

## MADAME DE POMPADOUR.

IT was the day in Paris that saw the young King Louis XV. bring home his bride, the Polish Princess Marie. The streets were crowded with the blue blouses and white caps of peasant men and women, the scarlet hoods of city dames, and the heavy, gilded coaches of duchesses and countesses. The air was vibrating with the musical clang of bells that rang out from every steeple, making mellow harmony above the lively din of the town below. The arms of bands of soldiers flashed in the sunlight; the rich brocaded silks of the ladies glittered and twinkled. The strains of full Te Deums swelled out in long billows through the doors of the churches to meet the crash of military march and fanfare. The great city was one mass of brilliant, changeful colour, one echo of joyous sound, one tumultuous, gorgeous holiday.

Through the sea of faces, the storm of noise, wound the bridal procession. The boy bridegroom, with features and form of faultless beauty that might have suited an Apollo, yet without one spark of the godlike fire of soul and heart shining in the deep blue eyes. The bride, old enough to be his elder sister at least, in her robe of stiff silver tissue, not all one sweet blush and flutter as bride should be, but calm as a marble column, from mere stupid stolidity; only showing, now and then, that she heeded the people and the joy by a smile from her wide, good-tempered mouth. The court ladies tossed triumphantly their pretty flowered and feathered heads, even while they held up Her Majesty's train, to see how plain and homely the new Queen looked in all her wedding finery. The ministers of state whispered to each other that there would come little profit or glory to France from this alliance with a titular king's daughter. The youthful nobles made sly jests about the slow and sober way in which the stream of so-called true love between the royal pair was flowing.

Then there was the Archbishop who was to tie the knot, and a dozen ecclesiastical dignitaries besides who were to help him, all in a high state of rosy good humour and urbanity; for the bride elect was a most devout daughter of Holy Church, and chosen by the great Cardinal Fleury himself. A long, many-tinted, gilded train of heralds, pursuivants, and attendants, ended the splendid pageant.

It was, in truth, a brave, goodly show, one calculated to attract a child's eyes and fancy. And at a window in one of the principal streets, at a safe distance above the thronged, moving, living panorama, a little girl of three was enjoying very fully and deliberately the spectacle. There was nothing in the child to draw especial attention towards her. She wore no dress belonging to the inmate of the nursery in a noble's hotel: hers was the costume of a simple bourgeois maiden.

Her face, though very intelligent, had not, at this age, any very remarkable beauty. He would have been a bold prophet indeed, who, glancing up at that window that royal wedding day, should have foretold that this child would, by-and-by, rule, with an absolute sway which would brook no rivalry, the King who was now passing beneath, and all France besides, with one wave of her fan.

This child's name was Jeanne Marie Poisson, but not as Jeanne Poisson is she known in history. The humble citizen name was to be swallowed up in the title of Marquise de Pompadour.

Jeanne's father held a rather considerable office under the French Government. His salary was good, and, for some years, all went well with him and his family. Indeed, it would have continued to do so had it not been for M. Poisson's own personal faults. First, he took to gambling, and then, finding that he could not, on his regular yearly income, both satisfy his passion for high play and keep his own household in such ease and affluence as they had been used to, he found it convenient to dip his hand, now and then, into the public purse, one or two of the strings of which his office placed between his fingers. This went on with impunity for a while. M. Poisson was clever enough to keep his own counsel, and to enjoy silently and comfortably the fruits of his well carried out, sly dishonesty. His conscience sometimes pricked him a little, no doubt, but then those pricks were soothed and plastered over by the respect paid to his position by the world in general.

At length, however, a day of retribution came. One of M. Poisson's superiors chanced to take it into his head to look keenly into the way in which things were going on in grades below him; and all Poisson's misdoings were brought suddenly and unsparingly to light. Very likely there were others among his colleagues who had slipped and fallen quite as badly as he had, but governments always think it well to make, at intervals, public examples. It has a good appearance. M. Poisson got timely warning of what was in the wind, and fled from France; but this only saved his life, not his reputation. He was tried, found guilty, and hung in effigy.

