

# Then and There

History told as it would be written today

By IRVIN S. COBB

## The Last Hours of a Doomed Queen

At fifteen, Marie Antoinette was married. At nineteen she was a queen, a creature lovely to look upon. At thirty-seven she died on the guillotine—one of the most pitiable as she was one of the most conspicuous among all the thousands upon thousands who lost their heads in the French revolution.

Born the daughter of Emperor Francis I of Austria and his ambitious and gifted consort Marie Theres, she was reared, for a princess of the blood, among exceedingly simple surroundings. Small wonder that the transition from what almost had been a sheltered life to the most brilliant, the most disolute, the most extravagant court in Christendom should have proven disastrous for her.

From the hour when she became the wife of the heir apparent to the French throne, the pathway of the girl-queen was beset with difficulties and pitfalls. She was under the exacting dominion of her imperious father-in-law, Louis XV; she was under the hostile eye of Louis' shrewd and unscrupulous mistress, Madame du Barry. She was enmeshed in intrigues, envies, jealousies, feuds and plots. That she was frivolous and headstrong and wasteful; that she made enemies by her interference in public affairs; that she estranged those who should have been her friends and her devoted allies—these charges not even her most sympathetic partisan among the chroniclers could deny.

But when the monarchy fell in bloodied ruins; when the time of the terror came to Paris; when she was insulted, imprisoned, widowed by violence; when she barbarously was torn from her children, including that hapless boy who went down in history as the Lost Dauphin; when at her trial she so gallantly faced atrocious accusations affecting her moral character; when finally she was led forth bound like a dangerous malefactor to be done to death before a shrieking exultant mob, then her courage, her faith and her noble bearing redeemed Marie Antoinette for all the grievous shortcomings of her youth. As a ruler she fell short, as a wife she had her faults, as a royal politician she was an abject failure. But as a mother, as a woman rising to sublime heights of fortitude in the face of a hideous doom, she stands forth for posterity, an heroic and noble figure.

Her old secret foe, Madame du Barry, was born like a commoner and died like a craven of commoners. Being condemned to the knife she went screaming and struggling to her fate—wringing in her hands, begging for mercy with her last breath, practically crazed with fright. But in her death, at least, Marie Antoinette was regal and splendid.

THANKS be to the books of hundreds of chroniclers and to at least one historic painting, every well-informed school child knows something of the last anguished hours of Marie Antoinette—how before being led forth for death she protested against the shame of having her hands lashed behind her as though she were a common criminal, and pointed out that her husband had been left unpunished in his ride to the place of execution; how her enemies disregarded her plea and so tightly corded her wrists that the kindly priest who accompanied her on the dreadful journey repeatedly pressed against the knotted rope in an effort to ease the pain in her bruised flesh; how in a crude cart she jolted over the cobbled streets of Paris, her head held erect and her face bared to the taunts and jeers of the populace; how when passing the palace where she had spent her happiest hours the widowed queen fell into a faint; how, reviving both her will and her spirit, she did not wince at sight of the guillotine, but with dignity climbed its wooden steps and even begged the pardon of one of the executioners upon whose toe she accidentally trod in mounting the platform; how she suffered herself to be strapped to the board and how quietly she lay there while they were adjusting the mechanism of the great blade which a moment later sheared through her slender neck. In years she was still young—only thirty-seven—but eye-witnesses recorded that she looked that morning like an old woman, worn and haggard. Her hair in less than three months had turned almost white.

Thanks also to many voracious accounts, we know of the proud courage of so many of Marie Antoinette's fellow-prisoners, doomed as she was, to be sacrificed to the fury of the populace acting through the caprices of a tribunal which gave to each of them the mockery of a trial and the certainty, in most cases, of conviction. Aristocratic ladies locked in foul prisons almost gayly cropped their heads in anticipation of the fall of the knife. Courty gentlemen, nobles of the old regime, rehearsed them in the etiquette suitable for those condemned in order that no one might be confused or awkward when the summons came; they practiced binding each other. The women discussed the question of appropriate dressing of the neck. A whole code of manners was evolved by these gallant souls that awaited a legalized slaughter.

