CHAPTER XIV.

THE REIGN OF CHARLES II.

Few events in English history have ever been hailed with greater popular enthusiasm than the restoration of Charles II. On the 25th of May, 1660, he landed near Dover, with his two brothers, the Dukes of York and Gloucester. On the 29th of May, he made his triumphal entry into London. It was his birthday he was thirty years of age, and in the full maturity of manly beauty, while his gracious manners and captivating speech made him the favorite of the people, as well as of the old nobility. The season was full of charms, and the spirits of all classes were buoyant with hope. Every thing conspired to give a glow to the popular enthusiasm. A long line of illustrious monarchs was restored. The hateful fires of religious fanaticism were apparently extinguished. An accomplished sovereign, disciplined in the school of adversity, of brilliant talents, amiable temper, fascinating manners, and singular experiences, had returned to the throne of his ancestors, and had sworn to rule by the laws, to forget old offences, and promote liberty of conscience. No longer should there be a government of soldiers, nor the rule of a man hostile to those pleasures and opinions which had ever been dear to the English people. With the return of the exiled prince, should also return joy, peace, and prosperity. For seventeen years, there had been violent political and social animosities, war, tyranny social restraints, and religious fanaticism. But order and law were now to be reëstablished, and the reign of cant and hypocrisy was now to end. Justice and mercy were to meet together in the person of a king who was represented to have all the virtues and none of the vices of his station and his times. So people reasoned and felt, of all classes and conditions. And why should they not rejoice in the restoration of such blessings? The ways were strewn with flowers, the bells sent forth a merry peal, the streets were hung with tapestries; while aldermen with their heavy

chains, nobles in their robes of pomp, ladies with their silks and satins, and waving handkerchiefs, filling all the balconies and windows; musicians, dancers, and exulting crowds, — all welcomed the return of Charles. Never was there so great a jubilee in London; and never did monarch receive such addresses of flattery and loyalty. "Dread monarch," said the Earl of Manchester, in the House of Lords, "I offer no flattering titles. You are the desire of three kingdoms, the strength and stay of the tribes of the people." "Most royal sovereign," said one of the deputations, "the hearts of all are filled with veneration for you, confidence in you, longings for you. All degrees, and ages, and sexes, high, low, rich and poor, men, women, and children, join in sending up to Heaven one prayer, 'Long live King Charles II.;' so that the English air is not susceptible of any other sound. bells, bonfires, peals of ordnance, shouts, and acclamations of the people bear no other moral; nor can his majesty conceive with what joy, what cheerfulness, what lettings out of the soul, what expressions of transported minds, a stupendous concourse of people attended the proclamation of their most potent, most mighty, and most undoubted king." Such was the adulatory language addressed by the English people to the son of the king they had murdered, and to a man noted for every frivolity and vice that could degrade a sovereign. What are we to think of that public joy, and public sycophancy, after so many years of hard fighting for civil and religious liberty? For what were the battles of Naseby and Worcester? For what the Solemn League and Covenant? For what the trial and execution of Charles I.? For what the elevation of Cromwell? Alas! for what were all the experiments and sufferings of twenty years, the breaking up of old and mighty customs, and twenty years of blood, usurpation, and change? What were the benefits of the Revolution? Or, had no benefits? How happened it that a whole nation should simultaneously rise and expel their monarch from a throne which his ancestors had enjoyed for six hundred years, and then, in so short a time, have elevated to this old throne, which was supposed to be subverted forever, the son of their insulted, humiliated, and murdered king? and this without bloodshed, with every demonstration of national rejoicings, and with every external mark of

Great Public Rejoicings.

repentance for their past conduct. Charles, too, was restored without any of those limitations by which the nation sought to curtail the power of his father. The nation surrendered to him more absolute power than the most ambitious kings, since the reign of John, had ever claimed, — more than he ever dared to expect. How shall we explain these things? And what is the moral which they teach?

One fact is obvious, — that a great reaction had taken place in the national mind as to revolutionary principles. It is evident that a great disgust for the government of Cromwell had succeeded the antipathy to the royal government of Charles. All classes as ardently desired the restoration, as they had before favored the rebellion. Even the old parliamentarians hailed the return of Charles, notwithstanding it was admitted that the protectorate was a vigorous administration; that law and order were enforced; that religious liberty was proclaimed; that the rights of conscience were respected; that literature and science were encouraged; that the morals of the people were purified; that the ordinances of religion were observed; that vice and folly were discouraged; that justice was ably administered; that peace and plenty were enjoyed; that prosperity attended the English arms abroad; and that the nation was as much respected abroad as it was prosperous at home. These things were admitted by the very people who rejoiced in the restoration. And yet, in spite of all these substantial blessings, the reign of Cromwell was odious. Why was this?

