

Au Revoir, Saint-Simon

By LESLIE F. SMITH

WHY IS IT that the name of Louis de Rouvroy, Duc de Saint-Simon (1675-1755), never occurs among the answers to such literary competitions as "A list of ten books you would wish to have with you on a desert island"? Quite apart from his intrinsic merit, Saint-Simon would have the advantage of lasting a good part of even a prolonged marooning, since his *Mémoires* run to something like 9,500 octavo pages, not counting the index.

These figures stick in my mind because I have recently finished the *Mémoires*, which I took up some time ago as a "last thing before you go to sleep" reading, gave up during an absence abroad of a year, and took up again joyfully on my return. Despite the numerous duties of a faculty member I have now the vague but irritating feeling of a vacuum in my life. Even though with Saint-Simon it must always be "au revoir but not goodbye," I have lost a wonderful companion. He is entertaining, describes an interesting court at an interesting time, and is a guide to living in a social pyramid in which everything in the long run depends on one man's favor.

Saint-Simon's feeling of dignity or his sense of morality did not allow him to follow the tactics of the game as played by most of his contemporaries and it is to be hoped that we today are at least as firm as Saint-Simon. Anne Sedgwick in her novel *The Little French Girl* (1924) has someone raise the question of whether Saint-Simon is suitable reading for the heroine, even though she is merely reading aloud to oblige a sick person. The little French girl, not yet won from the French to the Anglo-Saxon viewpoint, makes some such reply as "That's the way life is. You might as well face the facts."

We do not admire snobbery. Was Saint-Simon a snob? Albert Guérard, professor at Harvard and transplanted Frenchman, recently called him one in a review of W. H. Lewis' *The Sunset of the Splendid Century*, and most readers of Saint-Simon would agree. It is entirely possible that Saint-Simon would not have understood what snobbery is since the concept of egalitarianism, which makes snobbery particularly vicious as denying equality, had not been invented. There was no equality

in the France of Louis XIV or of Saint-Simon's friend, the Duke of Orleans, whose Regency followed the death of Louis XIV. Saint-Simon would probably have said that he merely stood for order in society, giving each person his due. He himself happened to be a duke and peer of France, and it must be remembered that peers of France were few, because Louis XIII, of whom he always speaks well, had liked his father and offered him this rank, the rank which Saint-Simon himself inherited along with a precedence going back to his father's creation as duke and peer. Much of his life was spent in maintaining this precedence.

The King of France was far above his subjects. Though Saint-Simon occasionally tells us of the Frondes early in Louis XIV's reign and the conspiracies during the Regency, in both of which princes of the blood took part, he himself does not challenge the Absolutism. The fact that Louis XIV seems to have been incurably suspicious of Saint-Simon personally does not affect the latter as a monarchist. After the king came his immediate family, sons and grandsons, daughters and granddaughters "of France," and the other princes of the blood more remotely related to the king. Saint-Simon does not forget "what he owes to them" but he hates to see any other ranks thrust between these and the dukes who, as the successors of Charlemagne's peers and the nobility of medieval France, are the king's natural advisers.

TWO SUCH classes particularly infuriated Saint-Simon. The first was that of the royal bastards, for whom Louis XIV and his morganatic wife, Madame de Maintenon, who had been their governess, had such a weakness that the old king ultimately practically equated them in standing to his legitimate offspring. To make things worse, says Saint-Simon, they were the fruit of double adultery. Not only had Louis been unfaithful to his wife, but their mother, Madame de Montespan, was unfaithful to her husband. The other class was that of "foreign princes" a rank which Saint-Simon regarded as fictitious and newly invented, unknown in such a well-ordered court as that of Spain.

