CHAPTER XXII.

LOUIS XV.

THE reign of Louis XV. was one of the longest on record extending from 1715 to 1774 — the greater part of the eighteenth century. But he was a child, only five years of age, on the death of his great grandfather, Louis XIV.; and, even after he came to his majority, he was ruled by his ministers and his mistresses. He was not, like Louis XIV., the life and the centre of all great movements in his country. He was an automaton, a pageant; not because the constitution imposed checks on his power, but because he was weak and vacillating. He, therefore, performing no great part in history, is only to be alluded to, and attention should be mainly directed to his ministers.

During the minority of the king, the reins of government were held by the Duke of Orleans, as regent, and who, in case of the king's death, would be the next king, being grand-nephew of Louis XIV. The administration of the Duke of Orleans is nearly contemporaneous with that of Sir Robert Walpole. The most pressing subject which demanded the attention of the regent, was that of the finances. The late king had left a debt of one thousand millions of livres — an enormous sum in that age. To get rid of this burden, the Duke of St. Simon proposed a bankruptcy. "This," said he, "would fall chiefly on the commercial and moneyed classes, who were not to be feared or pitied; and would, moreover, be not only a relief to the state, but a salutary warning to the ignoble classes not to lend their money." This speech illustrates the feelings and opinions of the aristocratic class in France, at that time. But the minister of finance would not run the risk of incurring the popular odium which such a measure would have produced, and he proposed calling together the States General. The regent duke, however, would not hear of that measure, and yet did not feel inclined to follow fully the advice of St. Simon. He therefore compromised the matter, and resolved to rob the

national creditor. He established a commission to verify the bills of the public creditors, and, if their accounts did not prove satisfactory, to cancel them entirely. Three hundred and fifty millions of livres — equal, probably, to three hundred millions of dollars in this age — were thus swept away. But it was resolved not only to refuse to pay just debts, but to make people repay the gains which they had made. Those who had loaned money to the state, or had farmed the revenues, were flung into prison, and threatened with confiscation of their goods, and even death, — treated as Jews were treated in the Dark Ages, — unless they redeemed themselves by purchasing a pardon. Never before did men suffer such a penalty for having befriended an embarrassed state. To this injustice and cruelty the magistracy winked. But, in addition to this, the coin was debased to such an extent, that seventy-two millions of livres were thus added to the treasury. Yet even these gains were not enough to satisfy a profligate government. There still continued a constant pressure. The national debt had increased even to fifteen hundred millions of livres, or almost seventy millions sterling—equivalent to what would now be equal to at least one thousand millions of dollars.

To get rid of this debt, the regent listened to the schemes of the celebrated John Law, a Scotch adventurer and financier, who had established a bank, had grown rich, and was reputed to be a wonderful political economist.

Law proposed, in substance, to increase the paper currency of the country, and thus supersede the necessity for the use of the precious metals.

The regent, moreover, having great faith in Law's abilities, and in his wealth, converted his private bank into a royal one — made it, in short, the Bank of France. This bank was then allied with the two great commercial companies of the time — the East India and the Mississippi. Great privileges were bestowed on each. The latter had the exclusive monopoly of the trade with Louisiana, and all the countries on the Mississippi River, and also of the fur trade in Canada. Louisiana was then supposed to be rich in gold mines, and great delusions arose from the popular notion.

The capital of this gigantic corporation was fixed at one hundred millions; and Law, who was made director-general aimed to make

the notes of the company preferable to specie, which, however could lawfully be demanded for the notes. So it was settled that the shares of the company could only be purchased by the paper of the bank. As extravagant hopes of gain were cherished respecting the company, its shares were in great demand. And, as only Law's bank bills could purchase the shares, the gold and silver of the realm flowed into Law's bank. Law and the regent had, therefore, the fabrication of both shares and bank bills to an indefinite amount.

The national creditor was also paid in the notes of the bank and, as unbounded confidence existed, both in the genius of Law and in the profits of the Mississippi Company, — as the shares were constantly in demand, and were rising in value, — the creditor was satisfied. In a short time, one half of the national debt was transferred. Government owed the bank, and not the individuals and corporations from whom loans had been originally obtained. These individuals, instead of government scrip, had shares in the Mississippi Company.

