

Literature, &c.

The British Magazines
FOR JANUARY.From Chamber's Edinburgh Journal.
MADAME LOUISE.

BY MRS CROWE.

LOUIS XV, of France had, by his marriage with Maria Leezinska, daughter of Stanislaw, king of Poland, two sons and several daughters. These ladies were the aunts of Louis XVI., of whom we frequently find mention made in the history of that unfortunate monarch.

Madame Louise, the heroine of our story, was one of the youngest, and was also the one that took most after her mother in character. Maria Leezinska was a pious, amiable, tender-hearted woman, and Louise resembled her in these characteristics; whilst the sort of education she received, being brought up in the Abbey of Fontevault, tended very much to increase the seriousness of her natural disposition; so that, after she lost her mother, though she continued to reside with her father at Versailles, or wherever he might be, and so lived in the court, she was not of it, nor ever imbibed a taste for its splendours or amusements, and still less for its dissipations and vices. Notwithstanding all her virtue and piety, however, Louise was a woman still, and a woman with a tender, loving heart; and in a court where there were so many gay and accomplished cavaliers, it must have been next to impossible for that loving heart to remain untouched. But poor Louise had one safeguard against love, which, pure and pious as she was, she would willingly have dispensed with—she was deformed. With a lovely and bewitching face, and eyes of inconceivable beauty, her figure was quite distorted, from the consequences of an unlucky fall in her infancy. Without meaning to derogate from her merit, it is extremely possible that this misfortune may have considerably influenced her character, and led her to seek in Heaven those consolations of the heart that she despaired of enjoying on earth.

Of course each of the princesses had a regular suite of servants, and of ladies and gentlemen in waiting; and amongst these, each had also an ecuyer and a lady of honour, who were in immediate and constant attendance on their persons. The office of the ecuyer was one which placed him in a peculiar situation as regarded his mistress: he placed her chair, opened the door for her, handed her up and down stairs, and accompanied her in her drives and walks, and, in short, wherever she went; so that, were it not for the respect due to royalty, it must have been difficult for a susceptible young man, or a susceptible man of any age, to be in this hourly attendance on a charming princess and retain his heart entire.

The deformity of poor Madame Louise, as well as her piety, however, were perhaps sufficient defences against any dangers of this description, as regarded either party; for without some such confidence, it would seem a great oversight on the part of the king, to have placed in this necessarily intimate relation with her one of the most fascinating men about the court; for such by universal admission, was the young Vicomte de Anatole de Saint Phale, who was appointed ecuyer to the princess upon the marriage, and consequent resignation of baron de Brignolles.

At the time of his appointment, Saint Phale was not much more than twenty nine years of age, the son of a duke, handsome accomplished, eminently agreeable, and with a name already distinguished in arms. He had himself solicited the appointment, and it had been granted to his own wishes, and the influence of his father without demur. Madame Louise, when the thing was mentioned to her made no objection. Indeed she had none. The vicomte was but little known to her; for, avoiding the court festivities as much as her father would permit, and when she did attend them, appearing there rather as a spectator than a partaker—beyond the general character and the personal appearance of the gay cavaliers of the court she knew nothing of them. She had always heard Saint Phale's name coupled with the most flattering epithets; she had also heard that he was brave, generous, honorable and extravagantly beloved by his father and mother; and her own eyes had informed her that he was extremely handsome. To the latter quality she was indifferent; and the others well fitting him for an office about her person, she signed his appointment without hesitating, little dreaming at the same moment that she was also signing the fiat of her own destiny. In due time the Baron de Brignolles took his leave, and the vicomte entered upon his duties, and it soon appeared evident to everybody that he had not sued for the situation without a motive. The princess's lady of honour was the Comtesse de Chateaugrand, Anatole's cousin, and with her he was to all appearance desperately smitten. He wore her colours, as was the fashion of the gallant world at that period, paid her the most public attentions, and seemed determined not only to be violently in love, but that all the world should know it.

There was, however, nothing very surprising in this. The Comtesse de Chateaugrand was a widow with a considerable fortune, and though nearly ten years older than Anatole, she was still extremely handsome, added to which she was very amiable, much esteemed by her mistress, and she and the

and the young vicomte had always been on the most friendly terms. His passion, therefore, as we have said, excited no surprise in anybody; but whether the lady returned it, was altogether another affair, and was indeed a question that created considerable discussion amongst the curious in these matters.

