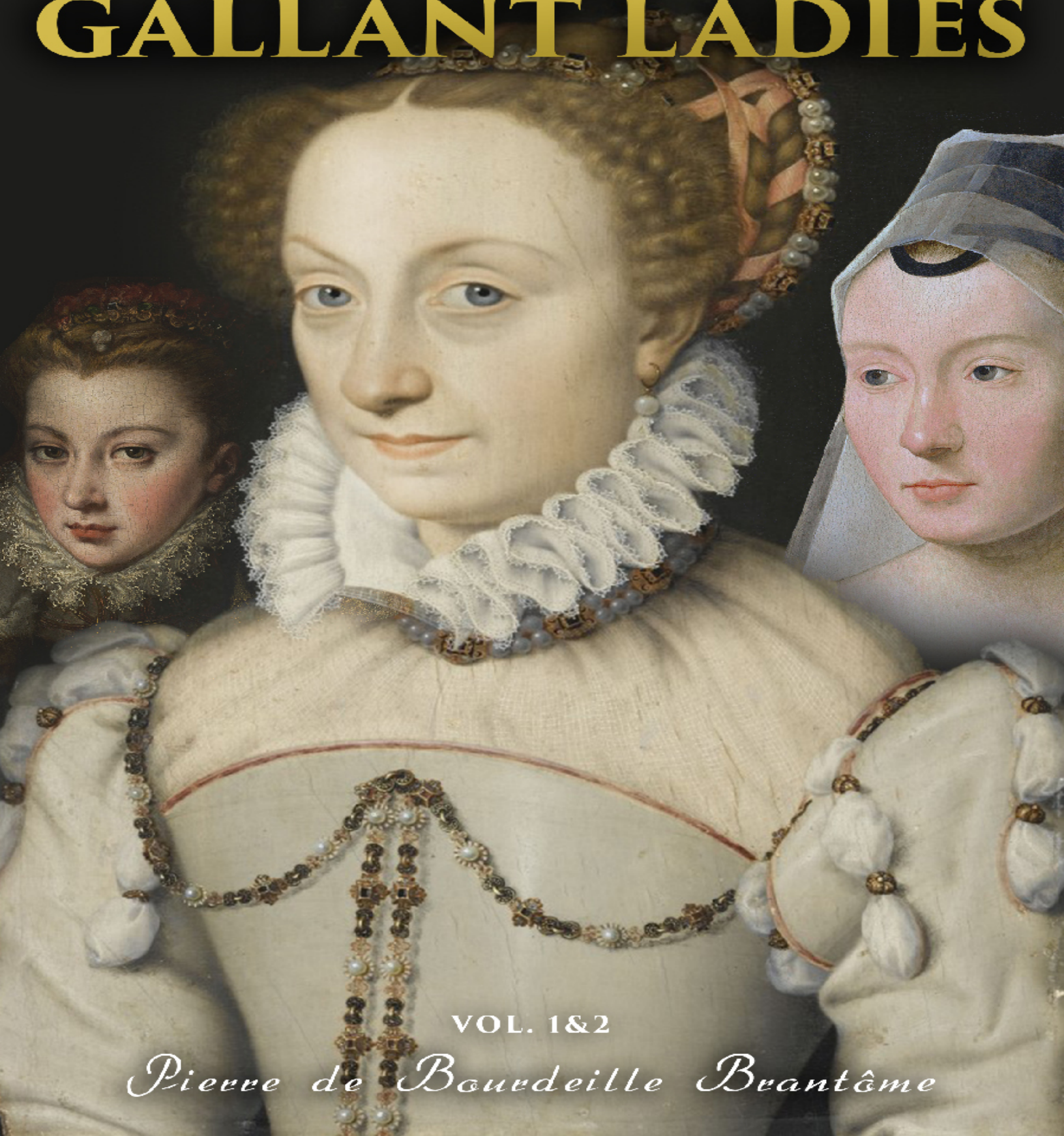


LIVES OF FAIR AND GALLANT LADIES



VOL. 1&2

Pierre de Bourdeille Brantôme

Pierre de Bourdeille Brantôme

Lives of Fair and Gallant Ladies (Vol. 1&2)

The Most Influential Women in Medieval France

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DEDICATION TO MONSEIGNEUR LE DUC D'ALENÇON OF BRABANT AND COUNT OF FLANDERS

