

THE ABBÉ DE CHOISY.

LIBERTINE, MISSIONARY, ACADEMICIAN.



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THE investigation of the historical features connected with a certain phase in the career of the Abbé de Choisy, namely that comprehended in his journey to Siam in 1685 and 1686, in the character of an ecclesiastical and diplomatic missionary, led the present writer to make some study of the other two phases which, with the one mentioned, filled up the life of that most remarkable man.

SO far as we can discover no notice of de Choisy has appeared in English and it would seem, therefore, well worth while to make some investigation into a personality and a life which, as Sainte-Beuve has put it, presented a comedy of a most diverse and least probable kind. Such an enquiry should cover the whole ground traversed by his many sided and ill-balanced nature, for de Choisy was a man who, without any very striking ability and certainly without any great depth of character, yet managed to play successfully and to his heart's content three parts, albeit the first of these was one of which he had every reason to be, but never was, ashamed.

"AS a voluptuary, as an apostle of Christianity and as an Academician, de Choisy had it in him to attract from those with whom he came in contact the attention, the love and the personal admiration that his heart craved for, although there was ever lacking the esteem and approval to which he was, unfortunately for his good name, too indifferent.

HE was on terms of friendship with the eminent Cardinals, de Retz and de Bouillon, the latter a close and life long friend; he was an associate with those agreeable wits and authors, Fontenelle and Perrault; he was converted and loved by the Abbé de Dangeau,

the brother of the Memoirist, and he formed a quick and mutual attachment with that brilliant but bitter satirist the Count de Bussy-Rabutin. For much public recognition during his lifetime and for much forgiveness the Abbé had no doubt to thank his birth and position in the Court circles of Louis XIV, but the fact remains that some part of his work as a writer has received praise of no light order at the hands of eminent critics. The Marquis d'Argenson Prime Minister of France and a relation of de Choisy, in his "Essays written after the manner of de Montagne," devotes some space to the character and writings of his kinsman, much of whose historical work he recommends for perusal. Sainte Beuve has devoted to the Abbé one of his immortal *Causeries*, while Paul Lacroix, (the "Bibliophile Jacob"), and M. de Lescure have each penned an agreeable *Avant-Propos* to reprints of one or other of his works. In 1888, M. de Lescure, when editing for the Librairie des Bibliophiles, a new edition of the "Mémoires de l'Abbé de Choisy pour servir à l'Histoire de Louis XIV" stated that that work had been chosen to take the first place in a select series of Mémoires and spoke of it as almost a master-piece of its kind and as one of the jewels and triumphs of French genius and literature.

Before giving a slight biographical sketch of the Abbé it should be stated that most of the salient points of his career have been derived by biographers and essayists from his own writings, and it is also from these that must be drawn the chief outlines of his bizarre and extraordinary character.

François Timoleon de Choisy was born in Paris in 1644, the year being the second of the reign of Louis XIV. His father had been Chancellor of Gaston, brother of Louis XIII, and had made some reputation in carrying out certain political negotiations, while his mother "a masterful woman" as her son describes her, was a distinguished adherent of the royal house, and being likewise thoroughly worldly never failed to impress on her three sons, of whom the Abbé was the youngest, the advisability and advantage of attaching themselves to the highest and most influential people of the Court. She is even credited with having, on one occasion, advised Louis XIV himself to seek her own company for instruction in the conduct of life; certainly the King paid her the

compliment of following her advice and treated her with great consideration and kindness, for had she not put the finishing touches to his "education amoureuse" while he was still a young man?

A vain as well as an intriguing woman, Madame de Choisy conceived the weird idea of dressing her youngest son as a girl, with the deliberate intention of thereby making herself appear more youthful by way of contrast with her childish looking offspring. She had the further motive of pleasing, by the flattery of imitation, Monsieur, the King's brother, who, as is well known, had been brought up by Mazarin in a most effeminate manner, for political reasons.

