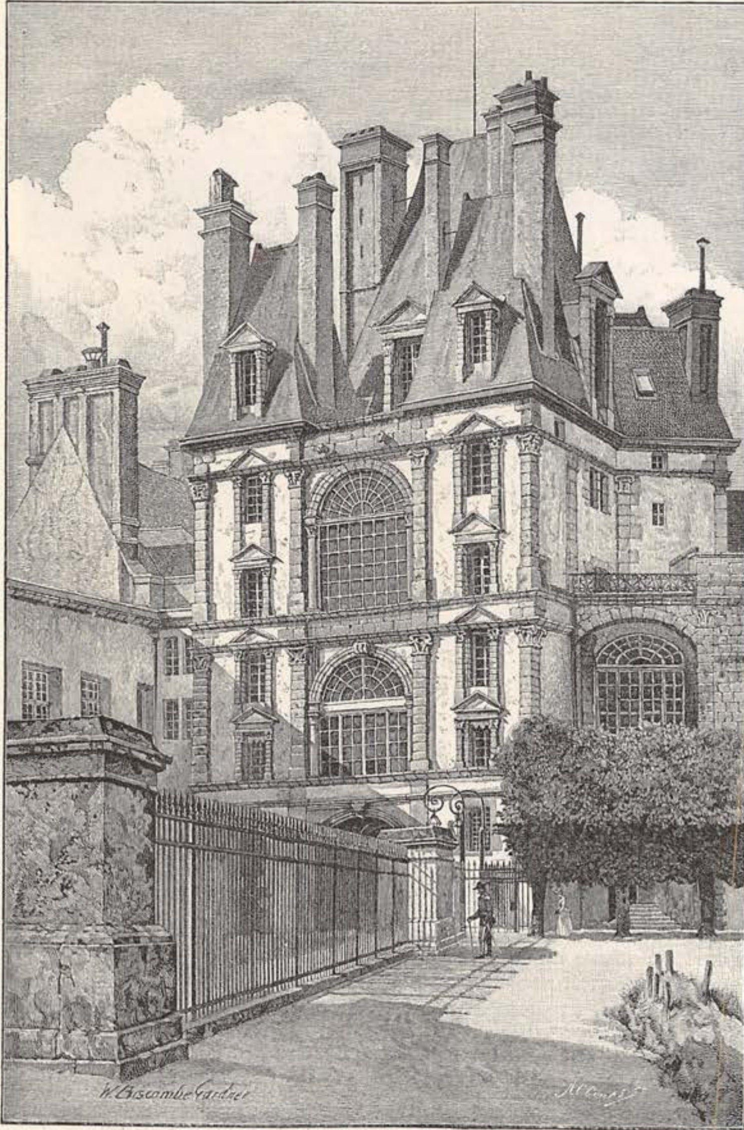
BY GRANT ALLEN.

With Illustrations by W. BISCOMBE GARDNER.

HAT Versailles is to the Augustan age of Louis Quatorze, that and more is Fontainebleau to the French Renaissance. As the Palace in the Marsh reflects and preserves for us the glories of the Grand Monarch, so the Palace in the forest reflects and preserves for us the glories of the gay and splendour-loving kings from François Premier to Henri Quatre. It embodies in itself at a single glance what may fairly be called the age of the Medici in France, and shows us at one *coup d'œil* the entire history of the origin and development of Renaissance architecture among the French people. Its great halls and long galleries are replete to this day with memories of the giddy butterfly throng which crowded the court of "the kings who amused themselves."