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SON AND BROTHER OF OUR FRENCH KINGS^{[1](#)}

MY GRACIOUS LORD,

Seeing how you have full often done me the honour at Court to converse with me in great privy of sundry jests and merry tales, the which are so familiar and ready with you they may well be said to grow apace before men's very eyes in your Lordship's mouth, so great your wit is and so keen and subtile, and your speech the same, and right eloquent to boot,—for this cause have I set me to indite these discourses, such as they be, to the best of my poor ability, to the end that in this wise some of them may please you, making the time to pass lightly and reminding you of me in your conversations, wherewith erstwhile you have honoured me as much as any gentleman of all the Court.

To you then, my Lord, do I dedicate this present book, and do beseech you fortify the same with your name and authority, till that I may find leisure to attend to discourses of a more serious content. Of such I pray you note one in especial, the which I have all but finished, wherein I do deduce a comparison of six great Princes and Captains that

be to-day abroad in this our Christendom, to wit: the King Henri III. your brother, Your Highness' self, the King of Navarre your brother-in-law, the Duc de Guise, the Duc de Maine, and the Prince of Parma, making record for each one of you of your noblest deeds of valour and high emprise, of your excellencies and exploits, the full tale and complement whereof I do resign to others better qualified than I to indite the same.

Meanwhile, My Lord, I do beseech God to bless you always more and more in your greatness, happiness and nobility.

And I am for all time

Your very humble and very obedient subject and very loving servant.

BOURDEILLE.²

REGRETTING THE DEATH OF THE DUC D'ALENÇON

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I had already dedicated this second Part of my Discourses on Women to the aforesaid my Gracious Lord d'Alençon, the while he yet lived,—seeing how he oft did me the honour to be my friend and to converse very privily with me, and was ever right curious to be informed of mirthful tales. Wherefore, albeit his generous and valorous and most noble body hath fallen on the field of honour, I have not thought good for that to recall my erstwhile dedication; but I do repeat and renew the same to his illustrious ashes and noble spirit, of the valorousness whereof and of his great deeds and high achievements I do treat in their turn among those of the other great Princes and Captains. For of a truth he was indeed a great Prince and a great Captain, if such an one there was ever,—the more so considering he is dead so untimeously.

Enough of such serious themes; let us discourse a while of merrier matters.

HISTORICAL NOTE

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Pierre de Bourdeille, Abbé de Brantôme et d'André, Vicomte de Bourdeille, was born in Périgord, in 1527, in the reign of François I. He early took up the career of arms, serving under his friend François de Guise, Duke of Lorraine, as his Captain, the same who was killed before Orleans by Poltrot de Méré. Afterwards he came up to Court, and was Gentleman of the Bedchamber under Charles IX., who showed him much favour. On the King's death he retired to his estates, where he composed his Works. These are: *Vies des hommes illustres et des grands capitaines françois*; *Vies des grands capitaines étrangers*; *Vies des dames illustres*; *Vies des dames galantes*; *Anecdotes touchant le duel*; and *Rodomontades et jurements des Espagnols*.—All that really concerns us here is the *Vies des dames galantes*. It is especially from this point of view that we propose to speak of Pierre de Bourdeille, known almost exclusively to posterity under the name of Brantôme. As to his Essays in the manner of Plutarch, these do not come into our purview at all. Besides which, I am of opinion, it is in this book that Brantôme appears under his most characteristic aspect, and that it is here we may best learn to know and appreciate his genius.

A gentleman of family, acknowledged and treated as kinsman by Queen Margot, wife of Henry IV., living habitually in the society of the most famous men of his time, a contemporary of Rabelais, Marot and Ronsard, a

sincere but unbigoted Catholic, a man of exceptional literary endowments, Brantôme is one of the happiest representatives of the French mind in the XVIth Century.

