

would have been, without doubt, an ornament among the sovereigns of his age, if hard fortune had not fettered his talents in the cruel chains of the gout, which circumscribed his reign to four years of continued pain; during which 'his greatest consolation,' as he himself affirmed, 'was that of having married a lady who appeared born to bring comfort to his afflictions.'"¹ It was indeed fortunate for Alphonso that he had chosen a consort from a rank not too much elevated to prevent her from being skilled in one of the most valuable attributes of woman in domestic life,—the sweet and tender office of a nurse. The duchess Laura manifested so much compassion and affectionate consideration for her suffering lord, that he never heard from her lips a word that could lead him to suppose that she was displeased at being the wife of a prince who was generally confined to his bed. Worn out with the acuteness of his agonizing malady, he died in the flower of his age, leaving his two infant children, Francis II., his successor, and Mary Beatrice, the subject of the present biography, to the guardianship of his duchess, on whom he conferred the regency of Modena during the long minority of his infant successor Francisco, who was two years younger than Mary Beatrice.

Prince Rinaldo d'Este, afterwards cardinal d'Esté, the younger brother of Alphonso, was appointed as the state guardian of the children, and associated with the widowed duchess in the care of their education, but all the power was in her hands.² The princely orphans were early trained to habits of virtue and religion by their mother: so fearful was she of injuring their characters by pernicious indulgence, that she rather erred on the opposite side, by exercising too stern a rule of discipline in their tender infancy. She loved them passionately, but she never excused their faults. Both were delicate in constitution, but she never allowed them to relax their studies, or the fasts enjoined by the church of which they were members, on that account. The little princess had

¹ Leti Teatro Britannica.

² Inedited Memorials of Mary Beatrice d'Este, in the Secret Archives of the kingdom of France.