From a very early period, a Château of the French kings occupied the site of the existing palace. But of this building not a single relic now shows externally in any part of the façade, with the solitary exception of one mediæval turret, assigned to Saint Louis, and still adjoining the Cour Ovale of the modern palace. The origin of the first Château was simple and natural enough. It existed as a hunting tower in the midst of a royal forest. In our own day, that wild woodland region with its strange sandstone rocks and deep parallel valleys envisages itself to most of us as a mere appanage of the great mansion which skirts its fringe. But, in reality, it is the forest, of course, which created the palace, and not the palace which created the forest. Some thirty and five miles south-east of Paris, the Seine bends round and partly traverses a remarkable district of long sandy ridges, tilted up at an angle as the last subsiding ripple of that great secular earth-wave which produced through slow ages the elevation of the central European axis in the Alpine region. From time immemorial, this light and somewhat sterile soil has been covered by a thick growth of native oaks and beeches. The maritime pines and Riga spruces, indeed, which add so greatly

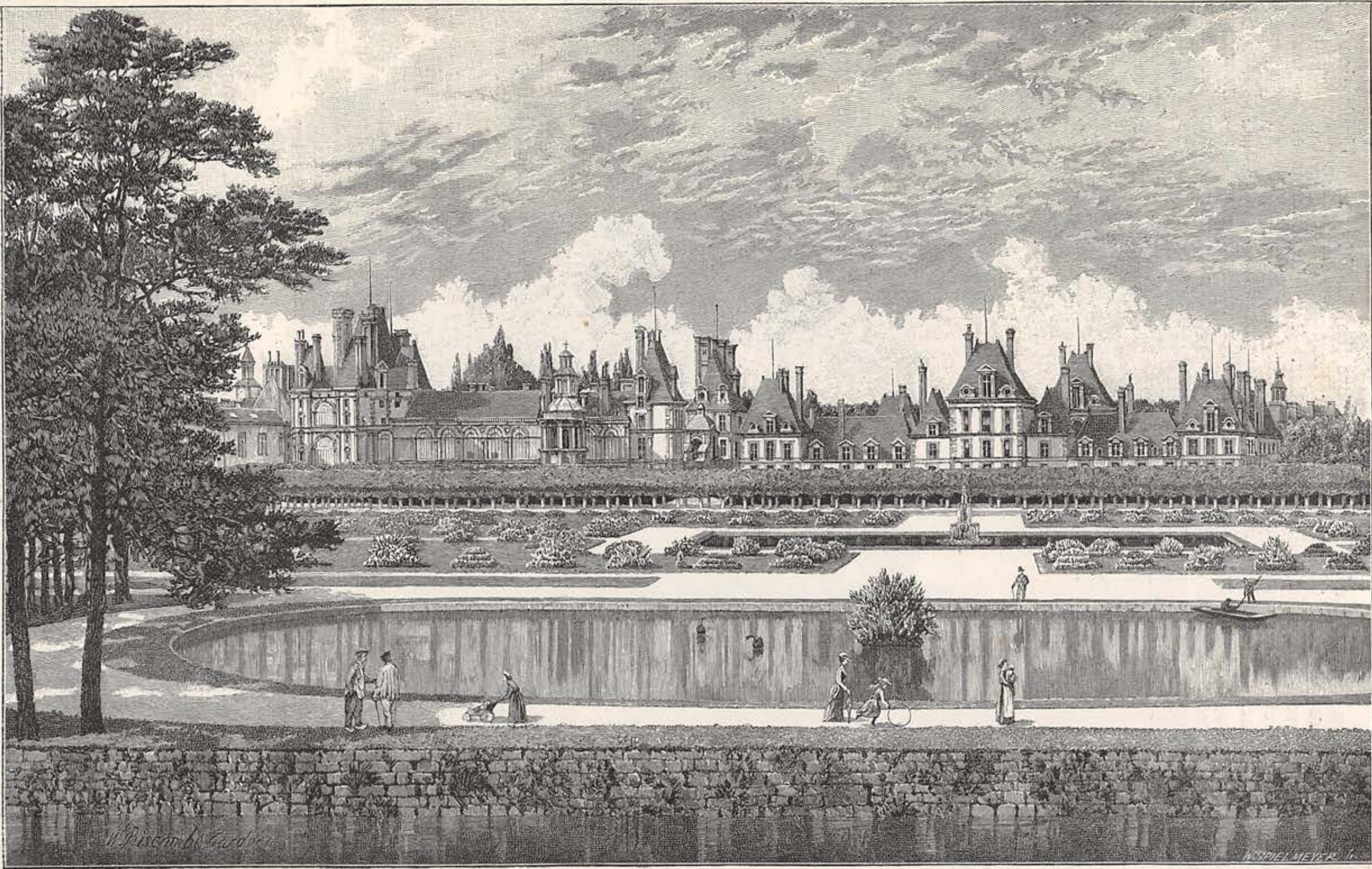
to the picturesque effect of the woodland at the present day, are but recent introductions from the Mediterranean and the Baltic shore; and the whole forest, as we now know it, has been trimmed and dressed by the obtrusive art of the modern planter, out of all similitude to its antique self. But the deciduous trees are for the most part indigenous; and the few stags and wild boars still carefully preserved by the gamekeepers of the Republic represent the descendants of a far wilder fauna which Merwing and Carling may well have hunted a dozen centuries since under the spreading boughs of those ancient oaks that bear to-day the quaint names of Pharamond and of Charlemagne.