It is the period of the Renaissance,—the days when Europe resounds with the fame of our gallant King Francis I. and his deeds of prowess in love and war, the days when Titian and Primaticcio were leaving behind on French palace walls immortal traces of their genius, when Jean Goujon was carving his admirable figures round the fountains of the Louvre and across its front, when Rabelais was uttering his stupendous guffaw, that was the Comedy of all human life, when Marot and Ronsard were writing their graceful stanzas, when the fair “Marguerite des Marguerites,”—the Queenly Pearl of Pearls,—was telling her delightful tales of love and adventure in the *Heptameron*.—Then comes the death of Francis I. His son mounts the throne. Protestantism makes serious progress in France, and Montgomery precipitates the succession of Francis II. This last wears the crown for one year only, succumbing to a fatal inflammation of the ears. Then it is Mary Stuart leaves France for ever, and with streaming eyes, as she watches the beloved shores where she has been Queen of France fade out of sight, sings sad and slow:

Adieu, plaisant pays de France!

And now we find seated on the throne of France a young Monarch of a strange, wild, unattractive exterior. His eye is pale, colourless and shifty, seeming to be void of all expression. He trusts no man, and has no real assurance of his power as Sovereign; he looks long and suspiciously at

those about him before speaking, rarely bestows his confidence and believes himself constantly surrounded by spies. 'Tis a nervous, timid child,—'tis Charles IX. History treats him with an extreme severity; and the "St. Bartholomew" has thrown a lurid light over this unhappy Prince's figure. He allowed the massacres on the fatal nights of the 24th and 25th of August, and even shot down the flying Protestants from his palace roof. Without going into the interminable discussions of historians as to this last alleged fact, which is as strongly denied by some authorities as it is maintained by others, I am not one of those who say hard things of Charles IX. It is more a sentiment of pity I feel for him,—this monarch who loved Brantôme and Marot, and who protected Henri IV. against Catherine de Medici. I see him surrounded by brothers whom he had learned to distrust. The Duc d'Alençon is on the spot, a legitimate object of detestation by reason of the subterranean intrigues he is for ever hatching against his person; while his other brother Henri (afterwards Henri III.), Catherine's favourite son, is in Poland, kept sedulously informed of every variation in the Prince's always feeble health, waiting impatiently for the hour when he must hurry back to France to secure the crown he covets. Then his sister's vicious outbreaks are a source of constant pain and anxiety to him; and last but not least there is his mother Catherine de Medici, an incubus that crushed out his very life-breath. He cannot forget the tortures his brother Francis suffered from his mysterious malady, and his premature death after a single year's reign.

Catherine hated Mary Stuart, his young Queen, whose only fault was to have exaggerated in herself all the frailties together with all the physical perfections of a woman; and dreadful words had been whispered with bated breath about the Queen Mother. An Italian, deprived of all power while her husband lived, insulted by a proud and beautiful favourite, yet knowing herself well fitted for command, she had brought up her children with ideas of respect and submission to her will they were never able to throw off. The ill-will she bore her daughter-in-law was the cause of all those accusations History has listened to over readily. But Charles, a nervous, affectionate child, whose natural impulses however had been chilled by his mother's influence and the indifference of his father Henri II., was thrown back on himself, and grew up timid, suspicious and morose. The frantic love of Francis for his fascinating Queen, the cold dignity of Catherine in face of slights and cruel mortifications, her bitter disappointment during her eldest son's reign, her Italian origin (held then even more than now to imply an implacable determination to avenge all injuries), her indifference to the sudden and appalling death of the young King, the insinuations of her enemies,—all combined to make a profound impression on Charles, giving a furtive and, if we may say so, a haggard bent to his character. Presently, seated on the throne of France, Huguenots and Catholics all about him, exposed to the insults and pretensions of the Guise faction on the one hand and that of Coligny on the other, dragged now this way now that between the two, yet all the while instinctively drawn toward the Catholic side by ancestral faith and his mother's

counsels no less than by reasons of state, Charles signed the fatal order authorizing the Massacre of the Saint Bartholomew.

Was the young King's action justifiable or no? It is no business of ours to discuss the question here; but much may be alleged in his excuse. Again whether he did actually fire on the terrified Protestants from the Louvre is a point vehemently debated,—but one it in no way concerns us here to decide. There is no doubt however that, dating from those two terrible nights, a steady decline declared itself in his health and vitality. In no long time he died; and his brother Henri, Duke of Anjou and King of Poland, duly warned of his approaching end, arrived in hot haste to take over the crown to which he was next in succession.