Not only were there these intruders be-

tween the dukes and the king, above them, but the dukes were also threatened from below. The Parlement of Paris, which Saint-Simon knew was just a law-court, though a highly important one, and in no way parallel to the Parliament at Westminster, whose power it would like to equal, was struggling to get equality with the dukes or at any rate trying to avoid deferring to them. The most repulsive thing Saint-Simon tells about himself is his behavior when the Regent called a "bed of justice" to check and discipline the Parlement. This was a day of triumph for Saint-Simon and he spent a lot of time catching the eye of its chief, the "first president," openly exulting over him and sneering at him. The duke and peer of France hated the whole Parlement because of its pretensions, but its first president he hated with a deadly hate. It cannot be said that he had much more use for this man's successor in the position, for he states that a scoundrel was replaced by a madman.

Scandal for scandal's sake has no part in Saint-Simon's memoirs, as he himself declares. Yet we learn how the daughter of the Duke of Orleans, a granddaughter of France through her father, and widow of the Duke of Berry, a grandson of France, drank heavily, sometimes in her father's company, hated her mother, and took part in the usual pushing for unusual outward symbols of rank. During her father's Regency, as a young widow, she took a lover, who treated her roughly, frequently reducing her to tears, married him secretly when circumstances dictated this, and had their child in the greatest secrecy and practically without attendance, refusing to admit to her room even her father, the temporary ruler of France. Shortly afterwards she died of the consequences of debauchery. Despite her drinking, the Duke of Orleans had entrusted her with secrets all her life.

Why did the Duke of Lausun hide under the second most eminent bed in France, second of course to the legitimate first bed of France, thus risking almost certain life-imprisonment if not execution? Actually his motive was to listen to conversation and find out whether he was to get a certain post of honor and profit or be "double-crossed." Fortunately for himself Lausun

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Professor Smith is perhaps the only man living in Oklahoma who has read all of the Mémoires of Louis de Rouvroy, Duc de Saint-Simon (1675-1755). The overpowering bulk of these memoirs makes War and Peace appear like an extended short story. Yet the positive knowledge contained in the twenty or so volumes of Saint-Simon's book is so fundamental that every historian of Louis XIV and his successors must study them. As Professor Smith delightfully shows us, the leisured reader will also enjoy the gossip, the novel and adroit use of words, the portraits, and the vivid sketches of incidents which have made the Mémoires interesting and influential.

was not caught but, because he disclosed resentment at the favorite who had failed to obtain the job for him, he was sent to a royal prison. Presumably he was to stay at the royal pleasure and actually he had about six or seven years of imprisonment. He might never have come out but for Mademoiselle, "la grande Mademoiselle," as she was called because of her size, not because of greatness, though she did not lack certain elements of greatness. Francis Steegmuller has recently published a book about her. Mademoiselle loved Lausun, who showed his power over her by ostentatiously ignoring "what was due" to a grand-daughter of France and ordering her to fetch his boots. Lausun once surprised Louis XIV into agreeing to his marriage to Mademoiselle and, if he had acted at once on the permission, could have married this eminent princess, who was also extremely rich. How did Saint-Simon know all this? Well, Versailles was just one whispering gallery. Moreover, he was intimate with the Duke of Lausun, who in his old age was encouraging the young Riom to treat the Duchess of Berry as roughly as he himself had treated the Grande Mademoiselle.

TURNING FROM daughter to father we note that in depicting the Duke of Orleans Saint-Simon shows that he avoids

scandal for scandal's sake. He does mention in passing an unacknowledged illegitimate son which the Duke had by the actress Florence but does not go into detail about the Duke's notorious suppers in Paris, away from the court at Versailles, in company with his male and female roués. This was the title the Duke gave them himself. It would be interesting to know whether it was Orleans who broadened the significance of this word from the technical meaning of "one broken on the wheel," a punishment still in force during the Regency, to just "dissipated person." Saint-Simon had, of course, no first-hand knowledge of these suppers since he would have refused an invitation even if his friend had invited him.