Madame Poisson and her two children, a son and a daughter, were left in no enviable situation. Their money resources were very scanty, and society looked on them with no very kindly eye, burdened, as they were, by the husband's and father's deed of shame. Gradually, however, matters grew brighter with them. Madame Poisson was a handsome, quick-witted woman, and managed to glide back again into the favour of her neighbours. A rich old gentleman, by name M. le Normand Tournehem, took a great fancy to her and her children, especially to the girl Jeanne, and became a fast, unwearying friend to the family.

M. le Normand's first care for his favourite Jeanne showed that he must have been a man of enlightened good sense. In those days, girls, even of noble families, seldom if ever received more than the

scantiest sprinkling of education ; but the old gentleman knew that Madlle. Poisson was in a position which would make her mind and hands the chief things she would have to depend on ; so he resolved that she should be trained in a way to make both useful to her in her journey through the world.

Jeanne's intellectual powers soon showed that they were worthy of cultivation. She displayed, early, a considerable artistic talent, and after a little good instruction, followed up by steady application, she handled the engraver's tools with much skill. She also developed, with teaching, a delicate, musical taste ; she became the mistress of several languages, and she was well read in history. Another point in which Madlle. Poisson distinguished herself, and a point greatly valued in the France of that day, was her dancing, which was like sweetest, softest music re-echoed in silent motion. Her whole form seemed to swim on waves of airy grace ; from her little, daintily carried head down to her taper feet she was one with the spirit of the dance. To watch her, thus animated, brought back to tired eyes dreams of summer leaves waving in the breeze.

This singular charm of Jeanne Poisson's dancing arose, no doubt, in great measure from the beauty of her shape and figure. As a very young girl she was too thin and wasp-like in form ; but as soon as she grew up, her flexible grace of movement and carriage became one of the most striking things about her. Her face, also, bloomed into a rare flower of female loveliness ; the features were delicately chiselled, and were lit by a mobility of expression which was wonderful in its changeful radiance, as it flashed from eye to lip, from cheek to brow. Added to this, Jeanne Poisson had a ready tongue in social talk, that sent sparks of wit and fun flying hither and thither wherever she went. No wonder, then, that she had a crowd of worshippers round her shrine. Madlle. Poisson had far more liberty of speech and action in her bourgeois sphere than was allowed, in those times, in France, to young ladies of noble birth ; and this, with her natural aptitude for making the most of all the advantages she possessed, made her, even at this early age, a star that shed its brightness very freely upon all.

It was necessary, however, for her and her mother to make a choice from among the many lovers who surrounded her ; and they were guided in it by their gratitude and affection for their old friend M. le Normand. M. le Normand d'Etioles, his nephew, was one of Jeanne's warmest, most constant suitors, and he was accepted.

The young man seems, at least at the time of his marriage, to have been most thoroughly in love. As for Jeanne, she certainly did not feel a single spark of real affection for her husband from the very beginning. But then conjugal attachment was as much out of fashion for women, in those days, in France, as white muslin and blue ribbons. What Jeanne was doing in marrying M. le Normand d'Etioles, without caring for him any more than she did for her hair-

dresser, was just what all other girls of her age were doing around her : and so we can scarcely blame her for the proceeding.

M. le Normand d'Etioles was a rich man, and his money enabled his wife to shine yet more brightly in society than she had yet done. Her wit and beauty were now set off by gleaming jewels, and folds of billowy lace, and glistening silk hangings. Her salon became a favourite resort for men of mind and thought, who always found a responsive note in their hostess's words and sympathetic eyes ; and many of the young nobility so far forgot their grandeur as to be never so happy as when they were this bourgeois lady's guests.

Had it not been for certain splendid temptations which came in her way, Jeanne might thus have played a brilliant and innocent part in the story of Parisian society of that period. Perhaps, in this case, we might know her now as an author or an artist ; but a very different path from that was before her.