It can only be explained on the supposition that there were *unendurable evils* connected with the administration of Cromwell, which more than balanced the benefits he conferred; or, that expectations were held out by Charles of national benefits greater than those conferred by the republic; or that the nation had so retrograded in elevation of sentiment as to be unable to appreciate the excellences of Cromwell's administration.

There is much to support all of these suppositions. In regard to the evils connected with the republic, it is certain that a large standing army was supported, and was necessary to uphold the government of the protector, in order to give to it efficiency and character. This army was expensive, and the people felt the burden. They always complain under taxation, whether necessary

or not. Taxes ever make any government unpopular, and made the administration of Cromwell especially so. And the army showed the existence of a military despotism, which, however imperatively called for, or rendered unavoidable by revolution, was still a hateful fact. The English never have liked the principle of a military despotism. And it was a bitter reflection to feel that so much blood and treasure had been expended to get rid of the arbitrary rule of the Stuarts, only to introduce a still more expensive and arbitrary government, under the name of a republic. Moreover, the eyes of the people were opened to the moral corruptions incident to the support of a large army, without which the power of Cromwell would have been unsubstantial. He may originally have desired to establish his power on a civil basis, rather than a military one; but his desires were not realized. The parliaments which he assembled were unpractical and disorderly. He was forced to rule without them. But the nation could not forget this great insult to their liberties, and to those privileges which had ever been dear to them. The preponderance of the civil power has, for several centuries, characterized the government; and no blessings were sufficiently great to balance the evil, in the eye of an Englishman, of the preponderance of a military government, neither the excellence of Cromwell's life, nor the glory and greatness to which he raised the nation.

Again, much was expected of Charles II., and there was much in his character and early administration to produce content. His manners were agreeable. He had no personal antipathies or jealousies. He selected, at first, the wisest and best of all parties to be his counsellors and ministers. He seemed to forget old offences. He was fond of pleasure; was good-natured and affable. He summoned a free parliament. His interests were made to appear identical with those of the people. He promised to rule by the laws. He did not openly infringe on the constitution. And he restored, what has ever been so dear to the great body of the nation, the Episcopal Church in all its beauty and grandeur while he did not recommence the persecution of Puritans until some time had elapsed from his restoration. Above all, he disbanded the army, which was always distasteful to the people, — odious, onerous, and oppressive. The civil power again triumphed over that

of the military, and circumstances existed which rendered the subversion of liberty very difficult. Many adverse events transpired during his unfortunate and disgraceful reign; but these, in the early part of it, had not, of course, been anticipated.

There is also force in the third supposition, that the nation had retrograded in moral elevation. All writers speak of a strong reaction to the religious fervor of the early revolutionists. The moral influence of the army had proved destructive to the habits and sentiments of the people. A strong love of pleasure and demoralizing amusements existed, when Charles was recalled. A general laxity of morals was lamented by the wisest and best of the nation. The religious convictions of enthusiasts survived their sympathies. Hypocrisy and cant succeeded fervor and honesty. Infidelity lurked in many a bosom in which devotional ardor had once warmly burned. Distrust of all philanthropy and all human virtue was as marked, as faith in the same previously had been. The ordinances of religion became irksome, and it was remembered with bitterness that the Puritans, in the days of their ascendency, had cruelly proscribed the most favorite pleasures and time-honored festivals of old England. But the love of them returned with redoubled vigor. May-poles, wrestling-matches, bear-baitings, puppet-shows, bowls, horse-racing, betting, rope-dancing, romping under the mistletoe on Christmas, eating boars' heads, attending the theatres, health-drinking, — all these old-fashioned ways, in which the English sought merriment, were restored. The evil was chiefly in the excess to which these pleasures were carried; and every thing, which bore any resemblance to the Puritans, was ridiculed and despised. The nation, as a nation, did not love Puritanism, or any thing pertaining to it, after the deep religious excitement had passed away. The people were ashamed of prayer-meetings, of speaking through their noses, of wearing their hair straight, of having their garments cut primly, of calling their children by the name of Moses, Joshua, Jeremiah, Obadiah, &c.; and, in short, of all customs and opinions peculiar to the Extreme Puritans. So general was the disgust of Puritanism, so eager were all to indulge in the pleasures that had been forbidden under the reign of Cromwell, so sick were they of the very name of republicanism, that Puritanism may be said to have proved, in England, a signal failure.