And all would have been well, had the company's shares been valuable, or had they retained their credit, or even had but a small part of the national debt been transferred. But the people did not know the real issues of the bank, and so long as new shares could be created and sold to pay the interest, the company's credit was good. For a while the delusion lasted. Law was regarded as a great national benefactor. His house was thronged with dukes and princes. He became controller-general of the finances — virtually prime minister. His fame extended far and wide. Honors were showered upon him from every quarter. He was elected a member of the French Academy. His schemes seemed to rain upon Paris a golden shower. He had freed the state from embarrassments, and he had, apparently, made every body rich, and no one poor. He was a deity, as beneficent as he was powerful. He became himself the richest man in Europe. Every body was intoxicated. The golden age had come. Paris was crowded with strangers from all parts of the world. Five hundred thousand strangers expended their fortunes, in hope of making greater ones. Twelve hundred new coaches were set up in the city. Lodgings could scarcely be had for money. The highest price was paid for

provisions. Widow ladies, clergymen, and noblemen deserted London to speculate in stocks at Paris. Nothing was seen but new equipages, new houses, new apparel, new furniture. Nothing was felt but universal exhilaration. Every man seemed to have made his fortune. The stocks rose every day. The higher they rose, the more new stock was created. At last, the shares of the company rose from one hundred to twelve hundred per cent., and three hundred millions were created, which were nominally worth, in 1719, three thousand six hundred millions of livres—one hundred and eighty times the amount of all the gold and silver in Europe at that time.

In this public delusion, the directors were wise enough to convert *their* shares into silver and gold. A great part of the current coin in the kingdom was locked up in the houses or banks of a few stockjobbers and speculators.

But the scarcity of gold and silver was felt, people's eyes were opened, and the bubble burst, but not until half of the national debt had been paid off by this swindling transaction.

The nation was furious. A panic spread among all classes; the bank had no money with which to redeem its notes; the shares fell almost to nothing; and universal bankruptcy took place. Those who, a few days before, fancied themselves rich, now found themselves poor. Property of all kinds fell to less than its original value. Houses, horses, carriages, upholstery, every thing, declined in price. All were sellers, and few were purchasers.

But popular execration and vengeance pursued the financier who had deceived the nation. He was forced to fly from Paris. His whole property was confiscated, and he was reduced to indigence and contempt. When his scheme was first suggested to the regent, he was worth three millions of livres. He had better remained a private banker.

The bursting of the Mississippi bubble, of course, inflamed the nation against the government, and the Duke of Orleans was execrated, for his agency in the business had all the appearance of a fraud. But he was probably deluded with others, and hoped to free the country from its burdens. The great blunder was in the over-issue of notes when there was no money to redeem them.

Nor could any management have prevented the catastrophe

It was not possible that the shares of the company should advance so greatly, and the public not perceive that they had advanced beyond their value; it was not possible, that, while paper money so vastly increased in quantity, the numerical prices of all other things should not increase also, and that foreigners who sold their manufactures to the French should not turn their paper into gold, and carry it out of the kingdom; it was not possible that the disappearance of the coin should not create alarm, notwithstanding the edicts of the regent, and the reasonings of Law; it was not possible that annuitants should not discover that their old incomes were now insufficient and less valuable, as the medium in which they were paid was less valuable; it was not possible that the small part of society which may be called the sober and reasoning part, should not be so struck with the sudden fortunes and extravagant enthusiasm which prevailed, as not to doubt of the solidity of a system, unphilosophical in itself, and which, after all, had to depend on the profits of a commercial company, the good faith of the regent, and the skill of Law; it was impossible, on these and other accounts, but that gold and silver should be at last preferred to paper notes, of whatever description or promise. These were inevitable consequences. Hence the failure of the scheme of Law, and the ruin of all who embarked in it, owing to a change in public opinion as to the probable success of the scheme, and, secondly, the over-issue of money."

By this great folly, four hundred thousand families were ruined, or greatly reduced; but the government got rid of about eight hundred millions of debts. The sufferings of the people, with such a government, did not, however, create great solicitude; the same old course of folly and extravagance was pursued by the court.

Nor was there a change for the better when Louis XV. attained his majority. His vices and follies exceeded all that had ever been displayed before. The support of his mistresses alone was enough to embarrass the nation. Their waste and extravagance almost exceeded belief. Who has not heard of the disgraceful and disgusting iniquities of Pompadour and Du Barry?

The regency of the Duke of Orleans occupied the first eight years of the reign of Louis XV. The prime minister of the regent

was Dubois, at first his tutor, and afterwards Archbishop of Cambray. He was rewarded with a cardinal's hat for the service he rendered to the Jesuits in their quarrel with the Jansenists, but was a man of unprincipled character; a fit minister to a prince who pretended to be too intellectual to worship God, and who copied Henry IV. only in his licentiousness.

The first minister of Louis XV., after he assumed himself the reins of government, was the Duke of Bourbon, lineal heir of the house of Condé, and first prince of the blood. But he was a man of no character, and his short administration was signalized by no important event.

