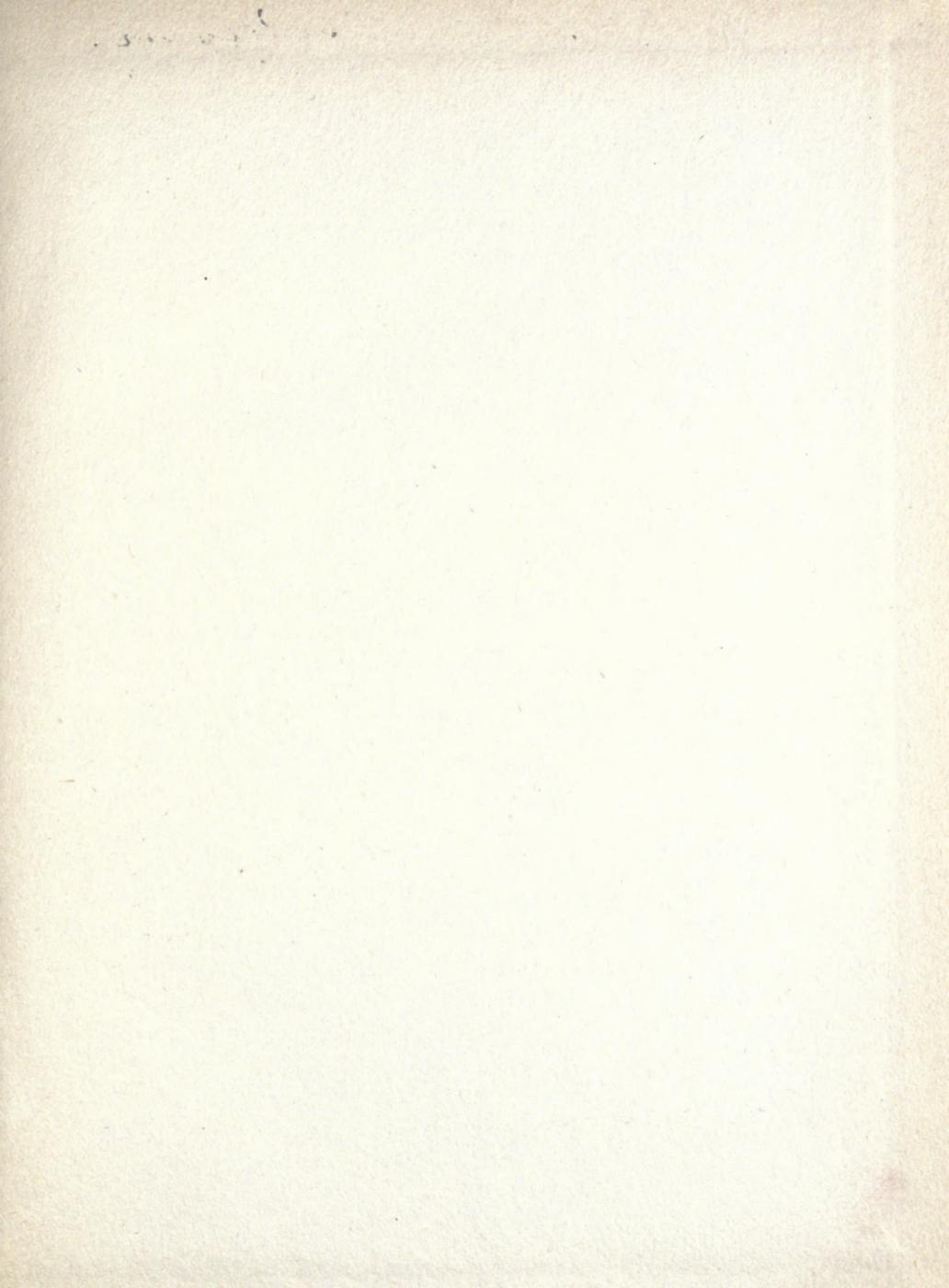


Mrs. C. L. Anderson.



THE REGENT'S DAUGHTER



PHILIP V.

Dumas, Vol. Twenty-three

THE WORKS OF
ALEXANDRE DUMAS

IN THIRTY VOLUMES



THE
REGENT'S DAUGHTER



ILLUSTRATED WITH DRAWINGS ON WOOD BY
EMINENT FRENCH AND AMERICAN ARTISTS



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THE REGENT'S DAUGHTER

CHAPTER I

AN ABBESS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

ON THE 8th of February, 1719, a carriage, bearing the fleur-de-lis of France, with the motto of Orléans, preceded by two outriders and a page, entered the porch of the Abbey of Chelles, precisely as the clock struck ten, and, the door having been quickly opened, its two occupants stepped out.

The first was a man of from forty-five to forty-six years of age, short, and rather stout, with a high color, easy in his movements, and displaying in every gesture a certain air of high breeding and command.

The second, who followed slowly, was short, and remarkably thin. His face, though not precisely ugly, was very disagreeable, although bearing the evidences of a keen intellect. He seemed to feel the cold, and followed his companion, wrapped up in an ample cloak.

The first of the two made his way up the staircase with the air of a man well acquainted with the locality. Passing through a large antechamber containing several nuns, who bowed to the ground as he passed, he ran rather than walked to a reception-room, which, it must be confessed,

bore but little trace of that austerity which is ordinarily ascribed to the interior of a cloister.