Such were some of the reasons of popular acclamation on the restoration of Charles II., and which we cannot consider entirely without force. A state of mind existed in England as favorable to the encroachments of royalty, as, twenty years before, it had been unfavorable.

Charles was not a high-minded, or honest, or patriotic king; and therefore we might naturally expect the growth of absolutism during his reign. The progress of absolutism is, indeed, one of its features. This, for a time, demands our notice.

On the restoration of Charles II., his subjects made no particular stipulations respecting their liberties, which were incautiously intrusted to his hands. But, at first, he did not seem inclined to grasp at greater powers than what the constitution allowed him. He had the right to appoint the great officers of state, the privilege of veto on legislative enactments, the control of the army and navy, the regulation of all foreign intercourse, and the right of making peace and war. But the constitution did not allow him to rule without a parliament, or to raise taxes without its consent. The parliament might grant or withhold supplies at pleasure, and all money bills originated and were discussed in the House of Commons alone. These were the great principles of the English constitution, which Charles swore to maintain.

The first form in which the encroaching temper of the king was manifested was, in causing the Triennial Bill to be repealed. This was indeed done by the parliament, but through the royal influence. This bill was not that a parliament should be assembled every three years, but that the interval between one session and another should not exceed that period. But this wise law, which had passed by acclamation during the reign of Charles I., and for which even Clarendon had voted, was regarded by Charles II. as subversive of the liberty of his crown; and a supple, degenerate and sycophantic parliament gratified his wishes.

About the same time was passed the Corporation Act, which enjoined all magistrates, and persons of trust in corporations, to swear that they believed it unlawful, under any pretence whatever to take arms against the king. The Presbyterians refused to take this oath; and they were therefore excluded from offices of dignity and trust. The act bore hard upon all bodies of Dissenters and

Roman Catholics, the former of whom were most cruelly persecuted in this reign.

The next most noticeable effort of Charles to extend his power independently of the law, was his secret alliance with Louis XIV. This was not known to the nation, and even but to few of his ministers, and was the most disgraceful act of his reign. For the miserable stipend of two hundred thousand pounds a year, he was ready to compromise the interests of the kingdom, and make himself the slave of the most ambitious sovereign in Europe. He became a pensioner of France, and yet did not feel his disgrace. Clarendon, attached as he was to monarchy, and to the house of Stuart, could not join him in his base intrigues; and therefore lost, as was to be expected, the royal favor. He had been the companion and counsellor of Charles in the days of his exile; he had attempted to enkindle in his mind the desire of great deeds and virtues; he had faithfully served him as chancellor and prime minister; he was impartial and incorruptible; he was as much attached to Episcopacy, as he was to monarchy; he had even advised Charles to rule without a parliament; and yet he was disgraced because he would not comply with all the wishes of his unscrupulous master. But Clarendon was, nevertheless, unpopular with the nation. He had advised Charles to sell Dunkirk, the proudest trophy of the Revolution, and had built for himself a splendid palace, on the site of the present Clarendon Hotel, in Albemarle Street, which the people called *Dunkirk House*. He was proud, ostentatious, and dictatorial, and was bitterly hostile to all democratic influences. He was too good for one party, and not good enough for the other, and therefore fell to the ground; but he retired, if not with dignity, at least with safety. He retreated to the Continent, and there wrote his celebrated history of the Great Rebellion, a partial and bitter history, yet a valuable record of the great events of the age of revolution which he had witnessed and detested.

Charles received the bribe of two hundred thousand pounds from the French king, with the hope of being made independent of his parliament, and with the condition of assisting Louis XIV. in his aggressive wars on the liberties of Europe, especially those of Holland. He was, at heart an absolutist, and rejoiced in the

victories of the "Grand Monarch." But this supply was scarcely sufficient even for his pleasures, much less to support the ordinary pomp of a monarchy, and the civil and military powers of the state. So he had to resort to other means.

It happened, fortunately for his encroachments, but unfortunately for the nation, that the English parliament, at that period, was more corrupt, venal, base, and sycophantic than at any period under the Tudor kings, or at any subsequent period under the Hanoverian princes. The House of Commons made no indignant resistance; it sent up but few spirited remonstrances; but tamely acquiesced in the measures of Charles and his ministers. Its members were bought and sold with unblushing facility, and even were corrupted by the agents of the French king. One member received six thousand pounds for his vote. Twenty-nine of the members received from five hundred to twelve hundred pounds a year. Charles I. attempted to rule by opposition to the parliament; Charles II. by corrupting it. Hence it was nearly silent in view of his arbitrary spirit, his repeated encroachments, and his worthless public character.

