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THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK
OF PRESENT CONDITIONS AND
RECENT PROGRESS

COURTS AND CABINETS



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AND STATECRAFT

BEFORE THE WAR
STUDIES IN DIPLOMACY

Vol. I. The Grouping of the Powers

Vol. II. The Coming of the Storm

RECENT REVELATIONS OF
EUROPEAN DIPLOMACY

4th Edition, Revised and Enlarged

COURTS AND CABINETS

BY

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PREFACE

A WORK by the present writer entitled *Studies in Diplomacy and Statecraft*, published in 1942, contained an essay on Political Autobiography which surveyed the apologies of some makers of history during the last four centuries. The present volume deals with writers whose testimony is of value less for what they did than what they saw and heard. That their records have to be microscopically examined in the light of their opportunities of observation, their principles and prejudices, the interval between the events described and the date of composition, and other considerations has been a commonplace since the appearance of Ranke's first book in 1824. Such contributions to knowledge are no longer taken at their face value. It has been the task of generations of editors and critics to assess the significance of each work as a whole and of the various parts, often written at different times, which compose it. These learned labours have established that historical memoirs of this class, when cautiously read, are indispensable to the study not only of the foreground of men and events but of the background of habit and atmosphere.

The thirteen authors selected for treatment in the present volume are of varying merit and celebrity, but none of them can be ignored. That eight are French, four are English, and only one is German illustrates the familiar fact that in this field of historical composition France occupies the first place, England the second, and Germany the third. No country in modern Europe can compare with France in the glitter of courts and the variety of political thrills; and nowhere has there been such a demand for historical memoirs, an appetite so gross that it has often been fed by the marketing of spurious material. The English members of the present team cannot compare with the countrymen of Dumas in colour and romance, but their historical content is in no way inferior. Wilhelmina, the sister of Frederick the Great, represents a country which has never been greatly attracted either to historical memoirs or historical novels; and her narrative, readable though it be, is less trustworthy than any of the other works included in the present survey.

The thirteen studies, seven of which have appeared in the *Contemporary Review*, possess many common features. As he turns the pages the reader continually murmurs, '*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*' 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players.' Revolutions, we are told, change everything except the human heart. Whatever the country or the century, the picture of human nature in the dramas

here briefly described is strikingly similar. There are the same glaring contrasts of good and evil types, the same hectic scramble for power and place, the same jealousies and backbiting, the same repulsive greed. The sub-title of this book might well be *Studies in Human Nature*. The great ones of the earth live in glass houses where we watch them in dress and undress, at work and at play. Viewed as a whole it is not a pretty picture, and the cynic may smile grimly as the blemishes emerge. But we should beware of identifying Whitehall or Windsor with England, Versailles or the Tuileries with France, Potsdam with Germany. While kings, queens and princesses, emperors and ministers, mighty soldiers and scheming *arrivistes*, were at their card-tables or busy with love and war, ordinary men and women were performing their unrecorded tasks and creating the wealth which their superiors felt themselves entitled to waste.

These studies are designed for readers without time or inclination for the originals or who lack access to large libraries, and for this reason copious quotations in French or English, abridged or unabridged, are given. Yet their purpose is rather to stimulate than to satisfy healthy appetites, and some, it may be hoped, will follow up the clues. Brief summaries and characterisations of works in several volumes—de Boislisle's incomparable edition of Saint-Simon is in forty-one—can serve merely as signposts to territory of inexhaustible human and historical interest. For the professional student there is the added attraction of attempting to discover how far these celebrated recorders and portrait-painters are to be trusted—a task which involves the patient exploration both of documentary collections and of the world of monographs in which the results of the critical scholarship of the last hundred years are mainly enshrined. The writer is indebted to the Directors of the *Contemporary Review* for permission to reprint.

G. P. G.

January 1944.