The other, who followed leisurely, was saluted almost as humbly by the nuns.

"And now," said the first, "wait here and warm yourself while I go to her, and in ten minutes I will make an end of all these abuses you mention: if she deny, and I want proof, I will call you."

"Ten minutes, monseigneur," replied the man in the cloak; "in two hours your highness will not have even broached the subject of your visit. Oh! the Abbessé de Chelles is a clever woman!"

So saying, he stretched himself out in an easy-chair, which he had drawn near the fire, and rested his thin legs on the fender.

"Yes, yes," replied he who had been addressed as "your highness"; "I know, and if I could forget it, you take care to remind me of it often enough. Why did you bring me here to-day through all this wind and snow?"

"Because you would not come yesterday, monseigneur."

"Yesterday, it was impossible; I had an appointment with Lord Stair at five o'clock."

"In a house in the Rue des Bons Enfants. My lord does not live any longer, then, at the English embassy?"

"Abbé, I had forbidden you to follow me."

"Monseigneur, it is my duty to disobey you."

"Well, then, disobey; but let me tell stories at my pleasure, without your having the impertinence to show me that you know it, just for the sake of proving the efficiency of your police."

"Monseigneur may rest easy in future—I will believe anything!"

"I will not promise as much in return, abbé, for here I think you have made a mistake."

"Monseigneur, I know what I said, and I repeat it."

"But look! no noise, no light, perfect quiet, your account is incorrect: it is evident that we are late."

"Yesterday, monseigneur, where you stand there was an orchestra of fifty musicians; there, where that young sister kneels so devoutly, was a buffet: what was upon it I cannot tell, but I know it was there, and in the gallery on the left, where a modest supper of lentils and cream cheese is now preparing for the holy sisters, were two hundred people, drinking, dancing, and making—"

"Well, making what?"

"Making love, monseigneur."

"Diable! are you sure of this?"

"Rather more sure than if I had seen it, and that is why you do well in coming to-day, and would have done better in coming yesterday. This sort of life does not become an abbess, monseigneur."

"No, it is only fit for an abbé. Ha!"

"I am a politician, monseigneur."

"Well, my daughter is a political abbess, that is all."

"Oh, let it be so, if it suit you, monseigneur; I am not so particular in point of morals, you know. To-morrow there will be another song or two out, but what does that matter?"

"Well, well, wait for me, and I will go and scold."

"Take my word for it, monseigneur, if you wish to scold properly you had better do it here, before me; if you fail in memory or arguments, sign to me, and I will come to the rescue."

"Yes, yes, you are right," said the person who had

undertaken to redress wrongs, and in whom we hope the reader has recognized Philippe d'Orléans. "Yes, this scandal must be quieted a little, at any rate: the abbess must not receive more than twice a week. There must be none of these dances and assemblies, and the cloisters must be re-established. Mademoiselle d'Orléans passed from gayety to a religious life; she left the Palais Royal for Chelles in spite of all I could do to prevent her; now, for five days in the week she must be the abbess, and that will leave her two to play the great lady."

"Ah, monseigneur, you are beginning to see the thing in its true light."

"Is not this what you wish?"

"It is what is necessary. It seems to me that an abbess who has thirty valets, fifteen footmen, ten cooks, eight grooms, and a mute—who fences, plays the horn and the violoncello—who is a surgeon and a hair-dresser—who shoots and makes fireworks—cannot be very dull."

"Has not my daughter been told of my arrival?" said the duke to an old nun who crossed the room with a bunch of keys in her hand; "I wish to know whether I shall go to her, or whether she is coming to me."

"Madame is coming, monseigneur," replied the sister, respectfully.

"It is well," murmured the regent, somewhat impatiently.

"Monseigneur, remember the parable of Jesus driving out the money-changers from the temple. You know it, or ought to know it, for I taught it you when I was your preceptor. Now, drive out these musicians, these Pharisees, these comedians and anatomists; three only of each profession will make a nice escort for our return."

"Do not fear, I am in a preaching vein."

"Then," replied Dubois, rising, "that is most fortunate, for here she is."

At this moment a door leading to the interior of the convent was opened, and the person so impatiently expected appeared.

Let us explain who was this worthy person who had succeeded, by repeated follies, in rousing the anger of Philippe d'Orléans, the most indulgent man and father in France.

Mademoiselle de Chartres, Louise-Adélaïde d'Orléans, was the second and prettiest of the regent's daughters. She had a beautiful complexion, fine eyes, a good figure, and well-shaped hands. Her teeth were splendid, and her grandmother, the princess palatine, compared them to a string of pearls in a coral casket. She danced well, sang better, and played at sight. She had learned of Cauchereau, one of the first artists at the opera, with whom she had made much more progress than is common with ladies, and especially with princesses. It is true that she was most assiduous; the secret of that assiduity will be shortly revealed.

All her tastes were masculine. She appeared to have changed sex with her brother Louis. She loved dogs and horses; amused herself with pistols and foils, but cared little for any feminine occupation.

Her chief predilection, however, was for music; she seldom missed a night at the opera when her master Cauchereau performed; and once, when he surpassed himself in an air, she exclaimed, "Bravo, bravo, my dear Cauchereau!" in a voice audible to the whole house.

The Duchesse d'Orléans judged that the exclamation was

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