LA PORTE DORÉE.

The original Château, of which St. Louis's bed-chamber forms the chief remaining portion, was probably founded under Louis VII. in the twelfth century. The Chapel of Saint Saturnin, the first predecessor of the existing church, has for Englishmen indeed a special interest from the fact that it was consecrated by Thomas à Becket during his period of exile from the anger of Henry at the French Court. The Château was a favourite residence of the saintly Louis IX. whose name still clings to the arcade of the Cour Ovale, though scarcely a trace of his buildings has survived the complete reconstruction of the exterior front under François Premier. The Fontainebleau of those days, in fact, was a feudal castle of the frowning type with which we are all so familiar along the banks of the Loire or among the dales of Normandy. Nothing could be more different than its gloomy turrets, its narrow windows, its airless halls, and its mediæval tortuousness, from the light, the space, the air, the brightness of its Renaissance successor.

At last however François Ier came. By his time, the character of the French monarchy—the character of the French nation—had undergone a complete and lasting change. Louis Onze had done his cruel work both wisely and well. The feudal spirit



THE PALACE OF FONTAINEBLEAU.

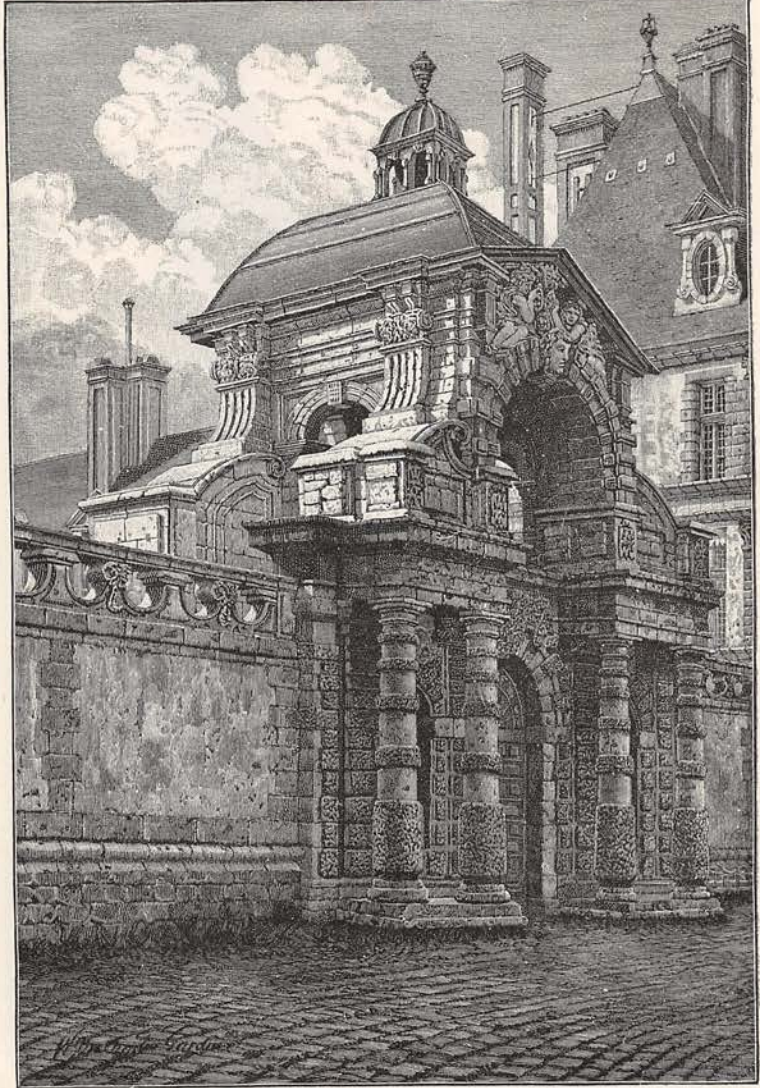
was half broken ; the task of Richelieu was more than half begun. Unification and absolutism were the order of the day all over Europe. Artillery had destroyed the power of the great nobles in their massive castles. The introduction of gunpowder, it has been well said, ruined feudalism. Fortresses which had been impregnable against the attacks of the middle ages, crumbled to pieces before one volley of the royal cannon. Throughout Europe, the crown became everywhere irresistible. As a natural result of this great social revolution, a Renaissance in architecture became inevitable in the west, the kings and nobles of France and England exchanged the gloomy darkness of the mediæval stronghold for the light and air and spaciousness of the Italian mansion. The merchant republics of Italy were already familiar with great princely palaces like the Pitti, and Strozzi, or the magnificent mansions which line the long curve of the Grand Canal. Peace under the strong hand of the royal despot, were he Valois or Tudor, made the imitation of these great houses possible in the north and west. Threatening walls and serried battlements gave way as if by magic to the pomp and grace of the Italianate mansion. Knowle and Longleet, Burleigh and Hatfield, Hardwick and Audley