

## Editors' Table.

### THE OLD COURT-LIFE IN SPAIN.

FOR nearly three centuries past, the Spanish court has been the ruling power in that unfortunate country. To understand the true nature of the government from which the Spanish people have sought to escape by their recent revolutions, we cannot do better than to study some of the lessons which history gives us in regard to the character of this court, and of the individuals who composed it. The particular lessons now referred to are recorded in the "Letters of Madame de Villars," a contemporary and almost a rival of Madame de Sevigné, in the elegant art of letter-writing. She was the wife of the French Ambassador in Spain, during the reign of Charles II. That sovereign, the last Spanish king of the House of Austria, reigned nearly two hundred years ago, at a time when the Spanish monarchy embraced vast possessions in every quarter of the globe. His first wife was a French princess, Marie Louise, of Orleans, a niece of Louis XIV., and granddaughter of the English King Charles I. She is described as an amiable young lady, naturally cheerful and affectionate, and of irreproachable character. Brought up in the pleasant intercourse of French social life, she dreaded the desolate existence which she would have to lead in the Spanish court, under its rigid etiquette, and with a husband who was little better than an imbecile. Her entreaties to her royal uncle to be allowed to escape this destiny were useless. The result is told in these letters of Madame de Villars, lately re-published, and in some other records which are condensed for us in an instructive article in the *Edinburgh Review* :—

"After a marriage by proxy at Fontainebleau, the Comte d'Harcourt was appointed to conduct her to the frontier, where, in the famous Isle of Pheasants, on the Bidassoa, the scene of so many meetings between the monarchs and ministers of the once rival powers of Spain and France, the sad-hearted bride was delivered over to the tender mercies of the Duchess de Terraneuva and the Marquis de Astorgas, the former of whom had been appointed her *camarera mayor* (or Chief Lady of the Bedchamber), and the latter her *mayordomo* (or High Steward). The portrait drawn of the Duchess de Terraneuva, a hard-visaged, wrinkled griffin of etiquette, by Madame d'Aulnoy, has all the air of a picture by Spagnoletto. A feminine familiar of the Inquisition could not wear a more repulsive face. She was a widow of about sixty, but looked seventy, of the family of Pignatelli, descended from Fernando Cortes, from whom she inherited a principality in Peru, possessing, besides, immense estates in Spain and Sicily, and hundreds of retainers. She was a bronze incarnation of Spanish rigidity and gravity. Not a step in her gait, not a movement of head or hand, which was not performed with the regularity and stiffness of a machine. She was lean, colorless, long-faced, and wrinkled; her eyes small, black, and sharp. Her tones of command made people tremble, and she was generally insupportable to her equals, haughty and dignified to her sovereign, but, nevertheless, tolerably gentle to her inferiors. She was penetrating in observation, ready of wit, and inflexible in decision. She would spare no extremities of violence to serve her interest or revenge, and had a cousin of her own assassinated because he contested her right to an estate."

Under this agreeable guardianship, the poor queen, having dismissed with tears most of her French attendants, set out on her journey through Spain to meet her royal husband. Charles II. is described as a poor, weak-minded creature, but well meaning and inoffensive. In countenance he was sufficiently

repulsive. In early life the lower part of his face had assumed that peculiar formation which distinguished the visage of his great ancestor, the Emperor Charles V., in his later years; the lower jaw protruded so far beyond the upper, that he was incapable of chewing his food. He had as much affection for his young queen as he was capable of feeling for any one. In his eagerness to meet her, he had pushed forward to a wretched little village of a few peasants' houses, three leagues beyond Burgos.