This period of political and religious ferment was no less the period *par excellence* of gallantry. In its characteristics it bears considerable resemblance to the days of the Empire. At both epochs love was quick, fierce and violent. Hurry was the mark of the times. In the midst of these everlasting struggles between Huguenot and Catholic, who could be sure of to-morrow? So men made it a point to indulge no attachment that was too serious,—for them love was become a mere question of choice and quantity; while women avoided a grand passion with a fervour worthy of a better cause. If ever a deep and earnest passion does show itself, it is an exception, an anomaly; if we find a woman stabbing her faithless husband to death on catching him in the arms of another, let us not for an instant suppose 'tis the fierce stirring of a loving heart which in the frenzy of its jealousy avenges the wrong it has suffered,—to die

presently of sorrow and remorse, or at the least to suffer long and sorely. This act of daring,—so carefully recorded by the chroniclers of the time,—is only the effect of strong self-love cruelly wounded. But powerful as this feeling may be, it would scarcely be adequate to explain so energetic an act, if we did not remember how frequently ladies in the XVIth Century were exposed to scenes of bloodshed. The dagger and the sword were as familiar to their eyes as the needle; and Brantôme has devoted a whole Discourse,—his Fifth, to courageous dames, and seems positively to scorn weak and timid women! How opposite is this to the sentiment of the present day, where one of the charms of womanhood is held to consist in her having nothing in common with man and being for ever in need of his protection. A few isolated cases then excepted, there existed between men and women nothing better than what Chamfort has wittily defined as “l'échange de deux fantaisies et le contact de deux épidermes,”—in other words gallantry pure and simple.

This then was the atmosphere our Author breathed. His life offers nothing specially striking in the way of incident. No need for me to take him from the arms of his nurse, to follow each of his steps through life and piously close his eyes in death. He served his time without special distinction or applause at the Court of Charles IX. In all he did, he showed so modest a reserve that, but for his Works, his very existence would have remained unknown. He is not like Bussy-Rabutin, the incidents of whose wild and wicked life filled and defaced a big book, or like Tallemant, whose diary, if diary it can be called, was written day by day and recounted each day's exploits. Brantôme's life and work

leave little trace of his own personality, beyond the impression of a genial, smiling, witty man of the world. I will be as plain and discreet as himself, and will make no effort to separate the Author from his book.

Brantôme possesses one of those happy, gentle, well ordered natures, which systematically avoid every form of excess and exaggeration. His book *Des Dames Galantes* is from beginning to end a protest against immoderate passion. It is above all a work of taste. Its seven Discourses are devoted exclusively to stories of love and passion, yet a man must be straightlaced indeed to feel any sort of repulsion. Another extraordinary merit! in spite of the monotony of the subject matter, everlastingly the same, the reader's attention never flags, and one tale read, he is irresistibly drawn on to make acquaintance with the next.

Such praise, I am aware, is very high; and especially when we possess such masterpieces in this *genre* as the Tales of Boccaccio, of Pietro Aretino, some of those of Ariosto, those of Voltaire, the short stories of Tallemant des Réaux and the indiscretions of the *Histoire amoureuse des Gaules*. I name only the most familiar examples. Of course all these works do not offer a complete resemblance to the *Vies des Dames Galantes*, but they all belong to the same race and family. I propose to say a few passing words of each of these productions.

The most remarkable among all these chroniclers of the frailties of the female heart is undoubtedly Boccaccio. Pietro Aretino has done himself an irreparable wrong by writing in such a vein that no decent man dare confess to having read him. Ariosto is a story-teller only by the way, but then he is

worthy of all imitation. The *Heptameron* is a collection of stories the chief value of which consists in a sensibility and charming grace that never fail. Tallemant tells a tale of gallantry between two daintily worded sentiments. Voltaire in this as in all departments shows an incontestable superiority of wit and *verve*. There is nothing new in La Fontaine; 'tis always the same wondrous charm, so simple in appearance, so deep in reality. As to Bussy, a man of the world and a gentleman, but vicious, spiteful and envious, his *Histoire amoureuse* is his revenge on mankind, a deliberate publication of extravagant personalities flavoured with wit.

Boccaccio, to say nothing of his striking originality, possesses other merits of the very highest order. The sorrows of unhappy love are told with genuine pathos, while lovers' wiles and the punishments they meet with at once raise a smile and provoke a resolve to profit by such valuable lessons. True Dioneo's quaint narratives are not precisely fit for ladies' ears; yet so daintily are they recounted, the most *risqué* episodes so cleverly sketched in, it is impossible to accuse them of indelicacy. An entire absence of bitterness, a genial indulgence for human weakness, a hearty admiration of women and a doctrine of genial complaisance as the only possible philosophy of life, these are the qualities that make the *Decameron* the masterpiece of this kind of composition.