Cardinal Fleury succeeded the Duke of Bourbon as prime minister. He had been preceptor of the king, and was superior to all the intrigues of the court; a man of great timidity, but also a man of great probity, gentleness, and benignity. Fortunately, he was intrusted with power at a period of great domestic tranquillity, and his administration was, like that of Walpole, pacific. He projected, however, no schemes of useful reform, and made no improvements in laws or finance. But he ruled despotically, and with good intentions, from 1726 to 1743.

The most considerable subject of interest connected with his peaceful administration, was the quarrel between the Jesuits and the Jansenists. Fleury took the side of the former, although he was never an active partisan; and he was induced to support the Jesuits for the sake of securing the cardinal's hat — the highest honor, next to that of the tiara, which could be conferred on an ecclesiastic. The Jesuits upheld the crumbling power of the popes, and the popes rewarded the advocates of that body of men, who were their ablest supporters.

The Jansenist controversy is too important to be passed over with a mere allusion. It was the great event in the history of Catholic Europe during the seventeenth century. It involved principles of great theological, and even political interest.

The Jansenist controversy grew out of the long-disputed questions pertaining to grace and free will — questions which were agitated with great spirit and acrimony in the seventeenth century as they had previously been centuries before by Augustine and Pelagius The Jesuits had never agreed with the great oracle of

the Western church in his views on certain points, and it was their aim to show the absolute freedom of the human will — that it had a self-determining power, a perfect liberty to act or not to act. Molina, a Spanish Jesuit, had been a great defender of this ancient Pelagianism, and his views were opposed by the Dominicans, and the controversy was carried into all the universities of Europe. The Council of Trent was too wise to meddle with this difficult question; but angry theologians would not let it rest, and it was discussed with peculiar fervor in the Catholic University of Louvaine. Among the doctors who there distinguished themselves in reviving the great contest of the fifth and sixth centuries, were Cornelius Jansen of Holland, and Jean de Verger of Gascony. Both these doctors hated the Jesuits, and lamented the dangerous doctrines which they defended, and advocated the views of Augustine and the Calvinists. Jansen became professor of divinity in the university, and then Bishop of Ypres. After an uninterrupted study of twenty years, he produced his celebrated book called *Augustinus*, in which he set forth the servitude of the will, and the necessity of divine grace to break the bondage, which, however, he maintained, like Calvin, is imparted only to a few, and in pursuance of a decree existing in the divine mind before the creation of our species. But Jansen died before the book was finished, and two years elapsed before it was published, but, when published, it was the signal for a contest which distracted Europe for seventy years.

While Jansen was preparing this work, his early companion and friend, De Verger, a man of family and rank, had become abbot of the monastery of St. Cyran in Paris, and had formed, in the centre of that gay city, a learned and ascetic hermitage. This was during the reign of Louis XIII. His reputation, as a scholar and a saint, attracted the attention of Richelieu, and his services were solicited by that able minister. But neither rewards, nor flatteries, nor applause had power over the mind of St. Cyran, as he was now called. The cardinal hated and feared a man whom he could not bribe or win, and soon found means to quarrel with him, and sent him to the gloomy fortress of Vincennes. But there, in his prison, he devoted himself, with renewed ardor, to his studies and duties, subduing his appetites and passions by an asce-

cism which even his church did not require, and devoting all his thoughts and words to the service of God. Like Calvin and Augustine, he had so profound a conception of the necessity of an inward change, that he made grace precede repentance. A man so serene in trial, so humble in spirit, so natural and childlike in ordinary life, and yet so distinguished for talents and erudition, could not help exciting admiration, and making illustrious proselytes. Among them was Arnauld D'Antilly, the intimate friend of Richelieu and Anne of Austria; Le Maitre, the most eloquent lawyer and advocate in France; and Angelique Arnauld, the abbess of Port Royal. This last was one of the most distinguished ladies of her age, noble by birth, and still more noble by her beautiful qualities of mind and heart. She had been made abbess of her Cistercian convent at the age of eleven years, and at that time was gay, social, and light-hearted. The preaching of a Capuchin friar had turned her thoughts to the future world, and she closed the gates of her beautiful abbey, in the vale of Chevreuse, against all strangers, and devoted herself to the ascetic duties which her church and age accounted most meritorious. She soon after made the acquaintance of St. Cyran, and he imbued her mind with the principles of the Augustinian theology. When imprisoned at Vincennes, he was still the spiritual father of Port Royal. Amid this famous retreat were collected the greatest scholars and the greatest saints of the seventeenth century — Antoine Le Maitre, De Lericourt, Le Maitre de Saci, Antoine Arnauld, and Pascal himself. Le Maitre de Saci gave to the world the best translation of the Bible in French; Arnauld wrote one hundred volumes of controversy, and, among them, a noted satire on the Jesuits, which did them infinite harm; while Pascal, besides his wonderful mathematical attainments, and his various meditative works, is immortalized for his Provincial Letters, written in the purest French, and with matchless power and beauty. This work, directed against the Jesuits, is an inimitable model of elegant irony, and the most effective sarcasm probably ever elaborated by man. In the vale of Port Royal also dwelt Tillemont, the great ecclesiastical historian; Fontaine and Racine, who were controlled by the spirit of Arnauld, as well as the Prince of Conti, and the Duke of Liancourt. There resided, under the name of