This unfortunate notion being actually carried out developed in the future churchman and historian a taste for masquerading as a woman, which lasted, if we are to believe all that is told of the Abbé, practically the whole of his life, while it undoubtedly suggested and facilitated his practice of libertinism. In 1763, through the influence of his mother, who wished him to devote his life to the church, he was given the Abbey de Saint Seine, in Burgundy, and in 1666, on the death of his mother he was left with the means to enter on the first chapter of his variegated career. Up to the age of 18 young de Choisy possessed and wore none but girls' clothing, for four years this was put aside for his proper attire, but when 22 years old, having lost his mother, a vista opened itself out before his eyes of unrestrained indulgence in that unnatural state of living as a woman which is explained by him as having been caused by an immense and overpowering love for being loved and for the admiration that attractive and beautiful women are able to draw to themselves. We shall be able to see something of his state of mind and attitude at this period from his own words, but there can be no doubt that success in his masquerade engendered, as time went on, the desire to make it something more than a mere display and rather the means to assist him in pursuing a systematic course of vice. It is to be remarked that the record of this period comes from his own narrative penned, as d'Argenson tells us, some time after he had quitted the singular and ridiculous life he had led. It would appear that moved by reflection or advice he obliterated from the manuscripts he left some of the worst pages dealing with that dissolute and unwholesome time, yet his kinsman

records the relation by the old Abbé of his early follies with an unspeakable pleasure. "I looked with astonishment," says the Marquis, "at a man whose whole life had been full of such strange improprieties."

We are told that the face and figure of the Abbé, as well as his lack of beard, lent themselves to the artifice by which he was able to play so well his feminine character, but must appear to a twentieth century mind as so amazing, so almost inexplicable, not to say ridiculous, is the kind of being which could find pleasure in posing as a woman and the state of society which could permit it. For it is to be noted that much of the Abbé's masquerading was done quite openly and in public, and it was only when the intention was more sinister—or, shall we say, when he desired to put forth his best efforts as an artist?—that the complete disguise of sex was adhered to.

For some years this mode of life was indulged in with all the zest of gaiety and light-heartedness with which the Abbé threw himself into everything he took in hand. It was not, however, without its humiliations, and a rebuke from the Duke de Montausier, the guardian or governor of the Dauphin, administered to de Choisy at the opera, and in the Dauphin's presence, drove him from Paris and induced him to travel.

"I admit," said the Duke to him, "I admit, Monsieur or Mademoiselle (for I do not know how you should be called) that you are beautiful. But truly, are you not ashamed to wear such clothes and to play the woman, when you are lucky enough not to be one? Go, go and hide yourself. Monsieur the Dauphin is disgusted to see you so."

"Pardon me", said the little Prince, then eleven years old. "I think he is as beautiful as an angel."

De Choisy now entered on what might be called the third scene of Act I of his drama. He visited England, travelled in Italy and spent some years in Venice and Rome, where, as he says, on the principle that one passion chases another away, he developed a propensity for gambling which, in accordance with his nature, was carried to excess, and he returned to France in

1676 a ruined man. Strict economy was now necessary, at least for a time, and he spent a few months at his Abbey. He also made the acquaintance of and stayed with the Count de Bussy-Rabutin, author of "*L'Histoire amoureuse des Gaules*," then in exile on his estate in Burgundy. A warm friendship sprang up between them and the Count advised him to give up play and become an author. The Abbé acted on this advice but not immediately. He returned to Paris, took up again his dissolute life there and thereby earned another rebuke, this time from Louis XIV himself, who ordered him to mend his ways. He was then thirty-two years old.

The Abbé's good fortune in the form of his life-long friend, the Cardinal de Bouillon, furnished an opportunity to leave France again. The two French Cardinals, de Retz and de Bouillon, who were deputed to proceed to Rome to take part in the election of a successor to Clement X, took de Choisy with them in an official capacity. In this way he found an opening to get behind the scenes in the selection and elevation of Innocent XI to the papal throne, this experience being perhaps his first introduction to serious diplomacy.