To his credit Saint-Simon avoided drinking and other excesses, and gambling including even speculation on the Stock Exchange when that too was available in connection with the Scotsman Law's Mississippi Bubble. He continually censures persons who are guilty of "crapule." Moreover, during an age in which Louis XIV had set the example of gormandising by eating enough for four men, Saint-Simon could dine on some soup and an egg in order to carry out quickly an ungrateful mission to the Duchess of Orleans imposed on him by her husband, the Duke, whose relations with her, not unnaturally, were strained.

The Duke of Orleans was certainly a worshipper of both Bacchus and Venus—until, towards the end of his life, he told Saint-Simon that neither any longer had attraction for him—and very little of a worshipper of Christ; but it may be that the thing he most appreciated in his suppers in Paris was their informality so that he got a rest from vexatious questions of precedence and the privileges of rank, who got a sofa in whose presence, and who had to sit on a stool, and so forth. Our author pays him the compliment of allowing that the Duke never disclosed secrets of state at these suppers nor did he promote his roués in the service of France. Saint-Simon never, however, quite gave up the hope of converting the Duke, not only to keeping the company of his equals, or at any rate the Dukes, but also to leading a Christian life, which Saint-Simon to the best of his lights certainly did. In this connection, the Duke once played Saint-Simon, who had been his friend at a time that he was shunned and slandered as a poisoner, a scurvy and unworthy trick. He pretended that he was ready to give up debauchery and listened solemnly to the sermon of encouragement that his friend read him. Then he went off to Paris and parodied the whole thing be-

fore the roués. If Saint-Simon had been more of a classical scholar, he would undoubtedly have paralleled it to the profanation of the Mysteries of Alcibiades. He heard of this episode, charged the Duke with it, and forgave him. He did not desert the Duke of Orleans until the latter gave up his power into the hands of a First Minister, one Dubois. Such prime ministers, he generalizes, are always the ruin of kingdoms. They will sell their country for a cardinal's hat. Obviously, he must have been thinking primarily of France and Spain since in contemporary Britain, where the office of Prime Minister, British style, was taking shape in the early days of the Hanoverian succession, the prime ministers were not only laymen but Protestants and thus not to be tempted by the cardinal's hat. It may be remarked in passing that Saint-Simon admired the effective service of contemporary British statesmen and diplomats to their country. Because they were working successfully at promoting their country's interest, especially in world trade, Saint-Simon himself was an out-and-out Jacobite, hoping that Jacobite revolts against George I would weaken Britain, the arch-enemy of his own country.

AS REGENT, by the way, the Duke of Orleans seemed to have pursued a policy of understanding with Hanoverian Britain, whereas he got into a war (1718-20) with Spain, ruled over by the first Spanish Bourbon, Philip, Duke of Anjou, his own close relative, king of Spain by the verdict of the War of the Spanish Succession. When the Regent surrendered power to Dubois as First Minister, it meant that the Councils at which Louis XIV in his time had presided and which the Regent had continued were now powerless. The surrender is interpreted by Saint-Simon as just another example of his friend's greatest fault, weakness. Time after time he had had the Regent ready to take some decisive action only to find that the next time they met he was embarrassed and ashamed because Orleans had either done nothing or had done the opposite from what he had agreed to. Some critics say that this simply means that Saint-Simon had totally lost his influence with his former friend.

Though Saint-Simon regarded himself as at least a practising Catholic, if not a devout one, he is far from uncritical of the Church and of certain churchmen. He is a defender of Gallican liberties and hates the Ultramontane party, especially the Jesuits and certain others who induced the Pope to issue the "constitution" *Unigenitus*. One of these had an illegitimate daughter, who became an actress and was never referred to otherwise than by her nickname, which

was "Constitution." The Pope and his court at Rome are always described as politicians with no hint that spiritual motives played a part in their politics. Many French bishops were absentees since not only the abbeys but the bishoprics of France had become part of the governmental system. When a political statesman fell from power, the king could *banish* him by ordering him to fulfill the canonical requirement of residence in his diocese!