Brantôme has not the same preponderating influence in literature that Boccaccio possesses, but he comes next after him. The "Lives of Gallant Ladies" are not, any more than the *Nove//i*, inventions pure and simple; they are anecdotes, reminiscences. The great merit of these Tales of Boccaccio is

the same as that of Balzac's Novels or Molière's Comedies, —to fix a character, to define a phase of manners in the life of the Author's day; in a word to create by induction and analogy a living being, hitherto unnoticed by every-day observers, but instantly recognized as lifelike. This is the true spirit of assimilation and generalisation,—the work of *genius*. Well! as for Brantôme, he is a man of talent and wit, not genius. We claim no more; genius is not so common as might be supposed, if we hearkened to all the acclamations daily raised round sundry statues,—but plaster after all, however cunningly contrived to look like bronze.

Brantôme's fame is already firmly established. To live for two centuries and a half without boring his readers; above all to be a book that scholars, men of sober learning and of literary taste, still read in these latter days, is a success worthy of some earnest thought. This chronicle of gallantry, this collection, as the Author himself describes it, of happy tricks played on each other by men and women, possesses a quite exquisite flavour of youth and freshness,—the whole told with a good nature, a *verve*, an unconventionality, that are inexpressibly charming. You feel the characters living and breathing through the delicate, pliant style. You see the very glance of a woman's eye; you hear her ardent, or cunningly alluring, words. For such as can read with a heart unstirred, the book is a series of delicious surprises.

Strong predispositions, nay! positive prejudices, stand in the way of the proper appreciation of our Author. Such is the Puritanism of language and prudery of manners in our day, it would seem *prima facie* an impossible task to popularize Brantôme. By common agreement we speak of the *esprit*

français as distinguished from the *esprit gaulois*, the latter term being used to denote a something more frank and outspoken. I heartily wish the division were a true one; for I can never forget I belong to this mighty Nineteenth Century. But for my own part, on a careful consideration of the facts, I should make a triple rather than a twofold classification. There would be the *esprit gaulois*, the *esprit français*, *not* the spirit of the age one atom, I must be allowed to observe, *and* thirdly a certain spirit of curling-irons and kid gloves and varnished boots, a sort of bastard, a cross between French and English, equally shocked at *Tristram Shandy* and the *Physiologie du Mariage* as coarse and immoral productions. *This* is our spirit, if spirit we have.

The two first types have a real and positive value; but the third is the sole and only one nowadays permitted or current as legal tender,—the others are much too outspoken. Well! I will hold my tongue, and mind my own business. An epoch is a mighty ugly customer to come to blows with. I remember Him of Galilee.

The genius of Rabelais was all instinct with this same *esprit gaulois*—a big, bold, virile spirit, breaking out in resounding guffaws, and crude, outspoken verities, equally unable and unwilling to soften down or gloss over anything, innocent of every species of periphrasis and affectation. It is genius in a merry mood rising above the petty conventionalities of speech,—often reminding us of Molière under like circumstances. Let fools be shocked, if they please; sensible men are ashamed only in presence of positive immorality and deliberate vice. The *esprit gaulois* is the spirit of primitive man going straight to its end,

regardless of fetter or law. The *esprit français* is equally natural; but then it has acquired a certain degree of civilisation. It has less width of scope; it has learned the little concessions men are bound to make one another, having associated longer with them. It has left hoddens grey, and taken to the silken doublet and cap of velvet, and rubs elbows with men of rank. It has lost nothing of its good sense and good temper; but it feels no longer bound in every case to blurt its thought right out; already it leaves something to be guessed at. It is all a question of civilisation and surroundings. But above and beyond this, it must be allowed to be conditioned by the essential distinction between genius and talent. The former does what it likes, 'tis lord and master; the latter is, by its very nature, a creature of compromise.