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CHAPTER I

MME DE MOTTEVILLE AND ANNE OF AUSTRIA

THE *Memoirs* of Mme de Motteville, published in 1723, put Anne of Austria on the map. The sister of Philip IV of Spain, the wife of Louis XIII, and the mother of Louis XIV, was hardly one of the dominating figures in French history, nor was her career lit up by the garish colours of tragedy or romance. She had more character than personality, and few queens have felt less desire to rule; yet her share in the making of the Absolute Monarchy is not to be despised. When her unloving husband died in 1643 she dedicated herself to preparing her four-year-old son for the throne, while striving courageously, if not always wisely, to maintain the royal prerogative intact. The best method, it seemed to her, was to retain the services of Mazarin, whom Richelieu had trained as his successor and whom Louis XIII had appointed when the mighty Cardinal passed away. That the Spanish princess was not a mere cipher, that she took her political duties seriously, that she made up in tenacity and clearness of purpose for her indolence and lack of brains, that she was every inch a queen, we learn from all the memoirs of the time, but from none so authoritatively and in such convincing detail as from those of her lady-in-waiting. Though Mme de Motteville was no politician her unrivalled opportunities of observation place her in the front rank of witnesses. A less finished artist than the incomparable de Retz, she had less reason to lie than the Queen's most damaging critic. Her four stout volumes record with an attractive simplicity what she saw and heard in an age of storm and stress. She knew too little of Mazarin's secrets to do full justice to the crafty Italian, but the portrait of her beloved mistress is a masterpiece of interpretation.

Françoise Bertaut, born in 1621, was the daughter of a middle-class Gentleman of the King's Chamber. Her mother, who was connected with a noble Spanish family and spent part of her youth in Spain, was favoured by Anne of Austria on her arrival in France, and, being bilingual, was employed to conduct the private correspondence with Madrid. Married at fourteen to a shy French lad of the same age, Anne felt very homesick, for of the Spanish ladies who had accompanied her only the one who had brought her up was allowed to remain. Neglected by her husband, whose passion was the chase, she took pleasure merely in what reminded her of Spain, and the sympathetic secretary became the trusted friend. When Richelieu, in pursuance of his policy of severing her contacts with her native land, ordered Mme Bertaut and her child Françoise to leave the Court, the Queen gave the latter, now ten years old, an

allowance of 600 livres. After receiving a good education she was married at eighteen to Langlois de Motteville, First President of the *Chambre des Comptes* in Normandy, a rich, childless octogenarian. Unsuitable as was the union, which lasted only two years, it was not unhappy. 'J'y trouvai de la douceur avec une abondance de toutes choses. Si j'avois voulu profiter de l'amitié qu'il avoit pour moi, je me serois trouvée riche après sa mort.' In the year of her marriage she visited the Queen, who received her kindly and increased her allowance to 2000 livres. On the death of her husband and parents, Mme de Motteville returned to Paris with her sister, and the longed-for death of the Cardinal when she was twenty-one reopened the doors of the Court. She never remarried, and there is as little trace of passionate emotions in her writings as in her life. This serene, affectionate, cheerful, intelligent, good-natured, and unambitious woman proved a restful and understanding companion to the sovereign whom she served with utter devotion to the end.

The detailed narrative begins with her return to Court in 1643, but some preliminary chapters sketch the background of events. A brief preface asserts that kings are praised to their face, blamed behind their back, and never told the truth. Hence the author's resolve to write 'in my idle hours for my own amusement what I know of the life, character, and tastes of the Queen, and to repay the honour she has done me in admitting me to intimacy. I cannot praise her in everything, but I can do her justice as future historians who have not known her virtue and kindness cannot do.' She recorded events and impressions while the other ladies of the Court were out walking or playing cards.