"Marie Louise saw him arrive from the balcony of a peasant's hovel in which she had rested. Prepared as she was, she was shocked at the sight. Charles II., however, ascended the mean staircase, and entered the miserable room in which he found his bride. She attempted several times to fall at his feet, but he prevented her, embracing the princess as much as etiquette permitted kings of Spain to embrace, by clasping her arms with his hands; he looked fondly in her face, and ejaculated, 'My queen! my queen!' On their arrival at Madrid, the queen, according to etiquette, was to be kept in the strictest seclusion at the Palace of Buen Retiro, outside the city, until the arrangements for her public entry into the capital were complete. An attempt was made by the *camarera mayor* to keep even the French ambassadors from seeing the queen at this time, but her resistance was overcome by the mediation of the Queen-mother, who, during the early days of the queen's new life, did all she could to mitigate the severity of her fate. But, nevertheless, when, a few days later, the Marquesa de los Balbases, whose husband had been the negotiator of the marriage at the court of France, came to see the bride, and entered into the apartment of the *camarera mayor*, which was next to that of the queen, and the queen heard of her arrival and came to meet her, the Terraneuva, with a severe face, took Marie Louise by the arm and led her back in silence to her apartment."

The remainder of her life, which, endured for ten years, was of a piece with this, as the following passages will show :—

"After her solemn entry into Madrid, the young queen only exchanged one prison for another, and then she began the life which she was destined to lead to the end of her brief existence; a life combining the jealous seclusion of the harem, the lugubrious monotony of the cloister, and the iron tyranny of Spanish etiquette personified in the Terraneuva, relieved only by occasional drives in a carriage with closed windows, according to the fashion of Spain; stupid plays, hunting parties, and visits to Aranjuez and the Escorial at fixed times. For everything in the court of Spain was regulated like a clock; the only disarrangement was when money was wanting to carry out the programme. From time to time the king would take her around to visit the convents; and as this kind of occupation was not very entertaining, she invited Madame de Villars to accompany her. The Ambassador takes care not to say that the queen was anything but amused; but the picture that she draws of the king and queen, each in their chairs, in the convent parlor, surrounded by kneeling nuns reduced to a state of imbecility by early seclusion from the world, with two long-haired court dwarfs, such as we see in the pictures of Velasquez, doing all the talking for the party, and the queen invariably endeavoring to kill time by eating—alas! she had already come to that—does not suggest anything very entertaining."

"One or two more touches, however, are still necessary to show the dreadful nature of the despotism which the queen had to endure at the hands of the *camarera mayor*. On one occasion the Terraneuva saw, to her dissatisfaction, that the front hair of the queen was not stiffened and flattened down with proper Spanish precision and rigidity, so the ugly harridan spat on her shrivelled hand, and applied it to the rebellious part. Marie Louise seized

the griffin's arm, and with quiet dignity said, 'The best essence was not too good for her,' and rubbed her forehead with her handkerchief in disgust for several minutes. Moreover, the gaoleress ruthlessly insisted that the queen should, as precedent required, be in bed regularly every night by eight o'clock; and during the first part of her domination, when the queen was less submissive, and lingered over her solitary supper, the maids of honor entered and undressed her while she was still sitting and eating at the table. One undid her dress, another her hair, and another got under the table to take off her shoes."

It is a satisfaction to know that the queen, after a time, was relieved from this relentless warder. Her new guardian, the Duchess of Albuquerque, was of a milder temper, and the queen was now allowed to sit up till half-past ten, and to ride occasionally on horseback. In spite of these alleviations, the tedium of the court-life seemed dreadful to Madame de Villars. An occasional visit from the queen-mother and the French Ambassador and one or two other privileged ladies, was the sole diversion of the secluded queen. After ten years of this life, Marie Louise died suddenly and "in great torments." There were suspicions of poison, for, as the marriage was childless, the question of the succession had arisen. Many about the court favored the House of Austria, and it was feared that the influence of the queen would be for the House of Bourbon, which, indeed, at last prevailed.

Such was the sort of life led by the best of Spanish sovereigns. What the life of the worst of them was, we may readily conjecture; and we need not wonder at the eagerness with which the more enlightened portion of the Spanish people have seized the first opportunity of sweeping away a system which had reduced their rulers to imbecility, and their country to weakness and poverty.