One night : a night which was to decide fair Jeanne's destiny : she went, dressed in character, to a masquerade ball. Louis XV. was there, as he fancied, incognito. He had seen and admired Madame Le Normand d'Etioles at some public place where they had chanced to be together ; and, masked though she was, he at once recognised her grace of shape and movement. The King, believing himself completely disguised, followed the lady, and soon contrived to get into conversation with her on a sofa a little apart from the rest of the company. The astute Jeanne, who was as quick sighted as she was beautiful, knew, from the very first moment, who was sitting at her side, but gave not the slightest outward sign of such knowledge. As the gilded ball of playful gallantry was being rolled nimbly up and down between the two, there rose first in Jeanne's mind a waking whisper of what she might become.

A "Maitresse en titre" was as much, at that time, a recognised personage at the French court as the Prime Minister of France himself. She was to the full as highly honoured as that dignitary, and if she played her cards well she might hold quite as much power in her hands. She who had last filled the office was just dead when the King and Madame Le Normand d'Etioles met at the masquerade. Jeanne was by nature aspiring and ambitious, and the question flashed through her brain : "Why should not I take her place?"

With that question the first drop of temptation filtered into Jeanne's soul. She did not, as has before been said, love her husband. Her grasping brain was enticed and drawn on by the prospect of vast power which now opened before her ; for already the whole woman felt instinctively that she was fit to reign. That little drop of temptation, then, grew and grew until it swelled into a great wave, which washed her away from all home ties, and landed her, at length, in the royal palace.

Jeanne does not seem to have been carried away, at this time, by any very strong passion for her royal lover : it was hardly likely she

could be when we consider his great mental inferiority to hers. A thirst for power was what chiefly led her on. Still, throughout her whole career, she was very faithful to Louis, and very true in her devotion to his interests and to those of France.

When we cast back our glance up the vista of time, and fix our gaze on the picture of this great woman, and mark the one black shadow which rests upon it, we must not judge her by the light of our own day. We must look at her impartially among the social circumstances which, in the France of that age, surrounded her. Conjugal fidelity was a thing utterly unknown in the land among the higher classes. The lover, "l'amî intime" as he was called in polite French parlance, was an indispensable part of every fine lady's household. It is true that both the fair dames and their cavaliers were frequently seen at mass and at all sorts of religious ceremonies, but they went back again to the salon to flirt and make love quite as briskly as ever. The King's "Maitresse en titre" was paid full as much respect by every one about the Court as was the Queen, and the Queen never dreamt of presuming to dispute her rival's rights; the whole public opinion in grand circles would have been against her if she had. We must recollect all this when we think of Madame de Pompadour, and be thankful that we have fallen on times when purer manners reign, at least, in outward things. We must admire the real nobility of the woman's nature, which could not fail to shine out even in her equivocal position, and strive in our generation to do as much for our country and our fellow men as she did for hers.

Louis XV. according to the fashion of sovereigns of the day, made short work in the appropriation and exaltation of his favourite. M. Le Normand d'Etioles was civilly told that he was no more wanted in France, and Jeanne was made Marquise de Pompadour, the name under which we know her.

When we set aside Madame de Pompadour's connection with the King, there can be no doubt about the lofty and brilliant part she played in the history of France of that period. She roused Louis from his natural apathetic sloth of character, and sent him out, as the head of his army, to win glory for France and himself. She held the reins of government very much in her hands, and managed state affairs with a clear-sightedness and skill that would have done honour to a gray-headed minister. She was a liberal patroness of men of art and letters. She founded hospitals and tended, herself, the sick in their wards. Her fertile, inventive faculties produced all kinds of new fashions in dress and furniture, trade flourished under her auspices, and her brain may be said to have kept going three parts of the manufactories in France. Her artistic talent came well to the front at this period, and she would sometimes draw original designs to be painted on china services which she ordered for her own use: designs which always became very popular and general, such was their elegance and taste.

Many are the great men who stand grouped round Madame de Pompadour, all of them owing something to her genial sympathy or kindly discernment. We will try, for a moment, to call up a vision of her salon on one of the evenings of her grand receptions. Lights are gleaming in their silver sconces; bright eyes are sparkling, jewels are flashing, flowered brocade dresses, of every tint that decks a summer garden, are shimmering. It dazzles our gaze as we look around. But most radiant of all shines the beauty of the lady about whom everybody is clustering; the colours of her robes are harmonious as the hues that tinge the western clouds at eventide. That grace of motion, as she glides hither and thither among her guests, the lightning-like play of expression swiftly coming and going in that fair face, all proclaim to us that this is none other than Madame de Pompadour herself, a fitting queen, in truth, for the scene.

