

## *Chapter XI – Ninon’s Lovers – Continued*

A counter attraction has been referred to in speaking of the Hôtel Rambouillet, where a fashionable court was established for the purpose of drawing away from Ninon the élite who flocked to her standard. Mademoiselle de Scudery gives a fine description of this little court at Rambouillet in her romance, entitled “Cyrus.” There was not, and could not, be any rivalry between the court in the Rue des Tournelles and that at Rambouillet, for the reason that Ninon’s coterie consisted of men exclusively, while that of Rambouillet was thronged with women. But this, quite naturally, occasioned much envy and jealousy among the ladies who devised all sorts of entertainments to attract masculine society. One of their performances was the famous “Julia Garland,” so named in honor of Mademoiselle de Rambouillet, who was known by the name of “Julie d’Angennes.” Each one selected a favorite flower, wrote a sonnet in its praise, and when all were ready, they stood around Mademoiselle de Rambouillet in a circle and alternately recited the poem, the reward for the best one being the favor of some fair lady. Among those who were drawn to the Hôtel Rambouillet by this pleasing entertainment was the Duke d’Enghien, afterward known as the “Great Condé,” prince of the highest renown as a victorious warrior. He was a great acquisition, and the Garland Play was repeated every night in the expectation that his pleasure would continue, and the constant attraction prove adequate to hold him. Once or twice, however, was sufficient for the Duke, its constant repetition becoming flat and tiresome. He did not scruple to express his dissatisfaction with a society that could not originate something new. He was a broadminded man, with a comprehensive knowledge, but had little taste for poetry and childish entertainments. But the good ladies of Rambouillet, unable to devise any other entertainment, persisted in their Garland Play, until the Duke’s human nature rebelled at the monotony, and he begged his friends de Moissens and Saint-Evremond to

suggest some relief. They immediately brought him in touch with the Birds of the Tournelles, with the result that he abandoned the Hôtel Rambouillet, and found scope for his social desires at Ninon’s house and in her more attractive society. The conquest of his heart followed that of his intelligence, the hero of Rocroi being unable to resist a tenderness that is the glory of a lover and the happiness of his mistress.

It is a curious fact, known to some, that all the heroes of Bellona are not expert in the wars of Venus, the strongest and most valiant souls being weak in combats in which valor plays an unimportant part. The poet Chaulieu says upon this point:

“Pour avoir la valeur d’Hercule,  
On n’est pas obligé d’en avoir la vigueur.”

(“To have the valor of Hercules,  
One need not have his vigor.”)

The young Prince was born to attain immortal glory on the field of Mars. To that, all his training had tended, but notwithstanding his robust physique, and the indicia of great strength with which nature had endowed him, he was a weakling in the field of Venus. He came within the category of a Latin proverb with which Ninon was familiar “*Pilosus aut fortis, aut libidinosus.*” (“A hairy man is either strong or sensual.”) Wherefore, one day when Ninon was enjoying his society, she looked at him narrowly and exclaimed, “Ah, Monseigneur, il faut que vous soyex bien fort!” (“Ah, Monsignor, you must be very strong.”)

Notwithstanding this, the two dwelt together for a long time in perfect harmony, the intellectual benefit the Duke derived from the close intimacy being no less than the pleasure he derived from her affection. Naturally inclined to deserve the merit and esteem as well as the love of her admirers, Ninon used all the influence she possessed to regulate their lives

and to inspire them with the true desire to perform faithfully the duties of their rank and station. What power over her intimates does not possess a charming woman disembarassed of conventional prudery, but vested with grace, high sentiments, and mental attainments! It was through the gentle exercise of this power that the famous Aspasia grayed in the soul of Pericles the seductive art of eloquent language, and taught him the most solid maxims of politics, maxims of which he made so noble a use.

The young Duke, penetrated with love and esteem for Ninon, passed at her side every moment he could steal away from the profound studies and occupations required by his rank and position. Although he afterward became the Prince de Condé, the Lion of his time, and the bulwark of France, he never ceased expressing for her the liveliest gratitude and friendship. Whenever he met her equipage in the streets of Paris, he never failed to descend from his own, and go to pay her the most affectionate compliments.

The Prince de Marsillac, afterward the Duke de la Rochefoucauld, less philosophical than later in life, and who prided himself on his acquaintance with all the vices and follies of youth, could not long withhold his admiration for the solid and estimable qualities he perceived in Ninon, whom he often saw in the company of the Duke d'Enghien. The result of his admiration was that he formed a tender attachment, which lasted as long as he lived. It was Ninon who continued the good work begun, by Madame de La Fayette, who confessed that her social relations with la Rochefoucauld had been the means of embellishing her mind, and that in compensation for this great service she had reformed his heart. Whatever share Madame de La Fayette may have had in reforming the heart of this great man, it is certain that Ninon de l'Enclos had much to do with reforming his morals and elevating his mind up to the point it is evident he reached, to judge from his "Maxims," in which the human heart is bared as with a scalpel in the most skillfully

devised epigrams that never cease to hold the interest of every reader.