#### THE PASSION TO BE DOING.

PERHAPS that which is most striking, in a comparison of ages, is the increasing *complexity* of modern life and thought. We can go back to a time, not many centuries ago, when the scheme of existence was comparatively simple; when a few strong feelings, based upon facts and theories which could be instilled into the mind in childhood and youth, regulated the conduct of civilized men. Science was in her infancy: art was confined to two or three nations. Bacon could say "I have taken all knowledge to be my province." But no man of science nowadays presumes to say even that he has thoroughly mastered his own special subject. Even Newton, whose conception of the universe was a thousandfold more complete and luminous than that of Bacon, humbly confessed that he had gathered only a few pebbles from the ocean of truth. And as knowledge grows so life becomes more difficult, motives more various and conflicting, the arguments on either side of great questions more evenly balanced; and in place of the instant action of that simple past time, we need careful thought and consideration to regulate our conduct.

We have never seen this increasing complexity of life, and its result upon the behavior of men more clearly indicated than in a work by Mr. Walter Bagehot, the celebrated English political writer, called "Physics and Politics," recently published by the Appletons. We shall give the conclusion of the matter in his own words, written with a clearness and force truly characteristic:—

"A main and principal excellence in the early times of the human races is the impulse to action. The problems before men are then plain and simple. The man who works hardest, the man who kills the most deer, the man who catches the most fish—even later on, the man who tends the largest herds or the

man who tills the largest field—is the man who succeeds; the nation which is quickest to kill its enemies is the nation which succeeds. All the inducements of early society tend to foster immediate action; all its penalties fall on the man who pauses. And in consequence an inability to stay quiet, an irritable desire to act directly, is one of the most conspicuous failings of mankind.

"The rise of physical science proves this in the plainest way. If it had not been for quiet people, who sat still and studied the sections of the cone, if other quiet people had not sat still and studied the theory of infinitesimals, if other quiet people had not sat still and worked out the doctrine of chances; if 'idle star-gazers' had not watched long and carefully the motions of the heavenly bodies, our modern astronomy would have been impossible, and without our astronomy our ships, our colonies, our seamen, all that makes modern life, modern life could not have existed. Ages of sedentary, quiet, thinking people were required before that noisy existence began, and without those pale preliminary students it never could have been brought into being. And nineteenth-century modern science is in this respect the same.

"But this is only part of the harm that over activity does. It is inherited from times when life was simple, objects were plain, and quick action generally led to desirable ends. But the issues of life are plain no longer. To act rightly in modern society requires a great deal of previous study, a great deal of assimilated information, a great deal of sharpened imagination; and these prerequisites of sound action require much time. Even the art of killing one another, which at first particularly trained men to be quick, now requires them to be slow. A hasty general is the worst of generals nowadays; the best is a sort of Von Moltke, who is passive if any man ever was passive; who is 'silent in seven languages'; who possesses more and better accumulated information as to the best way of killing people than any one who ever lived."

So Mr. Bagehot goes on to instance philanthropy, commerce, and scientific speculations as things injured by "the wild passion for instant action." Of course there is another side to the question, and the "hasty" men might make out some case for themselves; but it remains true that the English and American fault is towards unconsidered action, and the author is to be thanked for so strong and clear a summary of its disadvantages.

#### DIAMOND CUTTING.

MOST persons are aware that much of the value of diamonds is due to the time and labor which must be expended on them to bring the rough stone into its finished state as a gem. To do this, two diamonds must be rubbed together, with the aid of machinery, in such a manner as to bring out the natural facets to the best advantage, without losing too much of the original stone. The work is one which requires science, skill, and unwearied patience. It has been until recently almost monopolized by the Dutch, most of the work being done in Amsterdam, where about two thousand men are employed in it. Twelve years ago, an American firm, Messrs. Crosby, Morse, & Foss, of Boston, undertook this peculiar branch of business. They invented machinery more compact than that which is used in Holland, and so much superior that it has now been copied in Europe. They have already obtained a high reputation and an extensive business, not only in cutting the rough stones, but in remodeling valuable gems which have been improperly cut. Formerly, the value of a diamond was determined chiefly by its weight; but brilliancy is now taken into consideration, and as this depends much upon the manner in which the stone is cut, a diminution in size may make a gem at once more lustrous and more valuable. Precious stones will always be prized for their charm of unfailing beauty; and it is, therefore, a satisfaction to know that in the art of preparing the most costly of them, our countrymen can now compete successfully with the most skillful workmen of Europe.