End, are familiar instances in England of the newer style. The high roofed gables, the long lines of wide windows, the jutting oriels that look down on the terraced Italian garden, the vases and fountains, the formal walks and parterres, all mark the arrival of a new epoch. The mediæval castle was in essence a fortress adapted mainly for defence ; the Italian mansion is in essence a residence, adapted mainly for the display of magnificence and wealth.

GALLERY OF HENRI II.

In France, this great revolution goes directly back to the influence of the Medici. François Premier began the Louvre and began Fontainebleau. With Louis XIII., the son of a Medici mother, both were practically complete. The long succession of high Mansard roofs and connecting galleries so well shown in Mr. Gardner's admirable and characteristic drawing of the palace from the garden front, marks the very spirit and ideal of the French Renaissance—its splendour, its grandeur, its vastness of aim, its want of picturesque feeling, its love of the magnificent, its contempt of the simple, the

natural, the merely beautiful. Imposing Fontainebleau extorts one's admiration, it never attracts one's love.

The nucleus of the existing building thus dates back practically to the gay days of François Premier. It was he who rebuilt the chapel of St. Saturnin, and erected that magnificent pile of the Porte Dorée, whose lavish display of glass in its broad-bayed windows looks like a modern protest against the loopholes and embrasures of the middle ages. It was he, too, who began the great Galerie des Fêtes, afterwards completed by Henri II., whose name it now bears, as well as the Galerie d'Ulysse, pulled down at a later date by Louis XV., to make room for the too numerous ladies of his Sybaritic court. It is to François equally that we owe the Cour Ovale, and the splendid Porte Dauphine or Baptistery which serves as its gateway. The initial *F*, so familiar to all of us on the exquisite façade of the oldest portion of the Louvre, reappears in many places on the gallery of the Cour de la Fontaine. The only part of the gardens, recalling the Boboli or the villas of Florence, which can with certainty be ascribed to this earliest date, is that known as the Orangerie and the Parterre du Tibre. But the grotto of what is now the Jardin Anglais was built by François as a Salle de Bain for his favourite, the Duchesse D'Étampes. Nothing now remains of that voluptuous retreat except the satyrs of the doorway and some torsos of rough sandstone worn out of all semblance of human limbs and muscles, and relegated to a place in the existing stables.

