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Sommario/riassunto

Born Françoise d'Aubigné, a criminal's daughter reduced to street begging as a child, Madame de Maintenon (1653-1719) made an improbable rise from impoverished beginnings to the summit of power as the second, secret wife of Louis XIV. An educational reformer, Maintenon founded and directed the celebrated academy for aristocratic women at Saint-Cyr. This volume presents the dialogues and addresses in which Maintenon explains her controversial philosophy of education for women. Denounced by her contemporaries as a political schemer and religious fanatic, Maintenon has long been criticized as an opponent of gender equality. The writings in this volume faithfully reflect Maintenon's respect for social hierarchy and her stoic call for women to accept the duties of their state in life. But the writings also echo Maintenon's more feminist concerns: the need to redefine the virtues in the light of women's experience, the importance of naming the constraints on women's freedom, and the urgent need to remedy the scandalous neglect of the education of women. In her writings as well as in her own model school at Saint-Cyr, Maintenon embodies the demand for educational reform as the key to the empowerment of women at the dawn of modernity.