Mme de Motteville painted an elaborate portrait of her mistress in 1658 which fills nine pages and is printed at the beginning of the book. Even a brief summary brings Anne of Austria to life, for it embodies the intimate experience of fifteen years of sunshine and storm. 'Nature has given her good inclinations, her sentiments are all noble, her soul is full of sweetness and firmness. Though it is not my wish to exaggerate, I can say that she possesses qualities which rank her with the greatest queens of old. She is tall and well built. Her expression, gentle and majestic, always inspires love and respect. She has been one of the great beauties of the century and she still puts young aspirants in the shade. Her large eyes are perfectly beautiful, a blend of sweetness and gravity. Her little mouth has been the innocent accomplice of her eyes. Her smile can win a thousand hearts, and even her enemies cannot resist her charm.' Her white hands were the talk of Europe. Spectators were always delighted at the sight of her dressing or at table. Though she dressed well she was not the slave of fashion, and many Parisiennes spent more on their clothes.

Her virtues, continues Mme de Motteville, particularly her generosity, ripened with her years. She was a frequent communicant, and certain persons curried favour by their show of piety. Her character was solid and she gave herself no airs. She was modest without being offended by innocent gaiety. She did not listen to evil talk, and when once she believed in people it was difficult to destroy her confidence. She was gentle, affable, and familiar with all who had the honour to serve her. She talked well and rejoiced in delicate and witty converse. She was indolent and had read little, but she made up by personal contacts. Charlemagne meant nothing to her, but she knew the history of her own time. She often visited the theatre with her son. She spent hours daily at the card-table, but those who had the honour to play with her said she displayed neither excitement nor desire for gain. She was indifferent to grandeur and admiration, loved few people but those dearly. As Regent she had been obliged to bestow her friendship on someone (Mazarin) whose ability could sustain her, and in whom she could find counsel and fidelity, service and the sweetness of confidence. Her heart was incapable of weakness or change when once she was persuaded that she was doing right. The love which her husband did not require was given to her children, especially the eldest, whom she adored. Her good treatment of her attendants was rewarded by their fidelity and gratitude. Kindness took the place of tenderness, but she was sympathetic and discreet with those who confided in her. She hated her enemies and by nature she would have liked revenge, but reason and conscience restrained her. She was seldom angry, and never deeply stirred except by the interests of the Crown. In danger she was brave and calm. When informed that her *femme de chambre* was writing her memoirs she modestly desired that she would not be praised beyond her deserts.

A very different portrait is painted in one of the most celebrated passages of the *Memoirs* of de Retz: 'La Reine avoit, plus que personne que j'aie jamais vu, de cette sorte d'esprit qui lui étoit nécessaire pour ne pas paraître sotté à ceux qui ne la connoissoient pas. Elle avoit plus d'aigreur que de hauteur, plus de hauteur que de grandeur, plus de manières que de fond, plus d'inapplication à l'argent que de libéralité, plus de libéralité que d'intérêt, plus d'intérêt que de désintéressement, plus d'attachement que de passion, plus de dureté que de fierté, plus de mémoire des injures que des bienfaits, plus d'intention de piété que de piété, plus d'opiniâtreté que de fermeté, et plus d'incapacité que de tout ce que dessus.' In weighing this elaborate indictment we must remember that it is the work of an embittered exile whose dreams of power had been shattered by his notorious failings and by her devotion and loyalty to the Minister of her choice. The *Memoirs*

of La Rochefoucauld, another distinguished *frondeur*, are scarcely less critical. But neither the Cardinal nor the Duke knew her or understood her half so well as her lady-in-waiting.

The introductory chapters describe the reign of Louis XIII as seen through the eyes of the Queen, who often talked of her past trials. Neglected by her husband, bullied by Richelieu—she was haunted by the fear that he would send her back to Spain—excluded from politics, deprived of her intimate friends, it was natural that the heart of the childless woman should turn with longing to the land of her birth. The stage is dominated by the towering figure of Richelieu, who banished or executed all his enemies from Marie de Médici and Cinq-Mars downwards, and of whom Mme de Motteville always speaks with a sort of shuddering awe. Louis XIII appears as a colourless and lonely creature, unable to live happily either with or without the terrible Cardinal. The belated birth of her two sons gave the Queen something to live for, but the King's tenderness during the period of pregnancy did not last, and he had to be urged to embrace her when her child was born. The expectation that she would now take her place on the Council was unfulfilled, and she never strove for power. Starved for love, she had attracted the passionate Buckingham, who had come to conduct Henrietta Maria to England, but her heart was never touched. That she talked freely to Mme de Motteville about such intimate experiences proves that the *femme de chambre* was also the trusted friend.

