

**THE ROMANCES OF  
ALEXANDRE DUMAS: THE  
CHEVALIER D'HARMENTAL**

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The Romances of Alexandre Dumas: The Chevalier D'Harmental by Alexandre Dumas

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"Harmental, on his knees, listened to her smallest word."




THE ROMANCES OF  
ALEXANDRE DUMAS

THE CHEVALIER D'HARMENTAL

A. C. FREEBORN,

*The Regency Romances*

McKINLAY, STONE & MACKENZIE  
New York



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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

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THE eight years from the death of Louis XIV., in 1715, to the legal majority of his great-grandson and successor, Louis XV., in 1723, exhibited a state of affairs in France corresponding very closely with that which existed in England after the Restoration of 1660,—when the natural reaction from the supremacy of the pleasure-hating, psalm-singing saints of the Commonwealth carried the nation to hitherto unheard-of excesses in the opposite direction.

During the last thirty years of the reign of the "Grand Monarque," piety had come to be the fashion at the French Court, of which Madame de Maintenon, the king's unacknowledged wife, was the true, though uncrowned, queen.

"Louis XIV., in his old age, became religious," says Macaulay in one of his critical essays; "he determined that his subjects should be religious, too; he shrugged his shoulders and knitted his brows if he observed at his levee or near his



dinner-table any gentleman who neglected the duties enjoined by the Church, and rewarded piety with blue ribbons, invitations to Marly, governments, pensions, and regiments. Forthwith Versailles became, in everything but dress, a convent. The pulpits and confessionals were surrounded by swords and embroidery. The Marshals of France were much in prayer; and there was hardly one among the dukes and peers who did not carry good little books in his pocket, fast during Lent, and communicate at Easter. Madame de Maintenon, who had a great share in the blessed work, boasted that devotion had become quite the fashion."

But Louis XIV. died. His will was treated with scant ceremony by the Parliament of Paris; his legitimized sons were pulled down from the height to which he, with the cordial approval of their former governess, Madame de Maintenon, had elevated them; and Philippe, Duc d'Orléans, whose private morals were the very antithesis of all that had been held in high esteem at court for a generation, was placed at the head of the government during the minority of the young king.

The many excellent qualities of the regent were overshadowed, in his own day as they have been for posterity, by the shameless profligacy of his life.

When the royal power, substantially unlimited, was placed in his hands, the whole face of the court changed; and unblushing debauchery succeeded to the odor of sanctity which had so long filled the nostrils of the courtiers. Madame de Maintenon was discredited; Père le Tellier, the bigoted confessor of the late king, vanished from the public gaze; while those whose real or pretended piety had led them to espouse the cause of the Duc du Maine as against the regent, had nothing to hope for under the new administration. Add to this that the father, mother, and brother of the child who had become king had all died within a week of one another some three years before; that his own life had been saved at the same time only by a miracle, and that very many people, under the guidance of a few who pretended to believe it, honestly did believe that the Duc d'Orléans was responsible for all these casualties; while the throne of Spain was filled by a grandson of Louis XIV., himself a candidate for the regency, bitterly jealous of the regent, and an inevitable candidate for the throne in case of the death of the sickly child, whose life was supposed to be in hourly danger. To be sure, by the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht, Philippe V. solemnly renounced all claim to the throne of France; but the emptiness of such

renunciations had been abundantly demonstrated in the case of his great-grandmother, Anne of Austria, wife of Louis XIII., and his grandmother, Marie Thérèse, wife of Louis XIV.; and even Saint-Simon, the most devoted of all the friends of the regent, tells us in his Memoirs that if Louis XV. had died he should have been obliged, tearfully and with great regret, to espouse the cause of the representative of the elder line. Under these circumstances, some sort of a plot against the government of the regent was inevitable. The so-called "Conspiracy of Cellamare," formed to carry out a far-reaching scheme of the ambitious and restless intriguer, Cardinal Alberoni, the all-powerful minister of Philippe V., forms the ground-work upon which Dumas has built the "Chevalier d'Harmental."

That the epithet "far-reaching" is not misapplied to the scheme of the ex-bell-ringer of Parma, will be apparent upon perusal of the objects he had in view, which are set forth with fulness and accuracy in the following pages; but the *dénouement* contained many elements of burlesque. Indeed, despite the undoubted earnestness of the Duchesse du Maine and the poisoned pen of the atrabilious poet, La Grange Chancel, the "Court" of Sceaux, with its "Order of the Honey-Bee," was a burlesque in itself, and the conspirators at the French end were