'But she looks so happy,—so calm,' said the young duchesse de Lange.

'And why not, when she has every reason to be so?' answered the Comtesse de Guiche. 'Are not his attentions unremitting? What can she desire more?'

'Ah, true,' replied the other; 'happy if you will, but calm.'

'Well, and why not calm?' repeated Madame de Guiche.

'Ah one is never calm when one loves,' returned the Duchesse, with a little air of affectation.

'That is so like you!' returned the countess laughing. 'You are so sentimental, my dear—a real heroine of romance. I maintain that Madame de Chateaugrand is perfectly content, and that she intends in due time to reward his devotion with her hand. I am sure he deserves it. Except waiting on the princess he never does anything in the world but attend to her caprices; and I do believe she often affects to be whimsical, for the sake of giving him occupation.'

'He certainly does not seem to recollect that there is another woman in the world besides the princess and his cousin,' said the duchesse with some little spite.

Many a conversation of this nature was held almost within hearing of one of the parties concerned—namely, the vicomte—and many a jest, besides, amongst his own companions, rendered it quite impossible that he should be ignorant of the observations made upon him and Madame de Chateaugrand; but he never showed himself disposed to resent this sort of interference, nor did it cause him to make the slightest attempt at concealing his attachment. Whilst the countess herself, though she could not be more ignorant than he of the court gossip, appeared equally indifferent to it. The consequence was, as is usual in similar cases, that the gossip nobody seemed to care for, and which annoyed nobody became less interesting; and gradually the *grande passion* of the Vicomte Anatole for his cousin being admitted as an established fact, whilst it was concluded, from the calmness of the lady's demeanour, that she had accepted his proposals, and that they were to be married some day, people began to think little about them; and except a hint now and then, that in all probability the true interpretation of the mystery was, that they were privately married already, very little was said.

But now there arose another bit of court gossip. 'Observe, my dear,' said the Duchesse de Lange to her friend the comtesse, 'how fast Madame de Chateaugrand is declining in the princess's favour!'

'I am perfectly confounded at it,' returned Madame de Guiche; 'for certainly her attachment to Madame Louise is very great; in short, it is devotion; and the princess herself has always till lately, appeared to set the greatest value on it. How is it that she, who never in her life showed the slightest tendency to caprice, should begin with such an injustice towards her most faithful friend?'

'It is inconceivable!' replied the duchesse. 'But what do you think the Duc d'Artois says about it?'

'Oh, the wicked man!' returned the Comtesse de Guiche laughing, 'but what does he say?'

'He says it is the attachment between her and Saint Phale that offends the princess: that she is so rigid that she can neither be in love herself, nor allow any body else to be so; and that he has seen her turn quite pale with horror at the sight of the vicomte's attentions.'

'Be in love herself—certainly not,' said Madame de Guiche; 'besides, to what purpose, poor thing, with her unfortunate figure? But I think she is much too kindhearted to endeavour to cross the loves of other people. However, certain it is, that she is not so fond of Madame de Chateaugrand as she was.'

And so, to her great grief, thought Madame de Chateaugrand herself. Louise, the gentle, the kind, the considerate, was now often peevish, impatient, and irritable; and what rendered the change infinitely more afflicting to the comtesse was, that all these ill-humours seemed to be reserved solely for her—to every one else the princess was as gentle and forbearing as before. So she was even to her at times still, for there were moments when she appeared to be seized with remorse for her injustice, and on these occasions she would do everything in her power to make amends for it; but as these intervals did not prevent an immediate recurrence of the evil, poor Madame de Chateaugrand began to think very seriously of resigning her situation, and so she told the vicomte.

'If you do, my dear Hortense,' answered he turning as pale as if she had pronounced his sentence of death—'If you do, I am undone!'

'Why,' said the comtesse 'you need not resign because I do.'

'I should not dare to remain,' answered he. 'Besides it would be impossible—I know it would! I have always told you so. But for you I never could have undertaken the situation: as you well know I should have been discovered.'

'But my dear Anatole, you can hardly expect me to remain here to be miserable; and I really am so,' returned Madame de Chateaugrand. 'It is not that I would not

bear with her humours and caprices; I love her well enough to bear a great deal more; but to lose her friendship, her affection, her confidence, breaks my heart.'

