

LE ROI L'A DIT

Music by Léo Delibes

Libretto by Edmond Gondinet

First Performance: Opéra-Comique, Paris, May 24, 1873

The Marquis de Moncontour has long wished to be presented to King Louis XIV, and as he has been fortunate enough to catch the escaped paroquet of Mme. de Maintenon, he is at last to have his wish accomplished. By way of preparation for his audience he tries to learn the latest mode of bowing, his own being somewhat antiquated, and the Marquise and her four lovely daughters, and even Javotte, the nice little ladies' maid, assist him. After many failures the old gentleman succeeds in making his bow to his own satisfaction, and he is put into a litter, and borne off, followed by his people's benedictions. When they are gone, Benoit, a young peasant, comes to see Javotte, who is his sweetheart. He wishes to enter the Marquis' service. Javotte thinks him too awkward, but she promises to intercede in his favor with Miton, a dancing master, who enters just as Benoit disappears. He has instructed the graceful Javotte in all the arts and graces of the noble world, and when he rehearses the steps and all the nice little tricks of his art with her, he is so delighted with his pupil that he pronounces her manners worthy of a Princess; but when Javotte tells him that she loves a peasant, he is filled with disgust, and orders her away. His real pupils, the four lovely daughters of the Marquis, now enter, and while the lesson goes on Milton hands a billet-doux from some lover to each of them. The two elder, Agathe and Chimene, are just in the act of reading theirs, when they hear a serenade outside, and shortly afterward the two lovers are standing in the room, having made their way through the window. The Marquis Flarembel and his friend, the Marquis de la Blurette, are just making a most ardent declaration of love, when Mme. la Marquise enters to present to her elder daughters the two bridegrooms she has chosen for them. The young men hide behind the ample dresses of the young ladies, and all begin to sing with great zeal, Miton beating the measure, so that some time elapses before the Marquise is able to state her errand. Of course her words excite great terror, the girls flying to the other side of the room with their lovers and receiving the two elderly suitors, Baron de Merlussac, and Gautru, a rich old financier, with great coolness and a refusal of their costly gifts. When the suitors are gone the two young strangers are detected, and the angry mother decides at once to send her daughters to a convent, from which they shall only issue on their wedding day.

When they have departed in a most crestfallen condition, the old Marquis returns from his audience with the King and relates its astounding results. His Majesty had been so peremptory in his questioning about the Marquis' son, and heir, that the Marquis losing his presence of mind, promised to present his son at court on the King's demand. The only question now is where to find a son to adopt, as the Marquis has only four daughters. Milton, the ever-useful, at once presents Benoit to the parents, engaging himself to drill the peasant into a nice cavalier in ten lessons. Benoit takes readily to his new position; he is fitted out at once, and when the merchants come, offering their best in cloth and finery, he treats them with an insolence worthy of the proudest seigneur. He even turns from his sweetheart Javotte.

In the second act Benoit, dressed like the finest cavalier, gives a masked ball in his father's gardens. Half Versailles is invited, but, having taken the Court Almanac to his aid, he has made the mistake of inviting many people who have long been dead. Those who do appear seem to him to be very insipid, and, wanting some friends with whom he can enjoy himself, the useful Miton presents the Marquises de la Blurette and de Flarembel, who are delighted to make the acquaintance of their sweetheart's brother.

Benoit hears from them that he has four charming sisters who have been sent to a convent, and

he at once promises to assist his new friends. Meanwhile Javotte appears in the mask of an Oriental Queen and Benoit makes love to her, but he is very much stupefied when she takes off her mask, and he recognizes Javotte. She laughingly turns away from him, when the good-for-nothing youth's new parents, to reproach him with his levity. But Benoit, nothing daunted, rushes away, telling the Marquis that he intends to visit his sisters in the convent. Miton tries in vain to recall him. The two old suitors of Agathe and Chimene appear, to complain that their deceased wife and grandmother were invited, and while the Marquis explains his son's mistake, the four daughters rush in, having been liberated by their lovers and their unknown brother, whom they greet with a fondness very shocking to the old Marchioness. The elderly suitors withdraw, swearing to take vengeance on the inopportune brother.

In the last act Benoit appears in his father's house in a somewhat dilapidated state. He has spent the night amongst gay companions and met Gautru and de Merlussac successively, who have both fought him and believe they have killed him, Benoit having feigned to be dead on the spot. When the old Marquis enters, he is very much astonished at receiving two letters of condolence from his daughters' suitors. Miton appears in mourning, explaining that, Mme. de Maintenon's visit being expected, they must all wear dark colors, as she prefers these. Meanwhile Benoit has an interview with Javotte, in which he declares his love to be undiminished, and he at once asks his father to give him Javotte as his wife, threatening to reveal the Marquis' deceit to the King if his request is not granted. In this dilemma help comes in the persons of the two Marquises, who present their King's condolences to old Moncontour. This gentleman hears to his great relief that his son is supposed to have fallen in a duel, and so he is disposed of. Nobody is happier than Javotte, who now claims Benoit for her own, while the Marquis, who receives a Duke's title from the King in compensation for his loss, gladly gives his two daughters to their young and noble lovers.

The girls, well aware that they owe their happiness to their adopted brother, are glad to provide him with ample means for his marriage with Javotte, and the affair ends to everybody's satisfaction.