To our relief, our author occasionally mentions a model bishop who not only resided in his diocese but devoted his revenues entirely to his poor. On the other hand, his bugbear, Cardinal Dubois, was an absentee and pluralist and had no right to any ecclesiastical benefice whatsoever, if it entailed the holding of holy orders—because he was married! Dubois got some one to go down to a parish in the diocese of Limoges, distract the attention of the parish priest, and tear out from the parish register the page which contained the proofs of Dubois' marriage. So says Saint-Simon, confessedly no friend of Dubois.

Living at court, Saint-Simon brushed up against many persons who made history, some in big things, some in small. Had Voltaire died young, we might have known no more of him than what Saint-Simon tells us, namely that his name was Arouet, that he was the son of the Saint-Simon family notary, and that he was first exiled from the court for satirical and impudent verses and later sent to the Bastille for similar effrontery. It was an acquaintance of our author, the postmistress at Nonancourt, who saved the life of the Old Pretender when he was on his way to raise the Rebellion of 1715 in Scotland. She foiled the English agents who were out to kidnap him, if not murder him. What did she get in return? His portrait, says our informant, but she was never recompensed for out-of-pocket expenses. Well, royalty in exile can be very hard up indeed. As a matter of fact Saint-Simon tells us repeatedly about this Stuart, known to Jacobites like himself as James III, and shows him in a very pleasant light.

Saint-Simon's own career reached its apex when he was sent to Spain as ambassador-extraordinary to negotiate a proposed double marriage alliance between the children of Philip V and those of his relative the Regent of France. It was an imposition, rather than a pleasure, says Saint-Simon, and he only undertook it for the sake of certain promotions which shall be mentioned. Dubois tried to ruin him by making his duties as expensive as possible,

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The New Inn and Ben Jonson's "Dotage"

By CALVIN G. THAYER

BEN JONSON's last plays, *The Devil is an Ass*, *The Staple of News*, *The New Inn*, and *The Magnetic Lady*, were not well received by contemporary audiences, and although the last two were not only total failures at the time, they have apparently never been performed on the public stage since their first, catastrophic, presentations. For the 1631 edition of one of these, *The New Inn*, Jonson supplied a bitter, if amusing, title-page: "The New Inn, or The Light Heart, a Comedy. As it was never acted, but most negligently played by some, the King's Servants, and more squeamishly beheld and censured by others, the King's Subjects. 1629. Now, at last, set at liberty to the Readers, his Majesty's Servants, and Subjects, to be judged. 1631." Jonson's statement that his play was to be "judged" is both characteristic and revealing; he always insisted that the spectator or the reader should approach his work with judgment and intelligence, that he should understand before he praised or censured. Frequently we can enjoy, after a fashion, without understanding, but with Ben Jonson this is scarcely possible, so carefully premeditated is his work, and so carefully wrought.

Following their inauspicious first performances, the fates of these last plays seemed to have been sealed by Dryden's famous and highly unfortunate remark that they were his "dotages," for few critics have challenged it. *The New Inn* and *The Magnetic Lady* were produced during Jonson's last years. James I was dead, and courtly patronage, on which Jonson had earlier been able to rely, was gone. He himself was old and sick; he had suffered a paralytic stroke and was confined to his bed in a house depressingly shabby, and for nourishment he was apparently relying more and more exclusively on the Canary wine which had always been a staple of his diet. When these plays, then, very different from anything he had produced before, were presented to puzzled or indifferent audiences, they were taken, by

the charitably inclined, as the last feeble performances of a sick and tired poet.

L. C. Knights, however, in his fine book, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson*, has convincingly demonstrated the high quality of *The Devil is an Ass* and *The Staple of News*. Swinburne, the gustiest noise-making machine of nineteenth-century criticism, loudly defended *The Magnetic Lady* as one of Jonson's most perfect plays. But among modern students, only Freda L. Townsend, in *Apologie for Bartholmewe Fayre*, has seriously attempted a defense of *The New Inn*, and while her defense is salutary, it is by no means complete; and so, following Jonson's injunction to "understand," I should like to present a new and, I trust, accurate reading of this almost universally maligned and misunderstood play.