Brantôme possesses all the *verve* and brightness of a genuine Frenchman. All the conditions of life are highly favourable for him; he is rich and noble, while intelligence and wit are stamped on his very face. He wins his first spurs under François de Guise, whose protégé he is; when he has had enough of war, he comes to Court. There he receives the most flattering of receptions, every Catholic Noble extending him the hand of good fellowship. His family connections are such, that on the very steps of the throne is a voice ready to call him cousin, and a charming woman's lips to smile on him with favour. 'Tis a good start; henceforth it is for his moral and intellectual qualities to achieve the career so auspiciously begun.

As I have said already, Brantôme is the finished type of a Frenchman of quality. Well taught and witty, brave and

enterprising, capable of appreciating honesty and worth whether in thought or deed, instinctively hating tyrants and tyrannical violence, and avoiding them like the plague, blessing the happy day on which his mother gave him birth, light-hearted and sceptical, he unites in himself everything that makes life go easy. Be sure no over-bearing passion will ever disturb the serenity of his existence. He has too much good sense to let his happiness depend on the chimerical figments of the imagination, and too much real courtesy ever to reproach a woman with her frailties. The world and all its ways seem good to him. In very truth, he is not far from Pangloss's conclusion,—Pangloss, the perfect type of what a man must be so as never to suffer,—“Well! well! all is for the best in this best of possible worlds.” If woman deceive, she offers so many compensations in other ways that 'tis a hundred times better to have her as she is than not at all. Men are sinners; again most true, as an abstract proposition, but if only we know how to regulate our conduct judiciously, their sinful spite will never touch us. Easy to see how, with this bent of character and these convictions, Brantôme was certain to find friendly faces wherever he went. The favourable impression his person and position had produced, his good sense completed.

The King took delight in the society of this finished gentleman with his easy and agreeable manners. In the midst of the numberless vexations he was surrounded by, one of his greatest distractions was the gay, lively conversation of this noble lord, from whom he had nothing to fear in the way of hostile speech or angry words. The Duc d'Alençon was another intimate, who putting aside for a

moment his schemes of ambition, would hear and tell tales of love and intrigue, laughing the louder in proportion to the audacity and success of the trick played by the heroine. And so it was with all; the result being that Brantôme quickly acquired the repute of being the wittiest man in France. All men and all parties were on friendly terms with him. The Huguenots forgot he was a Catholic, and made an ally of him. Without religious fanaticism or personal ambition, honoured and sought after by the great, yet quite unspoiled and always simple-hearted and good-natured, equally free from prejudice and pride, he conciliated the good will of all. Throughout the whole of Brantôme's career, we never hear of his making a single enemy; and be it remembered he lived in the very hottest of the storm and stress, political and religious, of the Sixteenth Century. Let us add to complete our characterisation, a quite incalculable merit,—a discretion such as cannot be found even in the annals of Chivalry, a period indeed when lovers were only too fond of making a show of their ladies' favours. This is the one and only point where Brantôme is inconsistent with the true French type of character, mostly as eager to declare the fair innamorata's name as to appreciate the proofs of love she may have given.

Francis I. is but just dead, we must remember. His reign has been called the Renaissance, and not without good reason. Under him begins that light, graceful bearing, that elegance of manner, that politeness of address, which henceforth will make continuous advances to greater and greater refinement. Rabelais is the last expression of that old, unsoftened and unmitigated French speech, from which

at a later date Matthieu Regnier will occasionally borrow one of his picturesque phrases. In the same reign costume first becomes dainty. Men's minds grow finical like their dress; and a new mode of expression was imperatively required to match the new elegance of living. The change was effected almost without effort; 'twas a mere question of external sensibility. The body, now habituated to silk and velvet, grows more sensitive and delicate, and intellect and language follow suit. The correspondence was inevitable. So much for the mental revolution. As for the moral side, manners gained in frankness no doubt; but otherwise things were neither better nor worse than before. It has always seemed to us a strange proceeding, to take a particular period of History, as writers so often will, and declare,—'At this epoch morals were more relaxed than ever before or since.'

Now under Francis I., and by his example, manners acquired a happy freedom, an unstudied ease, his Courtiers were sure to turn to good advantage. A King is always king of the fashion. Judging by the two celebrated lines³ he wrote one day on a pane in one of the windows at the Castle of Chambord, Francis I., a Prince of wit and a true Frenchman, could discover no better way of punishing women for their fickleness and frivolity than that of copying their example. Every pretty woman stirred a longing to possess in the ample and facile heart of this Royal Don Juan. They were easy and happy loves,—without remorse and without bitterness, and never deformed with tears. So far did he push his rights as a Sovereign, that there is said to have

been at least one instance of rivalry between him and his own son. He died, as he had lived, a lover,—and a victim to love.