Little is recorded of the next few years but that there were relapses to early habits is evident, for it is stated that a long and dangerous illness, which occurred in 1683, was necessary to bring about the change required for a partial if not absolute quittance of the old for the new character he was about to assume. Having been converted during his sickness by his friend, the Abbé de Dangeau, a seceder from Protestantism, who remained in constant and devoted attendance at his bed-side, he collaborated with de Dangeau in the composition and publication of four religious dialogues, whose titles indicate the stress of his mind at that period.

It was about this time that the French Government decided to send a political mission to Siam, in which country that remarkable Greek adventurer, Constantine Phaulkon, by his skill and daring had gained considerable power, and had possessed himself of the goodwill and favour of the reigning monarch, himself a notable leader. It is an open question how far Phaulkon's ambitions

were carrying his hopes at that time, but it is certain that if not aspiring to regal power for himself, he was at least deeply intent on the establishment of cordial relations between France and Siam, to which the conversion of the King of Siam to Christianity might be a possible preliminary and an influential bait to French religious zeal. Louis XIV had already nominated the Chevalier de Chaumont as the first French ambassador to Siam when de Choisy heard of the mission and at once pictured himself at its head. Disappointed in this hope he succeeded, through the influence of Cardinal de Bouillon, in securing an appointment, the nature of which was his own suggestion, as missionary coadjutor to the political ambassador, and in March 1685, he set sail with de Chaumont for the East.

The Abbé had now entered on Act II of his life and he felt himself carried along with a zeal for work and that relish for new surroundings, new sensations and impressions, which was characteristic of his nature. It was whilst he was in Siam that de Choisy by the complaisance of a foreign bishop was allowed to enter into holy orders, and on the return voyage he preached his first sermon, which he thought a somewhat bold proceeding at the age of 42.

The experiences of the mission are given, purely from the Abbé's point of view, in his journal "*Voyage de Siam*" which was published in Paris in 1686, after the return to France of the two ambassadors. "They surrounded us like bears", says the Abbé of the French courtiers, and the King had innumerable questions to put his returned diplomatists. In his "*Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire de Louis XIV*" published after the Abbé's death, he relates a scrape he got into owing to his action, concerning some of the beautiful presents sent to France by the King of Siam. The unfortunate Abbé when in the East had arranged that some of these should be diverted into the hands of his friend and patron, the Cardinal de Bouillon. But on his return, lo! the Cardinal was in deep disgrace and in exile, and de Choisy was convicted of a piece of presumption which served him ill with his King. Later on the Abbé's attendance at Court became requisite when the Siamese ambassadors, who had travelled to Europe with the Chevalier de Chaumont, arrived in Paris and

needed the advice and assistance of a courtier and an interpreter.

His work as a missionary now over the Abbé de Choisy entered on the third and last stage of his career. Following up the "*Voyage de Siam*" with a History of King David and a Translation of the Psalms, which he dedicated and presented to the King he received once more the royal recognition so eagerly sought for. He does not seem to have forfeited this, or even jeopardised it, by any return to his "youthful pranks," his euphemism for early follies, though he was suspected of indulging occasionally in one weakness, by dressing himself up as a woman, though in strictest privacy, sighing the while that he could no longer fill his former part with satisfaction to himself, or excite once more the admiration for his good looks which had been his in earlier days.

In 1687 the French Academy honoured the Abbé by electing him a member, and the rest of his life was devoted to the composition of historical and biographical records. The chief of these works was a History of the Church, the first volume of which was published in 1703, and the eleventh and last volume in 1723. The publication, some time after 1689, of a translation by de Choisy of *The Imitation of Christ*, with a certain print as frontispiece, scandalized the morals and good taste of even that easy period and the Abbé, who had made presents of copies to some of his friends was compelled to cut out the print from remaining copies. To make his court with Madame de Maintenon, the declared mistress of the King, but also a devotee, de Choisy dedicated his work to Madame, and placed in it a pretty engraving, representing that lady kneeling at the foot of the cross, and below, an extract in Latin from the 45th Psalm, which runs thus "Hearken, O daughter and consider; forget also thine own people and thy father's house. So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty, for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him". The authenticity of this story has been contested, but we have it on the authority of the Marquis d'Argenson, who adds "He would not give me even a copy with the print. The Bibliomanes bought it very dear."