No one would be justified in seriously asserting that *The New Inn* is comparable to the great plays of Jonson's middle period, the period of those masterpieces, *Volpone*, *The Alchemist*, and *Bartholomew Fair*. *The Alchemist*, Jonson's greatest play, is, with respect to structure, vigor of language, serious intent displayed in comic terms, ingenuity of plot and situation, and fidelity to a clearly worked out theory of comedy, the greatest comic production in our language; there is nothing like it. But to say that a man, having once reached this height, is in his dotage because he did not reach it again, is to demand too much, even of Ben Jonson.

A summary of the action follows: The Lord Frampul married "Sylly's daughter of the South," whom he left, because of a "peccant humor," shortly after the birth of their second daughter. She, thinking he had gone because she had not borne him a son, left home also, resolving never to return until he should return. When he did return and found her gone, he immediately set out in quest of her, and neither of them had been heard from since, the estate remaining in the hands of the eldest daughter, Frances, Lady Frampul, "her young

spoke in defense of "the bourgeois republic which contained the hope of the social republic." To Péguy the class struggle was anathema for yet another reason: It was competitive and hence capitalistic. A true socialist, in his opinion, believed in the harmonizing of all interests in society, and left strife, struggle, and competition to the barbarian. When Marxian and non-Marxian socialists were fused in the SFIO of 1899, Péguy quit the party and became a dissenter. With growing bitterness he watched socialist involvement in the separation struggle against the Catholic Church and eventually ended his days in the bosom of the Church and in the odor of sanctity.

Had Péguy remained a socialist after 1905, he would have had still another cause for alarm. For it became evident to the observer that the socialist party's involvement in political and religious quarrels brought to its ranks such fine talents as the librarian of the École Normale, Lucien Herr, the historian Jean Jaurès, and the literary critic Léon Blum, but not many representatives of the working class. As we pursue the history of the socialist movement, we lose the scent of class conflict because the French Socialist Party became more and more an intellectual coterie of college professors, civil servants, and literati. The horny-handed sons of toil lost faith in it and sought social salvation elsewhere. They had become skeptical when a socialist, Alexandre Millerand, had become a cabinet minister; they became downright incensed when another right-wing socialist, Aristide Briand, responded to the great railroad strike of 1910 by drafting the workers into the army, thus breaking it. Party socialism had become a bourgeois movement.

As a result, the Socialist party never was able to control its potentially most important resource, the labor unions. The unions were neither Marxian, nor St. Simonian, nor yet Fourierist. They became Syndicalist. Syndicalism, as we know, rejects parliamentary party politics as bourgeois, notwithstanding the fact that socialists and communists participate in it. Again let me draw on David Thomson for a graphic comparative description of this development:

The English trade unions and other labor or co-operative movements grew up in tune with . . . the liberal and parliamentary tradition. They demanded equality of rights with other associations . . . and sought their ends eventually by familiar parliamentary and political methods. Their aim was legal protection, freedom of collective bargaining, and freedom of association. French trade unions grew up in hostility to the French liberal tradition, which was so closely identified with business

interests on one hand and with the interest of peasant proprietors on the other. They were more syndicalist, collectivist . . . than they were liberal; their demands were for freedom of direct action, for special powers *within* the community rather than for equality of treatment with other associations; their conception of economic equality was collectivist rather than distributivist. They wanted "National Workshops" rather than Workmen's Compensation Act, a "Worker's Republic" rather than a place within a parliamentary constitution; and they therefore quite logically eschewed parliamentary party-politics and adhered to a policy of direct action through strike, boycott and sabotage. In short, the peculiar tradition of the barricades found natural continuity within the movement of organized labor. . . .

The tradition of the barricades, one might add, exists on both sides, of course. The bitterness, engendered by pitched battles in the streets has made the entrepreneur as uncompromisingly hostile to labor, as labor has been to him. And here, then, is a division and source of instability that really counts.