Under Henri II., Diane de Poitiers is the most prominent figure on the stage; following the gallant leadership of the King's mistress, the Court continues the same mode of life and type of manners which distinguished the preceding reign.

Of the reign of Francis II., we need only speak *en passant*. During the short while he and Mary Stuart were exhausting the joys of a brief married life, there was no time for further change.

But now we come to a far more noteworthy and important period. While the Queen Mother and the Guises are silently preparing their *coup d'état*; while the Huguenots, light-hearted and unsuspecting, are dancing and making merry in the halls of the Louvre; while Catholics join them in merry feasts at the taverns then in vogue, and ladies allow no party spirit to intrude in their love affairs; while the Pré-aux-Clercs is the meeting-ground where men of honour settle their quarrels, and the happy man, the man who receives the most caressing marks of female favour, is he that has killed most, at a time like this the wits are keen and the spirit as reckless as the courage. With such a code of morals it was a difficult matter for any serious sentiment to survive. Women soon began to feel the same scorn of life that men professed. The strongest were falling day by day, and emotion and sensibility could not but be blunted. Then think of the crowd of eager candidates to seize the vacant

reins of Government, and the steeple-chase existence of those days becomes intelligible and even excusable.

In all this movement Brantôme was necessarily involved, but he kept invariably in the back-ground, in a convenient semi-obscurity. But we must by no means assume that this prudence on the Vicomte de Bourdeille's part proceeded from any lack of energy; this would be doing him a quite undeserved injustice. He had given proofs of his courage; and Abbé as he was, his sword on hip spoke as proudly as the most doughty ruffler's. But a man of peace, he avoided provoking quarrels; he was a good Catholic, and Religion has always discountenanced the shedding of blood.

The best proof of the position he was able to win at Court is this Book of Fair and Gallant Ladies which has come down to us as its result. Amid all the gay and boisterous fêtes of the time, and the thousand lights of the Louvre, men and women both smiled graciously on our Author. His perfect discretion was perhaps his chief merit in the eyes of all these love-sick swains and garrulous young noodles. The instant a lover received an assignation from his fair one, his joy ran over in noisy fanfaronnades. A happy man is brim full of good-fellowship, and eager for a confidant. Well! if at that moment the gallant Abbé chanced to pass, what more natural than for the fortunate gentleman to seize and buttonhole him? Then he would recount his incomparable good fortune, adding a hundred piquant details, and drunk with his own babbling, enumerate one after the other the most minute particulars of his intrigue, ending by letting out the name of the husband at whose expense he had been enjoying himself. Love is so simple-minded and so

charmingly selfish! Every lover seriously thinks each casual acquaintance must of course sympathise actively in his feelings. A bosom friend he must have!—no matter who, if only he can tell him, always of course under formal promise of concealment, the secret he should have kept locked in his own bosom. Nor should we look over harshly on this weakness; too much happiness, no less than too much unhappiness, will stifle the bosom that cannot throw off any of its load upon another. 'Tis the world-old story of the reeds and the secret that must be told. Self-expansion is a natural craving; without it, men grow misanthropes and die of an aneurism of the heart.

This brings us to the book of the *Dames galantes*. When eventually he retired to his estates, Brantôme took up the pen as a relief to his ennui. Among all the works he composed, this one must certainly have pleased him best, because it so exactly corresponds with his own character and ways of thought. But to write these lives of Gallant Ladies was an enterprise not without its dangers. A volume of anecdotes of the sort cannot be written without there being considerable risk in the process of falling into the coarse and commonplace vulgarities that surround such a subject. Style, wit, philosophy, gaiety, all in a degree seldom met with, were indispensable for success; yet Brantôme has succeeded. This book, of the *Vies des Dames galantes*, offers a close analogy with another celebrated study in the same *genre*, viz., Balzac's *Physiologie du mariage*. Both works deal with the same subject, the ways and wiles of women, married, widow and maid, under the varying conditions of, (1) the Sixteenth Century, and (2) the Present

Day. But the mode of treatment is different; and this difference made Brantôme's task a harder one than the modern Author's. His short stories of a dozen lines, each revealing woman in one of those secret and confidential situations only open to the eye of husband or lover, might easily be displeasing, or worse still tiresome. Brantôme has avoided all these shoals and shallows. Each little tale has its own interest, always fresh and bright.