In 1724 the Abbé de Choisy, Prior of Saint Lo in Rouen, of Saint Benoist du Sault and of Saint Gelais, and Grand Dean of the Cathedral of Bayeux, died in Paris in his 81st year.

It is from the "Histoire de Madame La Comtesse des Barres," first published in 1735, and reprinted in fuller form in 1870 under the title "Aventures de l'Abbé de Choisy habillé en femme," from the "Voyage de Siam", published in 1786, and from the "Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire de Louis XIV," first published in 1727, a trio which alone of the Abbé's works is worthy of consideration at this date, that the best and most intimate impression of his character can be obtained. "La Vie de M. l'Abbé de Choisy," published in 1742 anonymously, but ascribed variously to the Abbé d'Olivet and to Lenglet-Dufresnoy, was dependent for most of its information on the works just named. Still it has the advantage of presenting him from the point of view obtainable by a contemporary of his later and best spent years.

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From the first two named works the extracts which follow have been taken in order to complete the delineation of a character which, notwithstanding the Abbé's frivolity, his weaknesses, nay, even his vices, still seems to live and breathe through his writings and to appeal to us by his light-heartedness and gaiety and good-nature to overlook his failings and accord him some of that indulgent warmth of feeling and admiring affection for which he craved. Surely a sincerity and a naiveté no less in degree than is attributed to Pepys might be claimed for de Choisy, as well as an equal self revelation which, on account of its very unconsciousness, is so much the more interesting.

"I have searched for the source whence so fantastical a pleasure has come to me," says the Abbé in his "Aventures" referring to his passion for feminine attire. "Here it is, The attribute of God is to be loved and adored. As much as his weakness will allow man has the same ambition; now as it is beauty which brings about the birth of love, and as that is ordinarily a woman's part, when it happens that men possess, or believe they possess, some traits which can make them beloved, they strive to add to them by feminine garments, which are extremely becoming. They feel the inexpressible pleasure of being loved. More than once have I been made conscious of what I have just said by a delightful experience, and when I have been at balls and plays, beautifully gowned and with diamonds and patches, and have

heard it whispered near me, "There is a beautiful being" I have tasted an inward pleasure which can, perhaps, be compared to nothing else so great was it. Ambition, riches, even love, do not equal it, because we always love ourselves better than we love others."

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"I prepared myself as for a festival which would show me off to the public view of a great many people. I had a gown of white Chinese damask made and lined with black silk. I had it trimmed with black ribbons, ribbons on the sleeves and at the back a great knot of black ribbons to set off the waist. I thought that on this occasion a petticoat of black velvet was necessary; as it was October velvet was in fashion. Since then I have always worn two petticoats and I have had my trains turned back with large bunches of ribbon. My head dress was very fine, a little cap of black taffeta covered with ribbons was fastened on to a well powdered wig. Madame de Noailles had lent me her large earrings of diamonds and brilliants, and on the left side of my head I had five or six ruby pins; I wore three or four large patches and more than a dozen small ones. I have always had a great fancy for patches, and there is nothing that becomes me so well. I had a stomacher of Mechlin lace, which appeared to hide a bosom; in short I was decked out finely. I presented the consecrated bread and then made a collection. It is not for me to boast, but they had never made so much money at Saint-Médard before I collected at high mass in the morning after dinner at vespers, and at the benediction. I had as an esquire M. de la Neuville, with a lady's maid to follow me, and three lackeys, one of whom carried my train."