### Simple Fare for the Nobility.

The vivacious Madame Roland, who, by the narrowest of margins, escaped the fate of so many of her compatriots, was one who lived to record the heroisms and the miseries which the gentry class underwent. The place of her confinement was Saint-Pelagie, a noisome hole. With irony and a trace even of humor, she told of her debut as a guest of the state:

"Whilst my name was being registered as a newcomer, an evil-looking fellow opens my bundle, fingers it inquisitively; I notice it at the moment when he is placing on the concierge's desk some printed matter which was in it (it was some newspapers); surprised and offended by a proceeding which ought only to take place in the instances of persons secretly imprisoned, I remark that at any rate it ought not to be left to a man to examine with such indecency a woman's night-clothes; he is ordered to leave it alone; but he is the turnkey of the corridor in which I am to live and I am doomed to see his ugly face twice a day.

"I am asked if I want a room with one or with two beds.

"I am alone and don't want a companion."

"But the room will be too small."

"I don't care."

"They look and find there is no single-bedded room vacant; I go into the double-bedded one; it is 6 feet long by 2 feet broad, so that with the two small tables and the two chairs there is hardly any room left. I hear I must pay in advance the rent for the first month.

"But there is no water-jug or other conveniences."

"You must buy them," observes the ugly fellow, extremely eager to offer services the selfish aim of which is

obvious. I learn that here the state gives nothing for the prisoners.

"How then do they live?"

"There is merely a portion of beans and a pound and a half of bread a day, but you will not be able to eat either one or the other."

"I can well believe the fare is not like what I am used to; but I like to know the peculiarities of every situation and to live on the level of that in which I happen to be; I wish to try it."

### A Maid as Reporter.

"The part of the building set aside for women is divided into long, very narrow passages, on one of the sides of which are small cells like the one in which I was lodged; there, under the same roof, on the same level, separated by a thin plastering, I live with prostitutes and murderers. On one side of me is one of those creatures whose trade is to seduce youth and sell innocence; above me is a woman who has forged assignments and torn to pieces on a high road an individual of her own sex with the help of the monsters in whose band she is enrolled; every cell is shut with a big lock and key, which a man comes every morning to open, looking insolently to see if you are up or in bed; next, their tenants meet in the corridors, on the staircases, in a small courtyard or in a damp and stinking hall, a receptacle worthy of such scum."

What Madame Roland so blithely endured, the majority of her captive fellow-aristocrats also endured—that and worse, for nearly all of them perished, whereas she escaped. Royalty fared no better. Thousands saw how Marie Antoinette faced her end and, as I have just said, distinguished historians recorded the scene while famous novelists embroidered it with fictional touches, but it remained for a humble witness, a serving maid, to tell future generations how the poor queen passed the final hours of her life. This moving account was handed down to us by Rosalie Lamorliere, a young woman of lowly birth who attended Marie Antoinette during the latter's confinement in the conciergerie.

Her occupation as a domestic in that dismal pile first brought her into contact with the queen. She was frequently, at times constantly, with the imperial prisoner from the date of her arrival at the prison on August 2, 1793, until the beginning of the third week of October when sentence was inflicted. Of the concluding acts of the tragic drama this Rosalie Lamorliere wrote as follows:

"At last came the awful day of October 15; the queen went up at 8 a. m. into the hall of audiences to receive sentence, and as I do not remember having taken her that day any kind of nourishment, I suppose they made her go fasting.

### A Doomed Queen.

"In the morning I heard some people talking about the hearing of the case. They said: 'Marie Antoinette will get off, she answered like an angel; they will only have her deported.' Toward 4 p. m. the doorkeeper said to me:

"The meeting is suspended for three-quarters of an hour; the accused is not to come down. Go up quick, she is asking for a bouillon."

"I immediately took an excellent broth which I kept in reserve on my stove and went up to the princess. As I was approaching near a hall close to her one of the police commissaires named Labuziere, a short stumpy fellow, snatched the soup-basin from my hands and handing it to a young woman who was excessively got up, said to me:

"This young woman is very eager to see Widow Capet; it's a delightful opportunity for her.' And the woman at once went off carrying the soup, which was half spilt.

"It was no use my begging and entreating Labuziere, he was all-powerful; I had to obey. What must the queen have thought at receiving the basin of soup from the hands of a person she did not know?

"A few minutes past four on the morning of October 16 they came to tell us the queen of France was condemned! I felt as if a sword had stabbed my heart and I went and wept in my room, stifling my cries and

customed to such things than I pretended to take no interest in it.

"About 7 a. m. he ordered me to go down to the queen and ask her if she wanted any nourishment. On entering the room, in which two lights were burning, I saw a gendarme officer sitting in the left corner, and approaching madame I saw her all dressed in black lying in the bed.

"With her face turned to the window, she leaned her head on her hand.