Le Mercier, and in the humble occupation of a gardener, one of the proudest nobles of the French court; and there, too, dwelt the celebrated Duchess of Longueville, sister of the Prince of Condé the life of the Fronde, the idol of the Parisian mob, and the once gay patroness of the proudest festivities.

But it is the labors of these saints, scholars, and nobles to repress the dangerous influence of the Jesuits for which they were most distinguished. The Jansenists of Port Royal did not deny the authority of the pope, nor the great institutions of the papacy. They sought chiefly, in their controversy with the Jesuits, to enforce the doctrines of Augustine respecting justification. But their efforts were not agreeable to the popes, nor to the doctors of the Sorbonne, who had no sympathy with their religious life, and detested their bold spirit of inquiry. The doctors of the Sorbonne, accordingly, extracted from the book of Jansen five propositions which they deemed heretical, and urged the pope to condemn them. The Port Royalists admitted that these five propositions were indefensible if they were declared heretical by the sovereign pontiff, but denied that they were actually to be found in the book of Jansen. They did not quarrel with the pope on grounds of faith. They recognized his infallibility in matters of religion, but not in matters of fact. The pope, not wishing to push things to extremity, which never was the policy of Rome, pretended to be satisfied. But the Jesuits would not let him rest, and insisted on the condemnation of the Jansenist opinions. The case was brought before a great council of French bishops and doctors, and Arnauld, the great champion of the Jansenists, was voted guilty of heresy for denying that the five propositions which the pope condemned were actually in the book of Jansen. The pope moreover, was induced to issue a formula of an oath, to which all who wished to enjoy any office in the church were obliged to subscribe, and which affirmed that the five condemned propositions were actually to be found in Jansen's book. This act of the pope was justly regarded by the Jansenists as intolerably despotic, and many of the most respectable of the French clergy sided with them in opinion. All France now became interested in the controversy, and it soon led to great commotions. The Jansenists then contended that the pope might err in questions of fact, and

that, therefore, they were not under an obligation to subscribe to the required oath. The Jesuits, on the other hand, maintained the pope's infallibility in matters of fact, as well as in doctrine; and, as they had the most powerful adherents, the Jansenists were bitterly persecuted. But, as twenty-two bishops were found to take their side, the matter was hushed up for a while. For ten years more, the Port Royalists had peace and protection, chiefly through the great influence of the Duchess of Longueville; but, on her death, persecution returned. Arnauld was obliged to fly to the Netherlands, and the beautiful abbey of Port Royal was despoiled of its lands and privileges. Louis XIV. had ever hated its inmates, being ruled by Madame de Maintenon, who, in turn, was a tool of the Jesuits.

But the demolition of the abbey, the spoliation of its lands, and the dispersion of those who sought its retreat, did not stop the controversy. Pascal continued it, and wrote his Provincial Letters, which had a wonderful effect in making the Jesuits both ridiculous and hateful. That book was the severest blow this body of ambitious and artful casuists ever received.

Nor was the Jansenist controversy merely a discussion of grace and free will. The principles of Jansenism, when carried out, tended to secure independence to the national church, and to free the consciences of men from the horrible power of their spiritual confessors. Jansenism was a timid protest against spiritual tyranny, a mild kind of Puritanism, which found sympathy with many people in France. The Parliament of Paris caught the spirit of freedom, and protected the Jansenists and those who sympathized with them. It so happened that a certain bishop published a charge to his clergy which was strongly imbued with the independent doctrines of the Jansenists. He was tried and condemned by a provincial council, and banished by the government. The Parliament of Paris, as the guardian of the law, took up the quarrel, and Cardinal Fleury was obliged to resort to a *Bed of Justice* in order to secure the registry of a decree. A Bed of Justice was the personal appearance of the sovereign in the supreme judicial tribunal of the nation, and his command to the members of it to obey his injunctions was the last resort of absolute power. The parliament, of course, obeyed, but protested the