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"At the division with my brothers of our patrimony we were all content. I was delighted at possessing beautiful jewels; I had never had anything but ear-rings worth a few hundreds, whereas I now found myself with ear-rings worth 10,000 francs, a diamond cross worth a hundred thousand and three beautiful rings. Here were the means to adorn and make myself a beauty, for since my infancy I have always loved to dress myself as a girl, and although I was then twenty-two years old my face did not present

any drawback. I had no beard, because from the age of five or six they had been careful to rub my face every day with a certain lotion which killed the hair at the roots provided it was done in good time. My black locks enabled my complexion to pass muster, although it was not very white. I was not then under the restraint of anyone and I gave myself up to my propensity. It happened that Madame de la Fayette, whom I often saw, noticing that I was always very much bedecked with ear-rings and patches, told me, like a good friend, that that was not a fashion for men and that I should do better to dress as a woman. On such good authority I had my hair cut to permit a better coiffure. I wore little ringlets in front and large ones on each side of the face. I had also a woman's gown. I put on the finest of these and went to call on Madame de la Fayette. She cried out on seeing me "Oh, the beautiful creature. You have followed my advice then." That encouraged me, and I continued to dress up as a woman for a couple of months. I paid visits, went to church, to the opera and the play, and it seemed to me that people got used to it. I had a portrait of myself painted by an Italian artist which people went to see, in short my style of living thoroughly satisfied me. I went to the Palais Royal whenever Monsieur was in Paris, he gave me innumerable tokens of friendship for our inclinations were similar, he too had a great wish to dress as a woman, but he didn't dare to do so because of his dignity; princes are immured in their grandeur."

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The story about the rebuke he received from the Duke de Montausier is given by the Abbé himself. The admonition had a powerful effect and one characteristic of de Choisy.

"I made up my mind to travel in earnest in order to dispel my chagrin; to put aside if I could all my little childish ways, which began to lose their savour—and to betake myself to something more real; I was no longer in that glorious state of youth which excuses everything, but I was still able, if I should so wish, to pass myself off as a woman. I got together all the money I could, placed my affairs in the hands of an agent, and set out for Italy with a jerkin and a sword. I lived there ten years at Rome and at Venice, and ruined myself at play. One passion chases another away, and that of play

takes front rank in this respect. Love and ambition become deadened as one grows old, play re-blossoms when all the rest fade away."

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"A passion for play has possessed me and has unsettled my life. How happy I should have been if I had always done the becoming thing, even if I had appeared unbecoming. Ridicule is to be preferred to poverty."

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We now come to the Abbé's Voyage to Siam. The record of this journey, especially where it deals with the diplomatic mission during the residence in Siam of de Chaumont and de Choisy, gives an interesting and very valuable insight into a part of the most stirring period in the early history of the relations between that country and Europe. That period was important for two reasons, firstly the political missions sent by each of the two countries to the other, and secondly for the revolution which took place in Siam in 1688. De Choisy, it is true, was but an unconscious witness of the first part of that drama which, unknown to him, had already begun and was to culminate two years later in the revolt of the nobility of Siam against the ascendancy of Phaulkon wherein that adventurer lost his life and his schemes, which had drawn two French missions to Siam and launched forth two Siamese missions to Europe, suffered a complete collapse. Nevertheless the Abbé's narrative takes first place in the records of the period covered by the introductory mission. D'Argenson says that "in general the epochs of the arrival of the Siamese ambassadors in France and that of the French in Siam are capable of furnishing many philosophical reflections ; it was a political comedy of which there were many in the reign of Louis XIV ; they appear ridiculous at present but they contributed to the glory of the monarch and that of the nation ; inseparable from each other." He seems however to have overlooked the political importance of development of intercourse with the far East, and it was natural enough, therefore, that the historical value of the records of missions which seemed to him so fruitless in all but glory should have escaped him.