Among his worst acts was his shutting up the Exchequer, where the bankers and merchants had been in the habit of depositing money on the security of the funds, receiving a large interest of from eight to ten per cent. By closing the Exchequer, the bankers, unable to draw out their money, stopped payment; and a universal panic was the consequence, during which many great failures happened. By this base violation of the public faith, Charles obtained one million three hundred thousand pounds. But it undermined his popularity more than any of his acts, since he touched the pockets of the people. The odium, however, fell chiefly on his ministers, especially those who received the name of the *Cabal*, from the fact that the initials of their names spelt that odious term of reproach, not unmerited in their case.

These five ministers were Clifford, Arlington, Buckingham, Ashley, and Lauderdale, and they were the great instruments of his tyranny. None of them had the talents or audacity of Strafford, or the narrowness and bigotry of Laud; but their counsels were injurious to the nation.

Clifford and Arlington were tolerably respectable but indifferent

to the glory and shame of their country; while Buckingham, Ashley, and Lauderdale were profligate, unprincipled, and dishonest to a great degree. They aided Charles to corrupt the parliament and deceive the nation. They removed all restraints on his will, and pandered to his depraved tastes. It was by their suggestion that the king shut up the Exchequer. They also favored restrictions on the press.

These restrictions were another abomination in the reign of Charles, but one ever peculiar to a despotic government. No book could be printed out of London, York, or the Universities. But these were not made wholly with a view of shackling the mind, but to prevent those libels and lampoons which made the government ridiculous in the eyes of the people.

Nothing caused more popular indignation, during this reign, than the Forfeiture of the Corporation of the City of London. The power of the democracy resided, at this time, with the corporations, and as long as they were actuated by the spirit of liberty, there was no prospect of obtaining a parliament entirely subservient to the king. It was determined to take away their charters; and the infamous Judge Jeffreys was found a most subservient tool of royalty in undermining the liberties of the country. The corporation of London, however, received back its charter, after having yielded to the king the right of conferring the appointments of mayor, recorder, and sheriffs.

Among other infringements on the constitution was the fining of jurors when they refused to act according to the direction of the judges. Juries were constantly intimidated, and their privileges were abridged. A new parliament, moreover, was not convoked after three years had elapsed from the dissolution of the old one, which infringement was the more reprehensible, since the king had nothing to fear from the new House of Commons, the members of which vied with each other in a base compliancy with the royal will.

But their sycophancy was nothing compared with what the bishops and clergy of the Established Church generally evinced. Absolute non-resistance was inculcated from the pulpits, and the doctrine ridiculed that power emanated from the people. The divine rights of kings, and the divine ordination of absolute power

were the themes of divines, while Oxford proclaimed doctrines worthy of Mariana and the Jesuits.

Thus various influences contributed to make Charles II. absolute in England — the Courts of Justice, the Parliaments, the Universities, and the Church of England. Had he been as ambitious as he was fond of pleasure, as capable of ruling as he was capable of telling stories at the dinner table, he would, like Louis XIV., have reared an absolute throne in England. But he was too easy, too careless, too fond of pleasure to concentrate his thoughts on devising means to enslave his subjects.

It must not, however, be supposed that all his subjects were indifferent to his encroachments, in spite of the great reaction which had succeeded to liberal sentiments. Before he died, the spirit of resistance was beginning to be seen, and some checks to royal power were imposed by parliament itself. The Habeas Corpus Act, the most important since the declaration of Magna Charta, was passed, and through the influence of one of his former ministers, Ashley, now become Earl of Shaftesbury, who took the popular side, after having served all sides, but always with a view of advancing his own interests, a man of great versatility of genius, of great sagacity, and of varied learning. Had Charles continued much longer on the throne, it cannot be doubted that the nation would have been finally aroused to resist his spirit of encroachment, for the principles of liberty had not been proclaimed in vain.

Charles II. was a tyrant, and one of the worst kings that ever sat on the English throne. His leading defect was want of earnestness of character, which made him indifferent to the welfare of his country. England, during his reign, was reduced to comparative insignificance in the eyes of foreigners, and was neither feared nor respected. Her king was neither a powerful friend nor an implacable enemy, and left the Continental Powers to pursue their own ends unmolested and unrebuked. Most of the administrations of the English kings are interlinked with the whole system of European politics. But the reign of Charles is chiefly interesting in relation to the domestic history of England This history is chiefly the cabals of ministers, the intrigues of the court, the pleasures and follies of the king, the attacks he made