CHAPTER LIII.

GOVERNMENT OF LOUIS XIV.

Consolidation of the Absolute Monarchy. — If the administration of the kingdom was the work of the ministers of Louis XIV., as well as his own, one thing certainly belonged to him alone; namely, the general supervision which he gave to the government and to society, the energetic and skilful manner in which he dominated all powers, annulled them, or made them subservient to his grandeur. We have already seen his ideas as to the rights of sovereigns; he had summarized them in the speech which he is said to have made, young as he was, at the termination of the Fronde: "I am the State." He believed it, all the world believed it also, and the Church taught it; Bossuet founded the divine right of monarchy upon maxims drawn from the Holy Scriptures. While Louis XIV. lived, there was, in France, but one will without limitation or control, and that was his own.

Suppression of States-General; Provincial States and Elective Mayoralties. — The States-General would have recalled the memory of other rights; he never convened them; he punished those who spoke of them. The greater part of the provinces had States of their own; he suppressed many of them. Those which were retained were assembled only to execute the orders of the ministers. What remained of municipal liberties disappeared, as provincial liberties had done. An edict of 1683 placed the financial management of the cities in the hands of the intendants. Municipal life was then suspended, as had long been the case with political life; an unfortunate condition of things, for practical education in public affairs was unknown in France, and when the day should come that she should be obliged to take the government from the failing hands of absolute royalty, she would find bold and powerful logicians to guide her, but no practical men of experience, who would understand how, by wise measures, to join the future to the past.

Political liberty, to be lasting, must be built upon the strong basis of local liberties. It is thus that it has grown up in England, and thus it is maintained.

Submission of Parliament. — In the sixteenth century the parliaments were called "the strong and powerful columns upon which monarchy rested." But in the seventeenth the new royalty desired no support but its own absolute right. But, thanks to the venality of offices, to the dignity of the lives of the magistrates, to the part they had sometimes played in politics, to their *esprit de corps*, there arose alongside of the feudal noblesse a *noblesse de robe* which was not always easily handled. Without openly breaking with the royal power, they resisted it by the aid of long proceedings and venerable forms. They turned aside attacks by that force of inertia which belongs to an assembly of old men, and which was hard to break down at a period when tradition made right. The spirit of opposition, driven out everywhere else, took refuge among them; faint political opposition in the Parliament of Paris, provincial opposition in the others, and in all religious opposition under the form of Jansenism. Louis XIV. saw this clearly, and diligently strove to transform the parliaments into simple courts of appeal, and make them subject to his Council of State. By an edict of 1667 he ordered the Parliament of Paris to register his ordinances within a week, and would allow no remonstrances. He caused the records of all deliberations which dated from the civil war to be torn from their register, so as to efface even the remembrance of their ancient pretensions. He changed their title of sovereign court to that of superior court.

Submission of the Nobility. — It seemed more difficult to reduce the nobles. Richelieu had demolished their fortresses and struck off the heads of the most troublesome among them; Mazarin had bought them or conquered them by intrigue. Louis XIV. made himself master of them by attracting them to him by festivals, and by drawing them away from their own estates, where they thought too much of their ancestors and felt themselves still free, filling his antechambers and private offices with the descendants of those who had made his forefathers tremble, and thus gathering about royalty that brilliant cortège by which the representative of God on earth wished to be always surrounded. The governors of provinces, despoiled of all

authority for the benefit of the intendants, "could no longer play the king." They had no longer the handling of the public moneys, not even the command of the troops, and they were appointed for only three years. Those of the nobles who persisted in remaining in their own domains were closely watched, and kept from every exercise of oppressiveness or violence. But to the nobles who lived at his court, even to those for whom he had little esteem, he always exhibited tokens of outward respect, in order that he, the chief among them, might appear greater in the eyes of the crowd.

But though they received titles and honors, they were allowed no political influence in the State. Louis XIV. employed the princes of the blood, even his own brother, as little as possible, fearing they might find opportunities to distinguish themselves. His brother might have been a prince equal to many others; his nephew possessed the qualities which make a superior man; and the Prince of Conti was certainly very brave and very capable. They were all obliged to extinguish, in idleness or debaucheries, talents which might have been made profitable to the country. After the death of Mazarin he admitted to his councils only one man of the old nobility, the Duke of Beauvilliers, governor of the children of the royal house, and chose all his ministers from among men of station by no means exalted. He reserved for the nobles only the more restricted field of the military profession, having first taken care to discipline them by the stern hand of Louvois and the inflexible *order of promotion*, and to deprive them of or abolish the high offices that Richelieu had allowed to remain: those of colonel-general of the infantry, colonel-general of the cavalry, admiral of France, and captain-general of the galleys. The nobility of France had not succeeded in making itself a political class, like that of England; it was only a military caste.