Labor's distrust of socialism was greatly increased, in France as well as in the rest of Europe, by party socialism's failure to take steps to prevent or stop World War I. Only one socialist party had taken any direct and successful action, after first seizing the reins of government, and that was of course the Bolshevik group in Russia. Their example split the post war socialist parties of Germany, Italy, and France.

The French schism occurred at the national congress held at Tours in 1920. More than half the delegates seceded to form the Communist party. This new organization certainly did not conquer the labor movement through a process of open and official affiliation, but its operatives immediately began to infiltrate and obtain positions of leadership which they have held to this day. The continuing non-political nature of the labor movement thus has preserved the division, it has caused labor to continue to stand aside and view with profound and cynical distrust the workings of their democratic republican government. At the same time this stand has fortified the communist grip on the unions. Attempts by the Catholics and the non-communist left to compete with the general Federation of Labor do not in this context hold out much hope of breaking the communist hold.

Thus the social divisions of France that began with the great Revolution continue, a cancerous, incurable ill. They form part of the substance of the contempt in which many Frenchmen hold the political status quo. They undermine the loyalty and the enthusiasm necessary for the defense of country and government. They must to a large degree be held accountable for the

disaster of 1940 and for the continuing and disturbing feebleness of the sick man in the Seine.

Au Revoir, Saint-Simon . . .

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and also set him almost impossible tasks in the way of improving the court-precedence of the ambassador of France to the Spanish court (which nevertheless our hero fulfilled) while the regular ambassador of France tried to sabotage the work of the ambassador-extraordinary. Moreover, Saint-Simon spoke no Spanish and was occasionally in difficult straits when his loving punctiliousness in paying the calls of etiquette, giving high personages "what was due to them," brought him to a tête à tête with a Spaniard who did not speak French.

The ambassador-extraordinary did succeed in his mission and moreover obtained for himself and his second son the rank of Grandee of Spain and for his elder son induction into the chivalric order of the Golden Fleece. The Marshall, Duke of Berwick, illegitimate son of James II and soldier scarcely inferior to Marlborough whose natural nephew he was, Marlborough's sister Arabella Churchill being Berwick's mother, had established his son, the Duke of Liria, in Spain. Saint-Simon was on good terms with Berwick and so received much kindness and an introduction to Spanish court customs from Liria. The latter, by the way, was a much better linguist than Saint-Simon, who mentions only Latin as a foreign language he could manage. Liria could speak a variety of tongues, even the Gaelic.

What would Saint-Simon think of modern society? Alas, he might decide that "plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose." In the matter of human relations, for example, there is probably not nearly as much difference as might appear on first sight between the servants of a modern corporation or other large organization in the United States and the courtiers of Versailles as Saint-Simon saw them. The expressions "He is a good mixer" and "Il est très liant" may mean just about the same thing. Some dukes, even, says our authority, were "low courtiers, of a baseness that went as far as courting the lackeys." Traits which we amiably dismiss as human do not look so pleasant under the microscope of a Saint-Simon.

It is misleading, however, to speak as though there could be several, nay, a whole class of Saint-Simons when his claim to uniqueness is practically self-evident. Only

Tacitus at once occurs to the reader as rivalling Saint-Simon in the art of making the definitive word-picture of an individual. In one way the latter's claim is higher than that of Tacitus. Owing to the loss of the memoirs of his age we have little wherewith to check the accuracy of the author of the *Annals* and the *Histories*. On the other hand, from the last third of Louis XIV's reign and from the Regency which succeeded it, as well as from previ-

ous periods to which Saint-Simon refers, dozens of memoirs survive. For example, the "Grande Mademoiselle" wrote hers and singularly lacking in merit our author found them. Such memoirs exist and may occasionally be read but the portraits etched by gall on a metal more lasting than bronze by the second Duke of Saint-Simon stand, promising like Horace's poems to outlast the Pyramids. Au revoir, Saint-Simon.

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