Richelieu passed away in December 1642. When the priest urged him to pardon his enemies he replied, in a famous phrase, that he had had none except those of the state. That is what every dictator affects to believe, yet France was longing for a gentler hand. Richelieu, in the celebrated phrase of de Retz, 'avait foudroyé plutôt que gouverné les hommes.' Louis XIII, himself a dying man, had no time to show what he could do. In placing Mazarin at the helm he followed Richelieu's advice; but the release of prisoners from the Bastille and the recall of exiles hinted that the Cardinal's cruelties had not been to his taste. Serenity returned to the faces of the courtiers, and the throng in the Queen's antechamber indicated the relief that her power had increased; but she received no greater consideration from the King. He expressed regret that he had kept his mother in exile and had not made peace with Spain, but there was no contrition for the treatment of his wife. When told that he was dying he remarked that he had never felt so much joy in his life as at the news that he was about to leave it. The Queen surprised Mme de Motteville by confessing that she felt real grief at the loss of her husband, as if her heart had been torn out. The intentions of Louis le Juste had been excellent, and it was generally considered

the fault of the Cardinal that his good qualities had never found scope.

The full narrative begins when Anne of Austria became Regent in May 1643 and within fairly broad limits could do what she liked. Mme de Motteville was never dazzled by the splendours of Court life, and she confesses that some of its incidents were as good as a comedy. Having neither ambitions nor fears she was happy enough, but she testifies that a Court is not a happy place. 'We have now reached the Queen's regency, and shall see, as in a picture, the revolutions of fortune's wheel; the climate of that country which is called the Court, the measure of its corruption, the good luck of those who are fated to live there. For no one is the air mild or serene. Those who seem entirely happy and are adored like gods are most menaced by the storm. The thunder never ceases. It is a windy region, dark and subject to continual tempests. Its inmates are chronic sufferers from the contagious malady ambition which deprives them of repose, ravages their hearts, and affects their reason. This malady also generates a distaste for the best things. They are ignorant of the price of equity, justice, and kindness. The sweetness of life, the innocent pleasures, everything which the sages of antiquity declared to be good, seem to them ridiculous. They are incapable of knowing virtue and obeying its maxims unless chance removes them from this sphere. Then, if they can cure themselves of this malady, they become wise and see the light. No one should be such a good Christian or philosopher as a courtier cured of his delusions.' The *Memoirs* may be described as a commentary on this pungent text, though the sky is rarely so dark as it suggests.

The Queen received the plaudits of the people as she drove back to Paris from Saint-Germain where Louis XIII had died. 'La Reine,' writes de Retz, 'étoit adorée beaucoup plus par ses disgrâces que par son mérite. L'on ne l'avoit vue que persécutée, et la souffrances, aux personnes de ce rang, tient lieu d'une grande vertu. L'on se vouloit imaginer que elle avoit eu de la patience, qui est très-souvent figurée par indolence. On donnoit tout, on ne refusoit rien.' Never did a Regency open under such happy auspices, testifies Mme de Motteville, and never did a queen of France possess so much authority and glory. Her first task was to recall her banished friends—Mme de Senecé, her *dame d'honneur*, Mlle de Hautefort, who had so nearly won the tepid heart of Louis XIII, Mme de Chevreuse, the inveterate intriguer, once the superintendent of her household. She needed no encouragement to become the effective ruler by annulling the will of the late King which limited her power by the nomination of a council. No monarch had the right to bind his successor, and the Parlement of Paris, that august corporation of lawyers which longed to recover

the authority it had lost under the Cardinal, was delighted to co-operate. Orleans was appointed Lieutenant-General, and Condé his deputy, while Mazarin continued to carry on the business of the State.