The Third Estate. — Louis XIV., following out the old traditions of the monarchy, preferred to make use of the middle classes, who were better instructed and at the same time more devoted, because they had not yet perceived the inconveniences of absolute power, while they had felt for centuries those of feudal rule. Louis XIV. delivered into their hands all financial, political, and judicial functions; he quietly established them in the administration of the

kingdom; he energetically advanced them in industry and commerce and favored them (*e.g.*, Boileau, Racine, Molière) in literature. Louis XIV. thus unconsciously prepared the way for democratic France and the Revolution. But he was nowise a bourgeois king. His policy, his intense self-esteem, the vigorous ceremonial which made of him a dreaded and inaccessible divinity, his carousals, his splendid feasts, all banish from the mind any suggestion of constitutional monarchy.

The Clergy; Declaration of 1682. — Louis maintained the same policy towards the clergy as towards the nobility; while he conferred honors upon them, he was careful not to give them any power. The great nobles were withdrawn from the Church as well as from the administration. The clergy were consequently, under Louis XIV., another prop of royalty. In the affair of the *régale* the bishops sustained the king even against the Pope. The name *régale* was given to the right of kings to collect the revenues of certain benefices, bishoprics, and archbishoprics during periods of vacancy. In 1673 an edict declared all the sees of France subject to the *régale*. Two bishops refused to obey and were supported by the Pope. Louis XIV., in order to put an end to the controversy, called an assembly of the French clergy, who adopted, in 1682, under the inspiration of Bossuet, four propositions, in substance as follows: —

1. God has not given to Saint Peter and his successors any power, either direct or indirect, over temporal matters.
2. The Gallican Church approves the decrees adopted by the council of Constance, which declare ecumenical councils superior to the Pope in spiritual affairs.
3. The rules and usages received in the kingdom and in the Gallican Church shall remain unchangeable.
4. Decisions of the Pope in matters of doctrine are not absolute until accepted by the Church.

Innocent XI. refused to grant bulls of investiture to the bishops appointed by the government who had been members of the assembly. The affair was settled in 1693 by a compromise. Innocent XII. granted the bulls of investiture, and the king ceased to impose upon faculties of theology the obligation to teach the four propositions of 1682.

Protestants, Jansenists, Quietists. — These discussions with the court of Rome were of no profit to dissenters. At the height of the quarrel the king revoked the edict of Nantes.

Nor did he temporize with the Jansenists. These latter derived their doctrines from a bishop of Ypres, named Jansenius, who died in 1638, and from the Abbé de Saint-Cyran; they held some old opinions, which seemed new, on the subjects of grace and predestination. The most illustrious among them, Arnauld and others, retired to Port-Royal des Champs, near Versailles, where Pascal joined them, and there, living as hermits, these Puritans of Catholicism gave to the world an example of industrious labor of hands and brain, of the most earnest piety, and of austerity of life which amounted almost to asceticism. They wrote excellent books, and were distinguished scholars; almost the entire magistracy adopted their doctrines in part, and, without any one's being able to assign any reason for it, the spirit of political opposition concealed itself behind this religious opposition.

Louis XIV. referred their opinions to the court of Rome; and as the sect would not submit to the decisions of the spiritual authority, he used against them temporal force with a severity which was considered excessive even at that day. He caused Port-Royal des Champs to be destroyed in 1709. The bodies of the inoffensive recluses were disinterred. A book of Père Quesnel, a priest of the Oratory, reanimated the disturbances. One hundred and one of its propositions were condemned at Rome by the bull Unigenitus, to which the king in 1712 imposed obedience upon all the clergy of France. The Jansenists were punished with disgrace, imprisonment, or exile. Quietism had the same fate. This was an old doctrine, brought up and disseminated by a woman, Madam Guyon. Fénelon, archbishop of Cambrai, the former preceptor of the Duke of Burgundy, having defended this opinion in a book, Bossuet denounced the work (1699), and the Pope condemned it. Fénelon submitted with the most Christian self-abnegation.

Creation of the Police; Large Standing Army. — Two institutions aided the king to accomplish the work of monarchical omnipotence, — the police and the army. The first was of his own creation. He was the first to appoint lieutenants of police for Paris. Then began the system of public lighting; from the first of November to the first of March, a lantern in which was a burning candle was placed at the ends and in the middle of each street. The watch was increased, or rather instituted. Bodies of firemen replaced

the Capuchins in the fire service (1699). The narrow streets were cleaned, widened, and paved, public carriages and cabs were established; the habit of riding on horseback was still indulged in Paris by none but a few stubborn representatives of the past centuries.