Chapelle, the most celebrated voluptuary in Paris, did everything in his power to overcome Ninon's repugnance, but without success. There was nothing lacking in his mental attainments, for he was a poet of very high order, inimitable in his style; moreover, he was presentable in his person. Yet he could not make the slightest impression on Ninon's heart. He openly declared his love, and, receiving constant rebuffs, resolved to have revenge and overcome her resistance by punishing her. This he attempted to do in a very singular manner without regard to consistency.

All Paris knew his verses in which he did not conceal his ardent love for Ninon, and in which were expressed the highest admiration for her estimable qualities and the depth of her philosophy. He now proceeded to take back everything good he had said about her and made fun of her love, her friendship, and her attainments. He ridiculed her in every possible manner, even charging up against her beauty, her age. A verse or so will enable the reader to understand his methods:

"Il ne faut pas qu'on s' étonne,  
Si souvent elle raisonne  
De la sublime vertu  
Dont Platon fut revêtu :  
Car à bien compter son âge,  
Elle pent avoir vécu  
Avec ce grand personnage"

Or, substantially in the English language:

"Let no one be surprised,  
If she should be advised  
Of the virtue most renowned  
Plato to be found:  
For, counting up her age,  
She lived, 'tis reason sound,  
With that great personage."

Ninon had no rancor in her heart toward any one, much less against an unsuccessful suitor, hence she only laughed at Chapelle's effu-

sions, and all Paris laughed with her. The truth is, la Rochefoucauld had impressed her mind with that famous saying of his, "Old age is the hell of women," and not fearing any hell, reference to her age neither alarmed her, nor caused the slightest flurry in her peaceful life. She was too philosophical to regret the loss of what she did not esteem of any value, and saw Chapelle slipping away from her with tranquility of mind. It was only during moments of gayety when she abandoned herself to the play of an imagination always laughing and fertile, that she repeated the sacrilegious wish of the pious king of Aragon, who wished that he had been present at the moment of creation, when, among the suggestions he could have given Providence, he would have advised him to put the wrinkles of old age where the gods of Pagandom had located the feeble spot in Achilles.

If Ninon ever felt a pang on account of the ungenerous conduct of Chapelle, his disciple, the illustrious Abbé de Chaulieu, the Anacreon of the age, who was called, when he made his entree into the world of letters, "the poet of good fellowship," more than compensated her for the injury done by his pastor. The Abbé was the Prior of Fontenay, whither Ninon frequently accompanied Madame the Duchess de Bouillon and the Chevalier d'Orléans. The Duchess loved to joke at the expense of the Abbé, and twit him about his wasted talents, which were more adapted to love than to his present situation. It may be that the worthy Abbé, after thinking over seriously what was intended to be a mere pleasantry, concluded that Madame the Duchess was right, and that he possessed some talent in the direction of love. However that might have been, it is certain that he had cast an observant and critical eye on Ninon, and he now openly paid her court, not unsuccessfully it should be known.

The Abbé Gedoyn was her last lover so far as there is any account of her amours. The story is related by Rémond, surnamed "The Greek," and must be taken with a grain of salt as Ninon was at that time seventy-nine years of age. This Rémond, notwithstanding her age, had made

violent love to Ninon, without meeting with any success. Perhaps he was trying an experiment, being a learned man, anxious to ascertain when the fire of passion became extinct in the human breast. Ninon evidently suspected his ardent professions, for she refused to listen to him and forbade his visits altogether.

"I was the dupe of his Greek erudition," she explained, "so I banished him from my school. He was always wrong in his philosophy of the world, and was unworthy of as sensible a society as mine." She often added to this, "After God had made man, he repented him to feel the same about Rémond."

But to return to the Abbé Gedoyn he left the

when human passion is supposed to be extinct, and her counsel was attempting to prove that fact to relieve her from the charge. The testimony of the aged Countess, who was herself over seventy-five years of age, was very unsatisfactory, and the court put this question to her demanding an explicit answer.

“Madame,” he inquired, “at what age does the sentiment, passion, or desire of love cease in the female heart?”

Her ladyship, who had lived long in high society and had been acquainted with all of the gallants and coquettes of the English court for nearly two generations, and who, herself, had sometimes been suspected of not having been averse to a little waywardness, looked down at her feet for a moment thoughtfully, then raising her eyes and looking squarely into those of the judge, answered:

“My Lord, you will have to ask a woman older than I.”