Anne of Austria, we are repeatedly informed, was indolent by nature, and she soon found the burden of rule almost intolerable. There was such a throng of petitioners with complaints of Richelieu and demands for redress that she sometimes kept in her room. 'Chacun lui demandait des grâces, et chacun se faisoit un mérite auprès d'elle des choses passées.' A buffer was needed, and Mazarin was there. Mme de Motteville never liked, never greatly disliked, never really knew, and never fully understood that supple and complicated personage. She realised that her mistress had no choice, for he was a born diplomatist and held all the threads of foreign policy in his hands. 'Je vous remets mon ouvrage entre les mains,' wrote the dying Richelieu, 'pour le conduire à sa perfection.' The Cardinal chose well, for no member of the Bourbon clan, legitimate or otherwise, was equal to the task. The Queen had asked a friend what he was like, and received the reassuring reply, 'the exact opposite of Richelieu.' He won over the two most influential men in France, the head of the House of Condé and Gaston, Duke of Orleans, brother of the late King, commonly known as Monsieur; and the conquest of the Queen's favour was only a matter of days. He quickly mastered the Council and began the long evening talks with the Regent which, on her side at any rate, ripened into love. He disarmed rivals and antagonists by 'sa manière douce et humble, sous laquelle il cachoit son ambition et ses desseins.' If Richelieu was the lion, Mazarin was the cat: there was something a little feline in the movements of this master of *finesse*. 'Le fort de M. le Cardinal Mazarin,' testifies his bitter enemy, de Retz, 'était proprement de donner à entendre, de faire espérer; de jeter des lueurs, de les retirer; de donner les vues, de les brouiller. Il s'érigea en Richelieu, mais il n'en eut que l'impudence de l'imitation. Il ne fut ni doux ni cruel, parce qu'il ne se ressouvenoit ni des bienfaits ni des injures. Il avait de l'esprit, de l'insinuation, de l'enjouement, des manières, mais le vilain cœur paroissoit toujours au travers. Il avoit beaucoup d'esprit mais n'avoit point d'âme.' Mme de Motteville pays homage to his extraordinary skill and the mildness of his rule. 'Never did a man with so much power and so many enemies pardon so easily or imprison so few.' He was envied, hated, and despised, but not greatly feared, for he never shed blood. Olivier d'Ormesson, his antagonist in the Parlement, speaks of 'un grand douceur dans le visage.' His worst fault was his shameless avarice.

A year after her husband's death the Queen Regent moved from

the Louvre to the Palais Royal, which Richelieu had left to Louis XIII, and it is here that most of the scenes so vividly described were enacted. Mazarin bought a house close by, and a door was made in the garden wall so that he could enter more or less unobserved. A year later the Queen Regent announced to the Council that the Cardinal, who was unwell, had been assigned a room in the palace so that he could discuss affairs of state with her at any time. Tongues began to wag and the stream of *Mazarinades* to flow. Anne hated causing people pain, particularly when they were old friends, and a sharp attack of jaundice was attributed by her doctors to worry; but there were limits to her tolerance. The criticisms and admonitions of Mlle de Hautefort became so intolerable that she had to leave the Court. When Mme de Motteville pleaded for her, the Regent was cool, and to a request for permission to visit her replied coldly 'Do as you like.' A much more formidable personage, the Duchesse de Chevreuse, was also dismissed, for the incorrigible intriguer had joined the ranks of Mazarin's foes. The observant *femme de chambre* saw a good deal of the quarrels of the Court, and the Queen told her more. She does not spare her sex. 'Les dames sont d'ordinaire les premières causes des plus grand renversements des États; et les guerres, qui ruinent les royaumes et les empires, ne procèdent presque jamais que des effets que produisent ou leur beauté ou leur malice.' There was no country, she added, where tongues wagged more unrestrainedly and people were more inclined to misjudge and calumniate their sovereigns.