But hark! what is that sound that comes ringing up the staircase; that sound which makes everyone look expectantly at the door—yes, even Madame herself, though she is at this instant paying court to an old duke whose breast is one sheet of glittering orders? It seems almost like shrill laughter; and yet, as it draws nearer, we find that it is only a high-keyed, high-pitched voice. And now the speaker is in the room. At first sight there is nothing so very remarkable in his appearance. He is short and thin, and wears a very plain coat. But watch his face as he talks, and we change our opinion. Were ever eyes so full of intellectual fire? But as for the smile, it is so full of finest irony that it makes us shiver as if we were looking at a bright icicle. He is always in restless movement. The many gilded, satin-covered chairs around are of little use to him, for nearly all the evening he is kneeling at the feet of some lady or other of the company. Voltaire is always a faithful adorer, at least in all outward and visible signs, of woman.

Altogether a very different individuality is the form which next crosses our magic canvas. With what an air of supreme scorn he folds his arms upon his breast; what self-absorbed melancholy there is in his glance; the ladies get no homage here, they have to court him for so much as a word or look; Rousseau is, evidently, entirely wrapped up to-night in his own merits, and his latest pet personal grievance.

It does our eyes good to turn away from Jean Jacques, to one who is standing not far off. What a broad, thoughtful brow he has; what a calm, still depth there is in his glance; and what hearty, sunny sweetness there is in his smiles. We feel, as we draw near him, as if, at his side, the most downcast spirit would be lifted up, the weakest would grow strong; we are sure that there must be quiet home brightness in his house, even in the midst of this restless, tinselled, Parisian life. And so there is, for Helvetius chose his fair, young wife without one thought of anything but love. But we can

linger no longer before our enchanted mirror: we must break the spell and hurry away.

Madame de Pompadour never lost her empire over the mind of Louis XV. after she had once gained it. Years went on, and her noontide of beauty was past, but still she seems to have had as much attraction for the King as ever. This lasting influence, no doubt, had its chief source in her varied power of charming. The mind of Louis was a jaded, weary mind, that had worn threadbare life's pleasures, and then fallen half asleep out of sheer apathetic idleness. But whenever he entered Madame de Pompadour's presence he was sure to find some new, sparkling excitement awaiting him. Now it was some fresh jewel of wit that flashed upon her lips; now she came to meet him in some wondrously devised costume. And yet, all the while that she kept him thus her willing slave, she never failed to act a nobler part towards him in stirring him up to recollect his kingship and his duties to France. It is no exaggeration to say that Madame de Pompadour was the mainspring of every public act and word, indicative of the slightest spirit and courage, done or spoken by Louis XV. at this period of his reign.

Madame de Pompadour probably owed part of her intellectual superiority to the education she had received, which differed so much from the narrow, superficial teaching of ladies of rank of that day in France. It was a strange, piquante novelty to King Louis to find a woman who could talk, with sense and lively freedom, on any subject, and who allowed herself to have opinions of her own. This daughter of the Bourgeoisie, who had been brought up to gain her own livelihood, who did not scruple to speak out her mind even in his royal presence, was, as it were, a wondrous, unexpected star which had appeared in the courtly horizon.

It is certain that Madame de Pompadour woke up more of Louis XV.'s heart than did ever any other woman. But still, on the whole, we feel that the effete, sluggish King was very unworthy of the life's service she gave him. She died at the age of forty-one; she died worn out with anxious care for France and for her King. And still her form, as we, in these latter days, look backward, stands out, in bright relief, amid the moral eclipse of all things high and noble of that period in French history: an eclipse which was already foretelling the fearful storm of the Revolution. The French nobility dined, daily, with gold dishes on their tables, while the poor were starving in the streets. She dined with gold dishes too, it is true, but she fed the poor, and was always their friend and champion. For this, then, if for nothing else, is the name of Jeanne de Pompadour to be remembered.

ALICE KING,