The police served another purpose: it inspected written matter; it stopped at the post-office, and read, suspected correspondence; and, to relieve the government of slow forms of justice, it multiplied the *lettres de cachets*, which deprived subjects of all guarantee of individual liberty. The army also served a double end: it faced the enemy abroad, and at home it crushed all resistance to the will of the sovereign. From this reign date the great standing armies, schools of discipline, of loyalty, and of honor, but also a heavy burden upon the finances of the country. The troops were sent into the provinces to protect the progressive extension of the authority of the intendants; they hastened by fear the collection of taxes; they were even charged with the extraordinary duty of leading back the consciences of dissenters to the unity of the faith.

The Court. — Thus all orders of the State, all authorities which existed in France, all classes, parliaments, nobility, middle classes, clergy, and dissenters were reduced and dominated. Under the pressure of authority, characters degenerated. Only a few — Vauban, Catinat, Fénelon, Turenne — resisted the contagion. The general enslavement showed nowhere more plainly than at the court, where Louis imposed on the high nobility a gilded captivity. Versailles was built with this in view, and all France was collected there, under the eye and hand of the king. The favor of the king depended upon three conditions, — to ask and obtain a lodging at Versailles, to follow the court everywhere, even though ill, even though dying, and to approve of everything. Henceforth no more seigniorial independence, no more family life, no more connection or communion with the country districts; but an artificial existence, in which certain qualities of mind were developed, but true dignity and all the virtues that belong to it were lost.

At these splendid fêtes of Versailles one sees, indeed, among all the marvels of the arts, a society incomparable for wit, elegance, and fine manners; but one sees also the too numerous errors of the prince himself but lightly veiled. The most eminent persons of the State, grave magistrates,

illustrious prelates, dared not make the slightest protest against the scandal of intrigues doubly adulterous. The Duchess de la Vallière has secured pardon by her deep repentance. The haughty Montespan reigned longer over the court, but she was in turn supplanted by the Marchioness of Maintenon, to whom she had confided the education of her children, and the widow of the cripple Scarron became the wife of Louis the Great (1685).

The trouble was not confined to the royal house; it threatened to extend to the State itself; for Louis, violating all civil and religious laws, placed the legitimated princes beside the princes of the blood. He forced the court to show as much respect to them as to the others; and public morality received a blow from which it has been slow to recover. The dukes of Orleans and Vendôme, given over to wholesale debauchery, the Duke of Antin, caught in the very act of theft, noblemen who knew how to repair at cards the losses of fortune, a court which according to Saint-Simon "sweated hypocrisy," a king who became a devotee when he could no longer be anything else, — all this shows that morals, conscience, and human dignity are never violated with impunity.

Memorials from the Intendants. — We have an indisputable body of evidence respecting the misery of the period, — the reports which the king required of the intendants, regarding the condition of their provinces, for the instruction of the Duke of Burgundy, his grandson. Upon each page occur these despairing words, "War, mortality, the continual quartering and movement of soldiery, service, heavy duties, the emigration of the Huguenots, have ruined this province." The bridges and roads are in a deplorable condition, and trade reduced to nothing. The frontier provinces are, still further, overwhelmed by requisitions, and by the marauding of the soldiery, who, receiving neither pay nor rations, undertook to find their own wages. In the district of Rouen 650,000 of the 700,000 inhabitants have only piles of straw for beds. The peasants in certain provinces have lapsed into a savage state, living frequently on herbs and roots like the beasts, and, wild as savages, flee when approached.

Signs of a New Spirit. — Meanwhile, however, a few men, not perhaps of singularly great minds, but who at any rate had honest hearts and elevated characters, — Fénelon, the

Duke of Beauvilliers, Saint-Simon, and Catinat, — saw the clouds appearing on the horizon, and some of them ventured to offer respectful counsel. Vauban, who grieved over all the troubles of the country, made plans to alleviate them; he asked for the re-establishment of the edict of Nantes, and the restoration of religious toleration; he proposed to substitute for all other forms of taxation a single tax, the *royal tithe*, which should be paid by nobles and priests as well as common people. When he presented his book to the king in 1707, Louis, forgetting the great services of the marshal, had the work condemned to the pillory. Six weeks after, Vauban died. Colbert had already died of despair; and it was less on account of his religious opinions than his political ideas, that Fénelon was sent into the exile from which he never returned. In that ancient Greece that he loved so well Fénelon rediscovered the idea which he transmitted to the eighteenth century, — that governments are made for the governed. In 1690 there was printed in Holland a collection of fifteen memoirs under the title of "The Groans of Enslaved France," in which were claimed, as among the ancient liberties of the country, the privileges of the three orders, and the convocation of the States-General. These were signs announcing the new spirit which was to agitate French society in the eighteenth century after its experience of the short-lived benefits and dangers attending absolute royalty, of which Louis XIV. had just given the most striking example.