MEMOIRS OF A ROYALIST EXILE.*

Memoirs are oftenest read because of the importance of the *rôle* played by their writer, and occasionally for the evidence they furnish toward the settlement of some interesting historical question. Neither of these uses render noteworthy the "Recollections of the Baron de Frénilly." He was not a distinguished man, although he attained a certain prominence during the Restoration among those who were "more royalist than the king." He wrote his memoirs so late in life, and when separated so completely from the means of verifying what recurred to his mind, that his testimony cannot be accepted upon any matter requiring exactness of statement. And yet these "Recollections," once begun, will probably be read to the last page, and if read will not soon be forgotten nor regarded as without historical interest. The reason is that Frénilly had an artist's sense for the value of every stroke in the portraits that fill his pages; his memory notes with the vividness of a fresh impression the characteristics of the changing phases of

* RECOLLECTIONS OF THE BARON DE FRÉNILLY. Edited by Arthur Chuquet. Translated by Frederick Lees. Illustrated. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

society from the Old Régime to the Restoration; and his wit is quick and keen, and as free from artificiality as a bubbling spring. His peculiar quality is a frankness, full of surprises, astounding in its comprehensiveness, only to be explained if we believe him when he says, "My story is a secret, a disclosure made only to myself," written to divert weary hours of a long exile from France after the overthrow of Charles X.

Frénilly was not of the old nobility, but belonged to one of the families of the *haute finance*. His uncle, of whom he was heir, was administrator-general of the royal domain, and his father had been receiver-general of the appanages of the Count of Artois in Poitou and Angoumois. These financial families had an identity of interest with the nobility, and no noble detested the Revolution more heartily than did the young Frénilly. But he was unwilling to emigrate. He looked back upon the emigration as "a painful sacrifice followed by a loyal dupery," and declared that "it alone, and not decrees, destroyed the nobility." During the Terror he lived on one of his Touraine estates, although occasionally he came to Paris. He was on the Rue St. Honoré when the cart passed which bore Danton to the scaffold. In that cart was also Hérault de Séchelles, ex-member of the Committee of Public Safety, who, when an officer of the old Parlement of Paris, had received Frénilly as an advocate, and whom his mother had once regarded as a desirable husband for his sister. Although at one time during the Directory he was on the point of entering the service of the government, he took no part in politics until the Restoration, when he became a pamphleteer for the Ultras. Toward the close of Villèle's administration, realizing that in current estimation a "peerage was equivalent to a dowry of a million, and my son would soon be twenty-four years of age," he asked that his name be included in the rumored creation, but was chagrined to find there were so many on the list. With a few exceptions they were "the flower of France. . . . But this did not excuse them from the crime of being seventy-six."

Frénilly had a sense of humor as well as a keen wit. A play of his was accepted at the Vaudeville, but "before half the first scene had been played I said to myself, 'Oh! but this is execrable!' The public was of the same opinion, and, whilst my friends kept applauding, hissed with all its strength. I ended by heartily hissing myself; for the further the play progressed the more convinced I was that the people were right." Afterwards he went to a dinner where wreaths of triumph were awaiting him, and told his adventure with such relish that everybody joined him in the laughter.

His description of the beginning of the overtures which led to his marriage is an example of his manner of telling his story. His notary said to him in 1800: "'Sir, you must think of marrying. I have a match to propose to you — a widow.' I made a grimace. 'Young,' he added. I smiled. 'And who possesses a very fine estate near Paris.' I listened." The "Recollections" are also full of amusing anecdotes. One relates that an officer after a battle was supervising the burial of the dead, and thinking he saw some of the bodies move, informed the grave-diggers. "Let them be, sir," replied one of the men; "if we listened to them, not one of them would be dead."

Frénilly's portraits are entirely without malice, although this would be a poor solace to some of the passing subjects of his pencil — for example, to that farmer-general, M. Delahante, who was "at bottom an excellent person," although he was "a tall, bony, square-shouldered man, with a dry, hard, vulgar face, and who smelt of money a mile off." He speaks of the Academician Bailly with appreciative warmth, adding, however, these sentences, *à propos* of his election as mayor of Paris:

> "His modesty capitulated, he thought himself a great man, and he became ridiculous. Heaven had granted him a wife who was exactly proportioned to his *entresol* in the Louvre: a good housekeeper and nurse who adored him, a talkative, common, ignorant, stupid woman. . . . Behold her through a stroke of the wand, seated in an immense gilded *salon* thronged with citizens and courtiers, and you may imagine what a powerful auxiliary she was to the sarcasms which were already showering upon her poor husband."

His contempt for Talleyrand breaks out in the description of the festival of the Federation, July 14, 1790, when "this little bishop, a dissolute and lame atheist and gambler, was the only person that could be found to say that famous high mass in the open air, and which the heavens seemed to take pleasure in drowning every five minutes by torrents of rain." Frénilly's mother thought Lafayette a hero, but he called him a *Gilles César*, in which, by the way, he agreed with Talleyrand's estimate.

The chief historical interest of the memoirs belongs to the descriptions of social life before the Revolution, the coming of which Frénilly thought was foreshadowed by an abandonment of the good old customs. His account of the training of a boy for social duties is especially

clear, and includes an amusing interview with Voltaire. The reorganization of society during the Directory is also illustrated with curious details. It should be remarked that the translator has been able to an unusual degree to preserve the liveliness of the original. M. Chuquet has added valuable biographical notes upon the many personages mentioned by Frénilly.

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