'She must be ill,' said the vicomte. 'Some secret malady is preying upon her, I am certain. Do you observe how her cheek flushes at times, and how her hand trembles? To day when I handed her a glass of water, I thought she would have let it fall.'

'It may be so,' returned Madame de Chateaugrand. 'Certain it is that she does not sleep as she used to do—in short, I believe she is often up half the night, walking about her room.'

'I think his Majesty should be informed of it,' said the Vicomte, 'that he might send her his physician.'

'I think so too,' answered the lady; 'but when I named it to her the other day, she was very angry and forbade me to make any remarks on her; and above all, enjoined me not to trouble her father with such nonsense.'

'I am afraid her religious austerities injure her health,' said Anatole.

'A propos,' returned the comtesse, 'she desired me to tell you that she goes to St Denis to-morrow, immediately after breakfast, and that no one is to accompany her but you and me.'

St Denis, as is well known, is the burying place of the Royal family of France, and there, consequently reposed the remains of Maria Leezinska, the princess's mother; and it was to her tomb that Madame Louise first proceeded alone, whilst her two attendants remained without. A long hour they waited for her, and Saint Phale was beginning to get so alarmed at her absence, that he was just about to violate her commands by opening the gate of the Sanctuary, when she came out pale and exhausted, and with evident traces of tears on her cheeks. She then entered the precincts of the convent, requesting to be conducted to the parlour. Even in a convent of holy nuns, who have abjured the world and its temptations, the *prestige* of royalty is not without its effect, and on this occasion the prioress came forth to meet the princess, whilst the sisters rushed to the corridors to get a peep at her, with as mundane a curiosity as the mob runs after the royal carriage in the streets of Paris or London. Louise looked at them benevolently; and with tears in her eyes and a sad smile, told them how much happier they were than those who lived among the intrigues and turmoils of a court. 'Ah, my sisters,' said she 'happy you should be! What repose of spirit you may attain in this holy asylum!'

Alas, could she have looked into some of those hearts, what a different tale they would have told her! But when we are very miserable ourselves, that situation which presents the greatest contrast to our own is apt to appear the one most desirable.

'There is amongst you my sisters—that is if she be still alive—a princess at whose profession, I was present when a child with my mother,' said Madame Louise. 'Is the friend of Maria Leezinska here?'

'I am here,' answered a sweet low voice. 'Clotilde de Mortemart!' said the princess inquiringly, looking in the direction of the voice.

'Formerly,' answered the nun, 'now Sœur Marie du Sacre Cœur.'

'I would speak with you,' said Madame Louise, taking her by the hand, 'lead me to your cell.'

Accordingly, whilst all the others retired, Sister Marie conducted her royal visitor to her little apartment.

'That stool is too inconvenient for your highness,' said she, as the princess seated herself. 'I will ask the prioress for a chair.'

'By no means; it is what I wish,' said Madame Louise. 'Sit down opposite me—I want to talk to you. Nay, nay, sit,' she added, observing the hesitation of the nun. 'Sit, in the name of Heaven! What an I, that you should stand before me? Would to God I was as you are!'

'How, madame!' said the sister, looking surprised. 'Are you not happy?'

'Friend of my mother, pity me!' exclaimed the princess, as she threw herself into the nun's arms with a burst of passionate tears—for they were the first open demonstration of a long-suppressed grief. 'Tell me,' she continued after an interval as she raised her tearful face—'tell me, are you really happy?'

'Yes,' replied Sister Marie, 'very happy now.'

'Would you go back again to the world, would you change, if you could?'

'No, never!' answered the nun.

'I remember your taking the veil,' said Madame Louise, after an interval of silence, 'and you will remember me, probably, as a child at that time?'

'Oh yes; well, quite well, I remember you,' replied the nun. 'Who could forget you that had once seen you?'

'I was pretty, I believe, as a child,' said Louise.

'Beautiful! angelic! as you are now my princess!' exclaimed Sister Marie, surprised for a moment, by her enthusiasm and admiration, out of her usual demeanour.

'As I am now?' said Louise fixing her eyes on the other's face.

'Pardon me!' said the nun, falling at her feet, fearing that the familiarity had offended; 'it was my heart that spoke!'

'Rise, my sister,' said Louise, 'I am not offended, rise, and look at me!' and she threw

aside the cloak which with its ample hood, concealed her deformity.