"Madame," I said, trembling, "you took nothing last night and almost nothing during the day. What do you wish for this morning?"

"The queen shed floods of tears. She answered:

"My girl, I don't want anything more; it's all ended with me."

"I took the liberty of adding:

"Madame, I have kept on my stoves a bouillon and a vermicelli; you have need of something to keep you up; allow me to bring you something."

"The queen's tears redoubled, and she said:

"Rosalie, bring me some soup."

### Prying Eyes.

"I went for it; she took a seat and could swallow only a few spoonfuls; I call God to witness her body received no other food.

"A little before this day an ecclesiastic authorized by the government presented himself to the queen and offered to hear her in confession. Her majesty, learning from him that he was one of the practicing Paris priests, understood he had taken the oath and so she refused his offices. The incident was talked about in the house.

"When daylight had come, that is to say about 8 a. m., I returned to madame to help her dress, as she had suggested when she took the small amount of bouillon on her bed. Her majesty went into the little space I usually left between the feather bed and the wall. She herself unfolded a chemise which had been brought her, probably in my absence, and having signed to me to remain in front of the bed so as to keep the sight of her body from the gendarme, she stooped down and doffed her dress in order to change linen for the last time. The gendarme officer at once drew near and, stopping by the foot of the bed, watched the change. Her majesty immediately put back the fichu on her shoulders and observed to the young man with great gentleness:

"In the name of decency, sir, permit me to change my linen without a witness."

"I could not agree to it," was the gendarme's rough reply. "My orders are that I must have my eye on all your movements."

### Wretched Remains.

"The queen sighed, put on her last chemise with all possible precautions and all possible modesty, took for her outer garb not the long mourning dress which she wore in the presence of her judges but the white deshabelle which served ordinarily as a morning costume, and unfolding her large muslin fichu, she crossed it under her chin. The worry caused by the gendarme's brutality prevented me from noticing whether she still had the medallion of M. le Dauphin; but it was easy for me to see that she carefully rolled up her poor chemise; she wrapped it in one of her sleeves as if in a sheath, and then pressed this linen into a space she perceived between the canvas-paper and the wall.

"The day before, knowing she was about to appear before the public and the judges, she had arranged her hair rather high from a feeling of decorum. She had added to her linen cap, which was bordered with small ornamental folds, the two streamers with she kept in a cardboard box; and under these mourning streamers she had neatly adjusted a black crepe, which gave her a pretty widow's headdress. On her way to death she kept only the simple linen cap, without streamers or marks of mourning, but having only one pair of chausures, she kept on her black stockings and her kid shoes, which she had not put out of shape or spilt at all during the seventy-six days she was with us.

"I left her without returning to bid her good-by or even to make her a single curtsy for fear of compromising and distressing her. I went and cried in my room and prayed to God for her.

"When she had left that fearful establishment, the first usher of the tribunal accompanied by three or four persons in his own employ, came and asked the concierge for me and ordered me to follow him to the queen's late room. He let me take back my looking-glass and the cardboard box. As for the other objects which had belonged to her majesty, he commanded me to wrap them up in a bed-sheet. They made me sweep up even a bit of straw which happened, I do not know how, to be on the floor of the room, and they took away with them these wretched remains of the best and most unhappy princess that ever lived."

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### Remarkable Ink

A concern that once produced a marking ink had the following to say about its product: "It is remarkable for requiring no preparation, pre-eminently pre-engages peculiar public predilection; produces palpable, plainly perceptible, perpetual perspicuity; penetrates powerfully, precluding previous pre-requisite preparations; possesses particular prerogatives; protects private property; prevents presumptuous, pilfering persons practicing promiscuous proprietorship; pleasantly performing plain practical penmanship; perfectly precludes peritenegetic, preferring proper public patronage."



# A Buying Guide

Before you order dinner at a restaurant, you consult the bill-of-fare. Before you take a long trip by motor-car, you pore over road maps. Before you start out on a shopping trip, you should consult the advertisements in this paper. For the same reasons! The advertising columns are a buying guide in the purchase of everything you need—including amusements! A guide that saves you time and conserves your energy; that saves useless steps and guards against false ones; that puts the S-T-R-E-T-C-H in family budgets.

The advertisements in this paper are so interesting, it is difficult to see how anyone could overlook them ... fail to profit by them. Just check with yourself and see that you are reading the advertisements regularly—the big ones and the little ones. It is time well spent ... always.

**Avoid time-wasting, money-wasting detours on the road to merchandise value. Read the advertising "road maps."**

# The Chatham Record