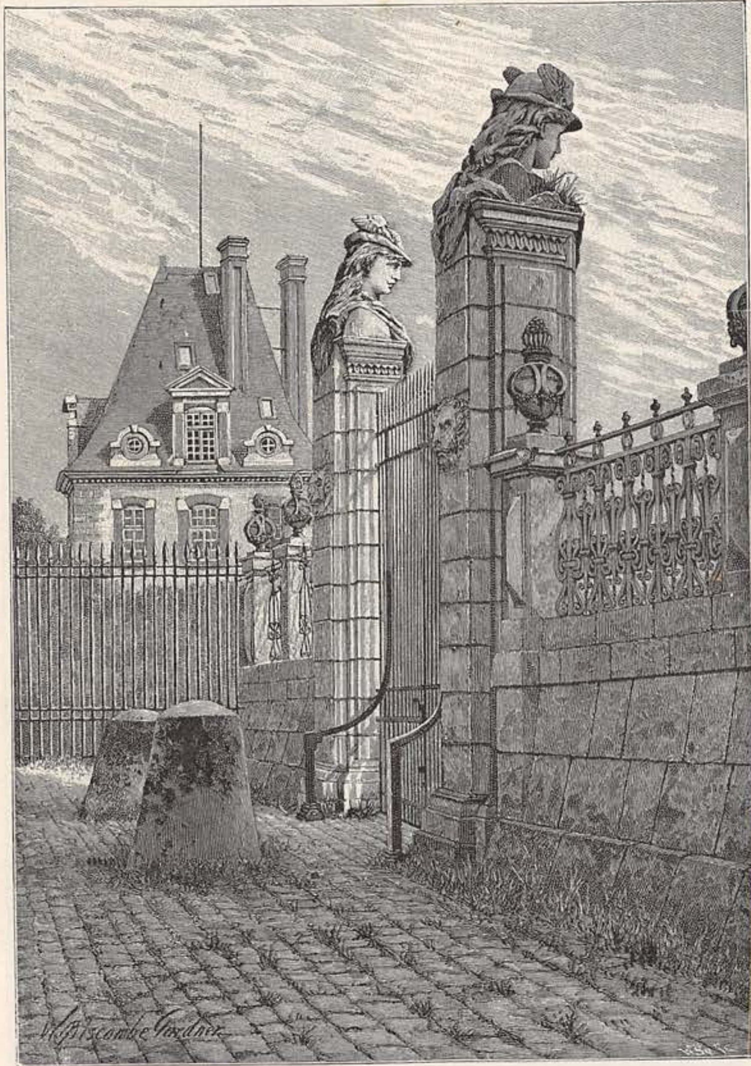


PORTE DAUPHINE OR BAPTISTERY.

As yet, however, the artistic impulse came entirely from Italy. Serlio, the architect, superintended the design; painters and sculptors from beyond the Alps contributed the decorations. French art in those days was still feeble and nascent. Florence sent Leonardo da Vinci and Andrea del Sarto to the new palace at Fontainebleau; the rising school of Mantua sent Primaticcio and Niccolo dell' Abbate, whose artistic existence almost sums itself up in the work they performed here.

Indeed, it is not too much to say that the pupils of Giulio Romano produced the profoundest effects upon the French Renaissance, and influenced every work of art of the entire period from the gallery of François Premier to the Rubens's in the Louvre.