'Jesu Maria!' exclaimed the sister, clasping her hands.

'You are a woman—you were once young yourself, and, as I have heard, beautiful also. Judge now, if I am happy!'

'But, my princess,' answered the nun, 'why not? Is there no happiness on earth, nay, even in a court, but with beauty? Besides, are you not beautiful? Ay, and a thousand times more so than hundreds that are not!'

'Deformed,' rejoined Louise: 'do not fail to utter the word; I repeat it to myself a hundred times a-day.'

'This amazes me,' said Sister Marie, after a pause, whilst her countenance expressed surprise as eloquently as words could have done. 'Madame Louise, the fame of whose devotions and self-imposed austerities reached even our secluded ears, are they the refuge of a mortified?'

'Vanity,' added the princess, as respect again caused the nun to hesitate. 'Not exactly: I cannot do myself the injustice to admit that altogether, for I was pious before I knew I was deformed. It was my natural disposition to be so, and my mother, foreseeing how much I should need the consolations of religion, cultivated the feeling as long as she lived, and when I was old enough to be aware of my misfortune, I felt what a blessing it was that I had not placed my happiness in what seemed to make the happiness of the world that surrounded me. But it was not to speak of myself that I came here,' continued Madame Louise, 'but to ask a favour of you. Young as I was when you took the veil, the scene made a great impression upon me; and I well remember my mother's tears as we drove back to Paris after she had bade you farewell. I remember also, when I was older, hearing a motive alleged for your resolution to retire from the world, which, if it would not give you too much pain, I should be glad to learn from your own lips.'

The pale cheek of the nun flushed with faint red as she said, 'What would my princess wish to hear?'

'Is it true,' said Madame Louise, 'that you were an unrequited love that brought you to this place?'

'It was,' answered the sister, placing her hands before her eyes.

'Excuse me,' said Madame Louise; 'you will think me cruel to awaken these recollections; but it must have been a bitter sorrow that could have induced you, so young, so beautiful, so highly born, to forsake the world and become a Carmelite?'

'I was,' returned the nun, 'so bitter, that I felt it was turning my blood into gall, and was not so much to flee from the misery I suffered, as from the corruption of my mind and character, that I fled from the sight of which I could not see without evil thoughts.'

'Ah, there it is! I understand that well!' said the princess, 'You were jealous?'

'I was,' answered the nun, 'and what made it so bitter was, that the person whom I was jealous was the woman I loved best in this world.'

'You loved Henri de Beaulieu, and he loved your cousin,' said Madame Louise. 'The nun covered her face with her hands and was silent. 'How cruel you must think me, read your heart by recalling these recollections!' continued the princess.'

'It is so long since I heard that name, said Maria, 'I did not think I was still so weak.'

'But tell me,' said Louise, seizing her hand, 'did your anguish endure long after you entered these gates—Did repose come quickly?'

'Slowly, slowly, but surely,' returned the nun, with a sigh. 'Till I had taken the irrevocable vow, I had a severe struggle; but I never wavered in the conviction that I had done wisely, for it was only by this living death that I could have ever conquered my Dreadful temptations had sometimes assailed me when I saw them together. Here I was nothing—heard nothing; and my better nature revived and conquered at last.'

'I see,' said the princess rising; 'compassion, I feel all.' And then embracing her, she added, 'Pardon me the pain I have given you; it has not been without a motive. We shall meet again ere long.'

On the following day Madame Louise requested a private interview with the king, for the purpose of obtaining his permission to join the Carmelites of St Denis. Louise was first extremely unwilling to hear of the proposal. Louise was his favorite daughter; and not only did not like to part with her, but he feared that her delicate health would sink under the austerities of so rigid an order. But her determination was taken; and at length, by her perseverance, and the repeated assurance, that she was not, nor ever could be happy in the world, she extracted his willing consent. She even avowed to her father, that, beside her own private griefs, she was obliged to witness his irregularities, afflictions, and her severe; and as she believed that to immerse herself in a convent, where she could devote her life to prayer, was a sacrifice she meant to expiate her father's errors, as well as attain peace for herself. Fearing the position she might meet with from the rest of her family, however she treated the king in silence, whilst she herself communicated her resolution to nobody except the Archbishop of Paris, and he having obtained his Majesty's consent in form, Madame Louise, at length