

**THE CHEVALIER DE
PONTGIBAUD, A FRENCH
VOLUNTEER OF THE
WAR OF INDEPENDENCE**

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The chevalier de Pontgibaud, a French volunteer of the war of independence by Robert B. Douglas

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ROBERT B. DOUGLAS

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THE CHEVALIER DE PONTGIBAUD



A FRENCH VOLUNTEER

OF THE

WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY

ROBERT B. DOUGLAS

Author of

*"Sophie Arnould; Actress and Wit", "The Life and Times of
Madame du Barry", etc., etc.*

WITH AN ENGRAVED PORTRAIT BY THEVENIN.



PARIS
CHARLES CARRINGTON
13, FAUBOURG MONTMARTRE.
1848

"The Story of my life,
From year to year, the battles, sieges, fortunes,
That I have passed."

OTHELLO. Act. 4. sc. 3.

(SECOND EDITION)

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1545

P R E F A C E.

The Chevalier de Pontgibaud was one of the gallant little band of Frenchmen, who, "sick for breathing and exploit", crossed the Atlantic to aid the American colonists to gain their independence. Like most of his companions, he was a mere lad, courageous, adventurous, high-spirited, light-hearted, and cool-headed, but he united to these ordinary attributes of the French gentleman, one which his comrades did not possess, or had no opportunity of developing. He seems to have been a shrewd observer of men and events, and he had a keen sense of humour.

It was not probable that a youth barely out of his teens and thinking more of his own liberty than the cause in which he was engaged, should have noted his impressions at the time. They were written down more than forty years later, but that will not detract from the value of a book which gives vivid pen-portraits of men about whom much has been written but of whom much yet remains to be written.

Concerning the author's life, little need be added to what he tells us, but I am indebted to his great-great-nephew, the Comte de Pontgibaud, for some details which are not to be found in the book. The Chevalier de

Pontgibaud married—31 July 1789—a daughter of Maréchal de Vaux, and the widow of Comte de Fougères, *maréchal de camp*. He was deeply attached to her, and only survived her a few months. She died in 1836 and he in 1837. From the time of his return to France (1814) till his wife's death, he resided at 6, Place Royale, Paris, but afterwards removed to the residence of his nephew, Comte de Pontgibaud, 32, Rue des Tournelles, where he died.

He was a genial, kind-hearted man, and it is related of him that in his later days he never left home without a pocketful of five-francs pieces, one of which coins he would bestow on each poor person he met. "As I want for nothing myself," he said, "let me do all I can for poor people who do want." Indeed had it not been for his charitable disposition he would never in all likelihood have written his book. His cousin, Muc de Lavau, who was interested in many charitable works, said to him one day, "My dear cousin, you have had such an adventurous career that an account of the principal events of your life would make a most interesting book. I would give away the copies as prizes in a lottery, and I warrant we should get a large sum for one of my charities." The proposal was perhaps hardly flattering to the author, but he was too kind-hearted to refuse, and the book was duly written. He even permitted a relative to pad out the volume by the addition of some singularly dull letters, which, being devoid of all interest, have been omitted from the present translation.

The *Mémoires du Comte de M.....* (the writer was then known as the Comte de Moré) has become a rare book, and appears to have been unknown to many of the historians and biographers whose writings relate to the War of Independence and the actors concerned in it.

That the book is rare and rather valuable is due to the "book-maniacs", who have snapped-up every available copy, not on account of any interest in the book or its author, but because of—the printer! A certain young man had persuaded his relatives to set him up in business as a printer, but in a little over a year he contrived to lose more than 150,000 francs. He threw up the business in disgust, and resolved to make his living by the pen. To prove that he was better fitted to compose with the pen than with the "stick", it needs but to cite his name,—Honoré de Balzac! Even a book which had the honour of proceeding from the novelist's unprofitable press has acquired a fictitious value.

Both as the Chevalier de Pontgibaud and the Marquis de Moré, the author had the good sense to keep out of politics, and his name occurs but rarely in memoirs and histories of the day. In Vatel's *Vie de Madame du Barry* he is mentioned as being present at a dinner party to which she was invited. The incident is related in the MS. Memoirs of Comte Dufort de Cheverny. "Seeing that the Chevalier wore the Order of Cincinnatus, she told us the following story. 'When I was at Versailles, I had the six tallest and best looking footmen that could be found, but the noisiest, laziest rascals that ever lived. The ring-leader of them gave me so much trouble that I was obliged to send him away. The war in America was then beginning, and he asked for letters of recommendation. I gave them, and he left me with a well filled purse, and I was glad to get rid of him. A year ago he came to see me, and he was wearing the Order of Cincinnatus.' We all laughed at the story, except the Chevalier de Pontgibaud."

On the fly leaf of a book in the Library at Clermont

Ferrand there are also some MS. notes—supposed to be written by Comte Thomas d’Espinchal—relating to the Chevalier de Pontgibaud. It is there stated that the Chevalier furnished Talleyrand with the means of returning to France by lending him 600 louis. It is not improbable, and as the Ex-Bishop would be absolutely certain to forget the obligation, this may account for certain severe remarks about Talleyrand to be found towards the close of the present volume.

In editing the Chevalier’s Memoirs I have done little more than identify the personages named only by initials, and supply notes concerning them, correct one or two dates, and strike out a passage or two that was not according to modern taste. As a translator I have endeavoured, as I always do, to render the original as faithfully as could be, and preserve the style and spirit of the author. The only liberty I have taken with the text is to cut up some of the sentences, for a few of them were of an inordinate length. If it should be found that the style is not always of the purest, it should be remembered that the Chevalier was a man of action, and was fighting for the freedom of America at an age when less adventurous youths are quietly pursuing their studies.

ROBT. B. DOUGLAS.

PARIS, 10th January 1897.

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