The *F.* and the salamander of the founder of the palace, are to be found abundantly on many portions of his magnificent erection. But the finest hall of all, the Salle des Fêtes, bears now the name of Galerie de Henri II., though built by François, because Henri decorated it in the garish taste of the time to meet the wishes of his mistress, Diane de Poictiers. This hall still remains the glory of Fontainebleau. Ninety feet long by thirty broad, and profusely decorated, it speaks in every part the taste of that gay and fantastic epoch. Ten colossal round arches form the bays of the windows; five give upon the parterre, and five on the Cour Ovale. The ornate ceiling is divided into octagonal panels, richly wrought in architrave, frieze, and cornice, and bearing in relief the intertwined initials of Henri himself and of the frail Diane. Primaticcio and Niccolo supplied the frescoes; nameless Italian artists moulded the stucco fretwork. The parquetry of the floor vies with the roof in magnificence. This gorgeous apartment may well recall the rooms of the gods in the Pitti Palace, and is only surpassed in elaborate over-ornamentation and profuseness of handicraft by the gaudy Galerie d'Apollon in the Louvre.

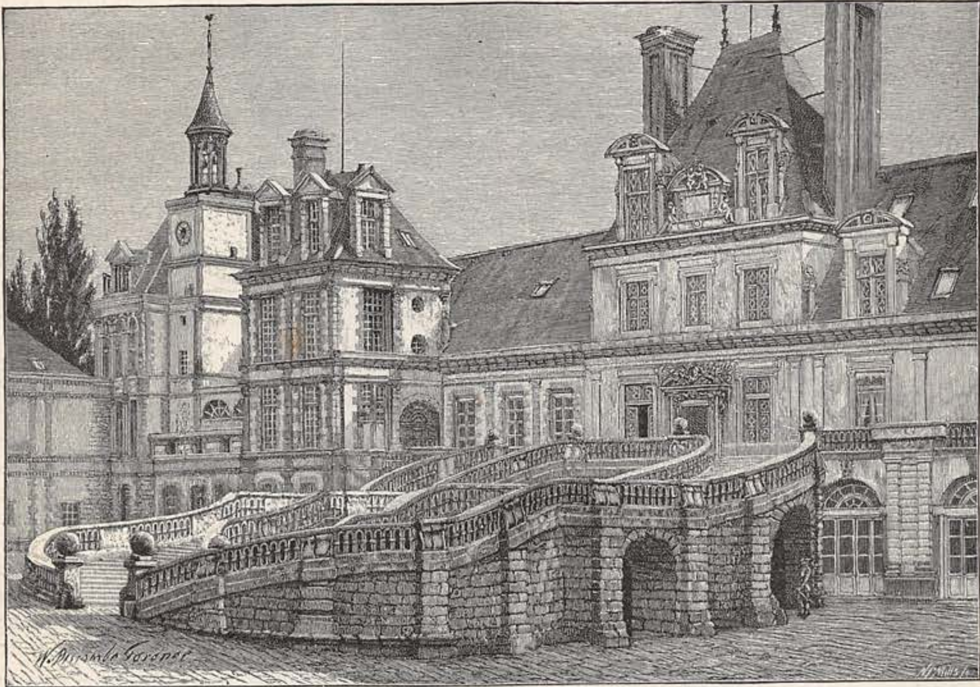


GATEWAY LEADING INTO LA COUR DE HENRI IV.

When Henri II. died, mortally wounded in a tournament in the Palace Courts, many things fell with him—tournaments themselves amongst others, and mediævalism in France, and Diane de Poictiers. Catherine de Medici sent the favourite packing to her Château d'Anet, and bore rule herself in her stead in the half completed palace. The new king, François II., was a true son of Fontainebleau. Here he was born in 1543, and here, a boy of seventeen, he married Mary Stuart, whom he left a girl-widow so shortly after, to exchange the luxurious joys of Fontainebleau for the

cramped closets of Holyrood, and the austerities of John Knox and his brother Calvinists. Under Charles IX., the work still went forward as before, and Primaticcio in his old age painted the frescoes of the Galerie d'Ulysse, afterwards ruthlessly destroyed under Louis XV.