The following extracts from the " Voyage " have been selected

rather on account of their bearing upon the personality of de Choisy than as descriptive of other matters.

"I have not been bored a single moment. The end is in sight. These great events are disentangling themselves. A King to become a Christian, a million souls to follow his example ; that perhaps is what we are going to attempt. Was there ever a finer design, and could a more noble idea, a more magnificent thought, enter into the mind of man ?"

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"I am always wanting to write and never to read. I protest that is not the way to become a savant. I am as prone to scribble when the pen is in my hand as M. the Prince to play with his sword. Happy posterity if these two instruments were each in its sphere to be employed equally well."

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"We pass our time very well. Hardly has one got up than it is evening ; the days fly by like moments. No sooner is one task finished than another begins. The Breviary, lectures, Holy Scripture, the Portuguese language, the Siamese language, the globe, a little chess, good fare withal and some gaiety ; improve on that if you can."

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(After some rough weather) "Go to, go to ; believe me all will be well. Let us pray to God, and let us drink our Spanish wine, for I have some of that, by the way, which is excellent."

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"I flatter myself in believing that I have struck the good road, and I am hoping much from the good-will of God. How happy I am at having undertaken this voyage. My spirits are still in fine form, always gay, and at one with all the world. If I remain in Siam I don't believe that I shall be bored for two or three years, and if I don't stay there I shall still have this splendid voyage to the good. I shall have had an insight into affairs of some importance. I shall scarcely have offended against God for two years. Alas ! perhaps on that account these will be the two best years of my life.

Oh, ! how could we offend God on this ship ! We talk only on good subjects, we see only good examples. Temptations are three or four thousand leagues away from here. To be frank there is not much merit in such a life. I had already made up my mind, before I left Paris, to give myself entirely to the Churuch. I hope that God will grant me grace to take orders in Siam. That will make me happy, and if this design is brought to a head, shall I not have done well to travel 12,000 leagues."

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"The two forts at Bangkok saluted us as we set out this morning. We saw decorations on the houses facing the river an honour reserved for the King only. All the rest-houses are painted red—another very unusual honour. For two days we have not eaten bread ; good fare, plenty of meat, plenty of rice ! To eat a mouthful of meat and a mouthful of rice, 'tis truly sad for one who loves not rice ; however, we must pass that by."

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M. Constance (Phaulkon) ever courteous in all that he does, has sent the Ambassador a present of porcelain ware, preserves from China, and some Tea. This is some of that famous Tea, so costly and precious. which only the Emperor of China uses and of which he sends some to Kings who are friends of his. There is but little of it."

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"I have bought a few little knick knacks to-day ; it is difficult to find them as the English who were here before us, have carried off everything, good and bad alike. It is necessary in order to get hold of curios, to be here in the Months of April and May, when the vessels arrive from China and Japan. Merchants of different nations take everything to send to their own people, and soon one can get nothing at first hand, and is at the mercy of people who are looking for huge profits."

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"M. Constance has let me have a good look at the fine things he wishes to send to France and in a few days we shall go to the store-houses of the King to choose the most beautiful things he has there. If he acts on my advice, and any big gold vases fall into my hand they won't escape."

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“The Siamese Ambassadors who are going to France are taking with them screens, porcelain-ware, Japanese works and tea. You can tell the Ladies that all these pretty things are for the most modest ones. The Siamese love modesty. They must not fail, when they go to inspect them, to carry fans, to wear hoods, to screen themselves well, and only to show their faces when they are begged to do so; those who behave in this way will get something.”

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“I have had a great discussion today with M. de Métellopolis and he has decided to give me orders here before I return to France. I have been inclined to take this step for a long time; when one is weak one should not expose oneself to danger, and I believe that these bonds will keep me in the right path. I have no longer any longings for the Opera, and when I am a Priest I hope that God will give me grace to live as a Priest. I have some Benefices and do not wish to leave them.”

