## By R. G. WALESKA

A best seller, 300 years ago, which devastatingly laid satire on the "establishment" of the French Court of Louis XIV had a special chapter "On The Pulpit". Surprisingly, "The Characters", by Jean de la Bruyere, became a public hit.

It might seem odd that preachers and pulpit-manners should be material for a book; it might never succeed in our times when great preachers are as rare as whooping cranes and the faithful submit to the Sunday sermons rather than listen to them.

In the 17th Century it was a different story. Predication was, considered the principal instrument by which to transform man's heart and promote the great, the Christian,

And there were so many outstanding preachers that one Father Haudry who compiled a "library" of masterworks of predication filled 23 volumes and yet had to discard three quarters of the material he would have liked to incorporate.

Some of these preachers were idolized like the Beatles today - with the difference that their fans were no squealing teen-agers but the elite of the age. Their sermons were events. To miss them meant that one was not

Louis XIV never missed a Lenters or Advent sermon in the court chapel. There he sat — the "Very Christian" King, surrounded by his queen and his mistresses - past and present, listening meekly as the Bossuets, Bourdaloues, Mascarons gave him literally hell.

Today there is a great hullabaloo when a pastor raises a mild question or two about a controversial war in the presence of a democratic head of state. To Louis XIV. this superb autocrat, this embodiment of all grandeur, a preacher was the mouthpiece of God. He suffered the violence of his anathemas and his too precise allusions as deserved penances sent to him by God.

And even when he had become the domesticated pious husband of Mme. de Maintenon he permitted the court preachers to denounce his wars, the sufferings they caused to the peoples, the contrast between their poverty and the luxury of Versailles, the moral laxity of his court, vice in high places you name it, he took it.

One day some of his courtiers complained about the brutal pummeling they got from one of the court preachers. "He did his duty," the King answered, "it's now up to us to do ours."

When speaking about the famous preachers of the 17th Century the name of Jacques Benigne Boussuet (1627-1704) comes first to mind. Actually he was better known as the foremost religious writer of his time, as the arbiter of the French episcopate, as the promoter of the Gallican Liberties, as the conscience of the court, as the deadly pole micist than as an orator. He was not one of the popular

Most of his sermons one knows of were preached in Paris in small churches and in convents between 1659-

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preached four Advent and Lenten courses, fewer than other preachers whose names no one remembers. After 1671 the envious hostility of the Archbishop of Paris, Harlay, limited his public appearances in the capital to four occasions — all funeral orations which have become

The last of them was preached at the funeral of the great Conde at Notre Dame early in 1787. At the end of it he announced that from here on

part of French literature.

"the rest of a faltering voice few inches to stand on and of an ebbing ardor."

Saint-Beuve suggested that the prospect of losing their greatest preacher just as they were mourning their greatest general, must have chilled the audience with premonitions of the impending decline of the reign.

There was above all the Jesuit Father Bourdaloue for 35 years his sermons fill-

There was an air of ex-citement in the air like in the theatre before the curtain rises over a first night. And then HE came, fought his way through the crowd, climbed up the stairs to the pumpit stood there for a long moment with closed eyes. Then he began to speak — ge mtly at first then gathering momentum and raising his voice (1632-1704). Year in year out to that "thundering and ter-

1670. At the same time he he would reserve for his flock People came to blows for a preached for less than three

At the end of the century there was a new crop of preachers of which the Oratorian Jean Baptiste Massillon (1663-1742) has become the most famous. Massillon's first appearance at the royal chapel was a sermon he preached for the Advent of Afterwards the king paid him one of those graceful compliments of which he the secret. "When I heard other preachers," he

pleased with them. When I hear you I am greatly displeased with myself."

Massillon's most remarkable sermon was probably his funeral oration for Louis XIV at the Sainte Chapelle. He stood for a long while in silence. Then letting his eyes wander over the audience he pointed to the escutcheons suspended all over the black draperies, which wore the letters L. L. G. — Louis le Grand —. Then he started out: "God alone is great, my

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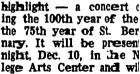
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