Beyond being born in the palace, Henri III. contributed as little to the history of Fontainebleau as to that of his dominions generally. But Henri IV. left no small mark of his masterful hand on the great growing pile whose overgrown area he well-nigh doubled. The Cour des Offices, the Cour des Princes, the Galerie de Diane, the balustrades in the Fountain Court, the decorations in the Chapel of the Holy Trinity, the park with its grand canal and its ornamental waters, all date from the days of the greatest of the Bourbons. But the French Renaissance was now at its zenith. Married though he was to an Italian princess, Henri entrusted his work for the most part to native workmen. Paul Bril and Ambroise Dubois painted and decorated the greater part of the new halls ; the heads of Mercury, in the courtyard which still bears the name of Henri Quatre, admirably represented in Mr. Gardner's charming drawing, are from the chisel of a later French sculptor, Gilles Guérin ; while



THE HORSESHOE STAIRCASE.

the simple but noble doorway which opens upon the Place d'Armes is the work of a local architect, François Jamin of Avon.

It was at Fontainebleau, too, that Marie de Medici gave birth to Louis XIII., who was baptized with his sisters under the quaint and ornate cupola of the Porte Dauphine, known ever since from that cause by the name of the Baptistery. To this one of its sons the palace owes its latest main additions. He it was who built the handsome horse-shoe staircase in the Cour des Adieux, the masterpiece of Lemercier, whose difficult perspective might well have tried the art of a less skilful pencil than that which here reproduces it. With that addition, the history of Fontainebleau practically ends. Events of importance in the annals of France took place there later ; but they are not events in the annals of Fontainebleau. The great pile as we know it was then really complete ; it remains to us a vast museum of Renaissance art and Renaissance feeling. Subsequent ages have destroyed, or restored, or renovated, or tampered with it, but they have not added to it, and the reason is clear. Louis Quatorze created Versailles ; and the rise of Versailles was the downfall of Fontainebleau.

Some few landmarks of its subsequent vicissitudes however are well known to

most of us. Louis Quatorze gilded it up, of course—what did not Louis gild? Le Notre laid out the gardens—where did not Le Notre spread his devastating gravel? Henrietta Maria of England took refuge here among her own people when Charles had lost his head; Christina of Sweden made use of its hospitality as a capital opportunity to murder Monaldeschi. Few buildings, indeed, have seen so many historic events; for here Louis Quatorze signed the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes which deprived France at one blow of a million of citizens; here Condé died; here James II. consoled himself with the consolations of a heavenly crown for the loss of an earthly one; and here Peter of Muscovy got royally drunk after his wont with all his suite, and indulged in Russian horseplay in the ponds and gardens. Under Louis Quinze, of funest memory, the decadence began; but still, as of old, princes feasted and drank, married and were given in marriage, under the high roofs of the palace. The king himself was united here to Maria Leczinska. But the earthquake was at hand, for Voltaire came to stay, and Jean Jacques Rousseau heard the court applaud his *Devin du Village*. Louis Seize, good honest man, came often to hunt, but the Revolution came too and gutted the Palace. During Napoleon's wars, it served as a barrack for prisoners. When Monarchy revived, Napoleon spent ten millions of francs in restoring and refurnishing it. Later on he used it as a prison for his spiritual father Pius the Seventh; here he divorced Josephine, and here he lived with Marie Louise of Austria. Here too he signed his famous abdication, and reviewed a year later, in the self-same court, the grenadiers of the Hundred Days who bore him back to the Tuileries. There its memories end. What need to speak of lesser things that have happened since, and obscure the recollection of those great days in its history?

OLD WELL, FONTAINEBLEAU.