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“Behold me, then a Priest. What a terrible burden I have undertaken! It must be borne and I believe that God, who knows my weakness, will lighten it for me, and will guide me always along that rosy path which I so fortunately found when escaping from the jaws of death.”

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“We have returned from our farewell audience. The Ambassador, the Bishop and I were carried on ordinary chairs. The whole way was lined with troops on foot and on horseback with more than 200 war elephants. The Audience passed with compliments. The King wished us a happy voyage, all this with a smiling countenance which wins every heart.”

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“Would you believe it? I am writing a sermon and may perhaps deliver it. Rather bold this, to begin to preach at the age of 42. We shall see how it turns out. I shall know if I fail and shall not forget it.”

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“ I made my trial effort to-day and preached for the first time in my life. It will not be the last; that will suffice to let you know that I am not discouraged.”

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As already stated, the Abbé de Choisy in his latest years did something in the way of expurgation by destroying parts of his memoirs which seemed to go beyond the bounds of decency wide as these evidently were in his eyes. All that he did leave behind he bequeathed to his kinsman, the Marquis d'Argenson, who made no use of the papers, beyond drawing a few anecdotes from them, probably because the Abbé d'Olivet had extracted the kernel by publishing, without his permission, what their owner considered the most interesting part, namely the “*Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire de Louis XIV*” The anonymous author of the Life of de Choisy, whether he was the Abbé d'Olivet as seems most probable, or the Abbé Lenglet-Dufresnoy, as Paul Lacroix believed, also drew his material from these manuscripts, now lying in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal. But what is of special interest to us at this date, is that there are still unpublished parts of these writings, and who shall say that others may not be discovered? There is, for instance, the fragment known as “*Journal de l'assemblée du Luxembourg*.” D'Argenson refers to this and names some of the members of this little shortlived Academy within the Academy, which met once a week at de Choisy's rooms at the Luxembourg to discuss in secret political and other subjects which might not be brought forward with propriety in the French Academy, that of Sciences and the Academy of Belles Lettres. The Abbés Dangeau, de Choisy, Testu, Renaud and de Caumartin were members, so also were Messieurs d'Herbelot, Perrault, Fontenelle and President Cousin. It was to this inner circle that de Choisy communicated his translation of the “*Imitation*,” the first edition of this giving rise to the anecdote concerning Madame de Maintenon. There is another fragment the “*Recueil de bons mots*” not yet published and whence d'Argenson admits having drawn some of the rarer stories it contains.

Where, we may ask, are the two portraits of the Abbé to which he refers in the “*Aventures*,” one painted by an Italian

artist and both representing him in feminine attire? Here is an opening for research work amongst the pictures of the period which have survived the interval.

We should not take leave of the Abbé without remarking on the good fortune which was his in having had his being in the country and the period most suitable for his peculiar and unique disposition. For many the reign of Louis XIV furnishes one of the most fascinating epochs in history, and to them certainly the career of de Choisy, the Improbable, will be found to contribute a curious page. Louvet de Couvray is credited with having drawn on the life and experiences of de Choisy for his famous novel "Faublas," Roger de Beauvoir boldly named one of his novels "L'Abbé de Choisy," the same romance appearing also under the title "Mademoiselle de Choisy." With regard to the Abbé's own literary work, we should remember that his pen portraits of contemporaries, have not only received Sainte-Beuve's whole-hearted praise, but have been copied into the *Causeries du Lundi*, and finally, that two at least of his works, both posthumous, have survived the elimination wrought by time and been found worthy of reprinting in recent years.

Here is the summary of de Choisy's character from the lips of "a lady well renowned for her wit" an appreciation and a condemnation of himself—that self he loved so well to please—which he would, in his old age quote with gusto:—

"He has lived three or four different lives. As man, as woman, always in extremes, buried either in study or in trifles. Estimable for a courage which carried him to the end of the world, contemptible for the coquetry of a girl, and in all these diversities ever governed by pleasure."

R. W. GIBLIN.