Graver problems had to be faced than the quarrels of pretty women, for France felt the lack of a master hand. Richelieu had laid the foundations of Absolute Monarchy, but the completion of the proud structure awaited the coming of Louis XIV. Though Mazarin possessed the Queen's confidence and won her heart, he had no party behind him, and he was disliked as a foreigner to the end. The victories of the Duc d'Enghien in the Spanish wars, welcome though they were, cost money, and the crushing burden of taxation led to riots in the provinces from 1643 onwards. Mazarin, like Richelieu, had no understanding of finance, which he left to Emery, 'l'esprit le plus corrompu de son siècle,' as de Retz calls him; and every new impost raised angry protests. The Duc de Beaufort, the frivolous son of the Duc de Vendôme, a bastard of Henri IV, won the title of Le Roi des Halles and captained the little group of political critics known as Les Importants; but his seditious activities were interrupted by imprisonment at Vincennes. When the Regent visited the Parlement in state in 1648, accompanied by her son, Monsieur, and Condé, she was treated to an outspoken discourse by Omer Talon on the burdens of the people and the power of favourites. The

warning was in vain. So anxious was she to exalt Mazarin's power that she wished everything, above all favours, to appear as his decision. Mme de Motteville, though the soul of loyalty, felt that he was given too much power, and in 1646, after three years of his undisputed rule, her position at Court was threatened for the first time. Mlle de Beaumont, one of the Queen's ladies, was so frank in her criticisms that the Minister persuaded the Queen to dismiss her. Since Mme de Motteville was her friend, though she never approved her audacious sallies, he wished for her dismissal as well. For once he was refused. 'La Reine qui me connoissoit dès mon enfance, et qui savoit que j'avois des intentions droites, ne pouvait douter de ma fidélité. Elle fut assez bonne de répondre de moi à son ministre, et de l'assurer de la netteté de mon procédé, sans en être instruite par moi; tout il est vrai qu'en toutes occasions il faut bien faire et de ne se vanter jamais. Comme le Cardinal Mazarin n'avait pas fortement déterminé ma perte, il se laissa aisément persuader par elle; et je me sauvai de cette sorte d'un châtement que je n'avois pas mérité, et d'un péril que je n'aperçus qu'après qu'il fût passé.'

Mazarin's suspicions remained, for some of her acquaintances were no friends of his, and one day he took her severely to task: 'Comme il ne connaissait pas mes intentions, et qu'il jugeoit de moi sur l'opinion qu'il avoit de la corruption universelle du monde, il ne pouvait s'empêcher de me soupçonner de me mêler de beaucoup de choses contraires à son intérêt. Il me dit un jour qu'il étoit persuadé de cela, parce que je ne lui disois jamais rien des autres, que j'écoutois parler les mécontents, que j'étois dans leur confidence, et que par ma manière d'agir je faisois voir clairement le peu d'affection que j'avois pour le service de la Reine: ajoutant que mes amis me faisoient tort en publiant que j'étois une honnête personne, sûre et généreuse, parce que cela vouloit dire qu'on pouvoit murmurer avec moi sans crainte.' It was the most disagreeable interview in her life, but she retained her poise. It was not her habit, she replied, to tell tales. Since she had always been faithful to the Queen and felt no hostility to the Minister, she discharged her duty in defending the truth against the grumblers, some of whom were her friends. Her watchword was to be faithful to all and to seek no reward beyond the approval of her conscience. Those who spread reports should be the objects of his greatest distrust, while those who did no harm to anyone could never fail in their duty. Mazarin took no further steps, but she realised that his favour had not been regained, and her comment on this incident is unusually severe. His reproaches, she declares, showed 'combien nous étions malheureuses de vivre sous la puissance d'un homme qui aimait la friponnerie, et avec qui la probité avoit si peu de valeur qu'il en faisoit un crime.'