Moreover a lofty morality runs through the narratives. At first sight the word morality may seem a joke applied to such matters; but it is easy to disconcert the scoffer merely by asking him to read our Author. To support my contention, there is no need to quote any particular story or stories; all alike have their charm, and the work must be perused in its entirety to appreciate the truth of the high praise I give it. Every reader, on finally closing the book, cannot but feel a genuine enthusiasm. The delicate wit of the whole recital passes imagination. On every page we meet some physical trait or some moral remark that rivets the attention. The author puts his hand on some curiosity or perversity, and instantly stops to examine it; while at the same time the propriety of his tone allures the most sedate reader. The discussion of each point, in which the *pros* and *cons* are always balanced one against the other in the wittiest and most thorough manner, is interesting to the highest degree. In one word the book is a code and compendium of Love. All is classified, studied, analysed; each argument is supported by an appropriate anecdote,—an example,—a Life.

The mere arrangement of the contents displays consummate skill. The Author has divided his *Vies des*

Dames galantes into seven Discourses, as follows:

In the First, he treats “Of ladies which do make love, and their husbands cuckolds;”

In the Second, he expatiates “On the question which doth give the more content in love, whether touching, seeing or speaking;”

In the Third, he speaks “Concerning the Beauty of a fine leg, and the virtue the same doth possess;”

In the Fourth, he discourses “Concerning old dames as fond to practise love as ever the young ones be;”

In the Fifth, he tells “How Fair and honourable ladies do love brave and valiant men, and brave men courageous women;”

In the Sixth, he teaches, “How we should never speak ill of ladies,—and of the consequences of so doing;”

In the Seventh, he asks, “Concerning married women, widows and maids—which of these be better than the other to love.”

This list of subjects, displaying as it does, all the leading ideas of the book, leaves me little to add. I have no call to go into a detailed appreciation of the Work under its manifold aspects as a gallery of portraits; my task was merely to judge of its general physiognomy and explain its *raison d’être*; and this I have attempted to do.

I will only add by way of conclusion a few words to show the especial esteem we should feel for Brantôme on this ground, that his works contain nothing to corrupt good morals. Each narrative is told simply and straightforwardly, for what it is worth. The author neither embellishes nor exaggerates. Moreover the species of corollary he clinches it

with is a philosophical and physiological deduction of the happiest and most apposite kind in the great majority of instances,—some witty and ingenious remark that never offends either against good sense or good taste. If now and again the reader is tempted to shy, he should in justice put this down to the diction of the time, which had not yet adopted that tone of arrogant virtue it nowadays affects. Then there was a large number of words in former days which connoted nothing worse than something ridiculous and absurd.

Then as to beauty of language, we must go roundabout ways to reach many a point they marched straight to in old days. Brantôme at any rate is a purist of style,—one of the most striking and most correct writers I have ever read. It is a great and genuine discovery readers will make, if they do not know him already; if they do, they will be renewing acquaintance with an old friend, at once witty and delightful. In either case, 'tis a piece of luck not to be despised.

H. VIGNEAU.

FIRST DISCOURSE

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Of Ladies which do make Love, and their Husbands cuckolds.⁴

1.

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Seeing 'tis the ladies have laid the foundation of all cuckoldry, and how 'tis they which do make all men cuckolds, I have thought it good to include this First Discourse in my present Book of Fair Ladies,—albeit that I shall have occasion to speak therein as much of men as of women. I know right well I am taking up a great work, and one I should never get done withal, if that I did insist on full completeness of the same. For of a truth not all the paper in the Records Office of Paris would hold in writing the half of the histories of folk in this case, whether women or men. Yet will I set down what I can; and when I can no more, I will e'en give my pen—to the devil, or mayhap to some good fellow-comrade, which shall carry on the tale.

Furthermore must I crave indulgence if in this Discourse I keep not due order and alignment, for indeed so great is the multitude of men and women so situate, and so manifold and divers their condition, that I know not any Commander and Master of War so skilled as that he could range the same in proper rank and meet array.