

France and England were now in fact the two chief rivals for the possession of the New World, as well as for that of the great Asiatic peninsula of India. In America, England occupied the Atlantic seacoast from Maine to the borders of Florida.

Under the leadership of the descendants of the Pilgrims, the Puritans, and the Cavaliers, she was now engaged in building up a new England and a greater Britain. But France, on her part, had not been idle. Although in previous wars she had lost Newfoundland, Acadia or Nova Scotia, Cape Breton, with Louisburg,¹ she still claimed an enormous territory. The two greatest rivers of the country — the Mississippi and the St. Lawrence — were both hers by right of exploration, with the regions which they watered. By virtue of this claim she held Canada in the north and the vast territory then called Louisiana² in the south and west.

To defend these possessions, France had already begun a chain of over sixty forts extending from Quebec to the Great Lakes, thence to the Mississippi and to New Orleans.³ Furthermore, the French had now begun a second and interior line of forts, designed to prevent English colonists from settling the valley of the Ohio.⁴

If they succeeded in their project, the English would be shut in between the Alleghanies and the Atlantic. France would then hold all the best part of the continent. In time she hoped that it would be peopled by her sons, who would speak her language and acknowledge her authority. Her forces would then probably be able to expel the English from

¹ Cape Breton with Louisburg had, however, been restored to her by the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748).

² See Paragraph 152. Louisiana then practically embraced the whole country watered by the Mississippi and its tributaries; in other words, about a third of what is now the United States.

³ This line of forts may be traced now by Quebec, Montreal, Ogdensburg, Detroit, Toledo, Fort Wayne, Vincennes, Natchez, and New Orleans.

⁴ See The Leading Facts of American History in this series.

the narrow strip that had been temporarily left to them, and the French flag would float unchallenged over the magnificent empire of New France.

The contest in America, therefore, was not for the present only, but for the future. It was a war of races, and the prize was the grandest and richest continent on the globe. After more than four years of fighting, the death struggle came in 1759, before the gates of Quebec.

Montcalm, one of the noblest and bravest generals of France, fought to hold the city; Wolfe, the English commander, a man of equal merit, fought to wrest it from him. Both were killed in the terrible battle which ensued, and both died as only heroes can. Quebec fell. Four years later (1763) the Treaty of Paris was made. By that treaty France had to give up everything. Of all her boasted possessions in America she now retained absolutely nothing that she could call her own, except two barren little islands off Newfoundland which were given her to dry fish on.¹

That memorable treaty settled the fact that America was not to be a dependency of France, but that it was to become the home of the greater part of the English-speaking race, destined to establish themselves, in the course of the next twenty years, as a free and independent nation.

While this important question was being determined, a similar contest was going on in India. After a number of battles, the British force, under Clive, gained the decisive victory of Plassy (1757), by which the French were subsequently driven from the country, and England thus secured her empire in the East.²

In Europe the Seven Years' War was not favorable to Louis and his allies. Frederick the Great, with some slight help from

¹ France gave Great Britain all of the country east of the Mississippi, and to her ally, Spain, all west of that river, including New Orleans. The islands received by France were Miquelon and St. Pierre, off the south coast of Newfoundland. ² See The Leading Facts of English History in this series.

England, came out of the contest triumphant. Prussia was not dismembered; but, to the humiliation of Louis and the vexation of Madame de Pompadour and Maria Theresa, it rose to be one of the most important kingdoms of Europe.

167. Suppression of the Jesuits. — Meanwhile an event of no small significance occurred in France. For many years there had been a strong feeling against the Jesuits. The Huguenots detested them for the part they had taken in the revocation of the Edict of Nantes¹ and the frightful persecution of the Protestants that followed. The great body of French Catholics distrusted their political policy and believed them hostile to the best interests of the country.

In the previous reign Cardinal Richelieu had condemned several pamphlets published by Jesuit Fathers, on the ground that they were subversive of the royal authority, and finally caused one of their books to be publicly burned, because it taught that the pope has the right to depose bad or incompetent kings.

But the most terrible blow to the power of the Jesuits was given by Pascal² in his "Provincial Letters." He attacked their moral teachings. The wit, the reasoning, the ridicule with which that great writer assailed the order was more destructive to them than all Louis XIV's "dragonnades" — or persecution by the dragoons — had been to the Huguenots.³ Under Louis XV the hostility to the Jesuits reached its height. Men forgot the self-sacrificing labors of the Fathers of an earlier period, — the missionaries,⁴ teachers, explorers, and philanthropists the order had sent forth, — and thought of them only as men who tampered with conscience and were secretly hostile to liberty.

¹ See Paragraph 158.

² See Paragraph 151.

⁴ See Parkman's *Jesuits in North America* for an account of the labors of the Jesuit missionaries in this country, and see *The Student's American History* in this series.

³ See Paragraph 158.

In 1761 the Parliament of Paris formally declared the Jesuits an organization dangerous to the state and one tending to "the subversion of all authority." The result was the suppression of the order in France and its virtual expulsion. Spain followed the example of the French parliament, and finally, in 1773, Pope Clement XIV, urged by nearly all the sovereigns of Europe, solemnly abolished the society, declaring "that for the welfare of Christendom it was best that the order should be dissolved."¹ Had this action been taken a century earlier, it might perhaps have saved France the loss of a large part of her Protestant population, and spared her the retribution that loss entailed.²

168. Abolition of Parliaments; Arbitrary Imprisonment. — In 1771 the king took a step which destroyed what little political liberty the nation still possessed. Richelieu and Louis XIV, though they humbled the nobility and practically ruled France according to their own will and pleasure, still left the parliaments³ some small degree of power. Louis XV, angry because they would not submit entirely to him, now suppressed them, and sent into exile or to prison seven hundred of their members.

Thus, at one blow, the last vestige of self-government was overthrown. Henceforth the people of Paris and the provinces could not even record a formal protest against tyranny. The king rejoiced in having at last silenced all opposition. But he had done so as a madman might silence the roar of escaping steam from a boiler by tying down the safety valve. There was quiet, indeed, but it was of that ominous sort which precedes an explosion.

But Louis XV was reckless of danger. He knew the government was tottering; but, as he said, with a cynical smile, "It

¹ By a brief of the pope issued in 1814, the legal existence of the Society of the Jesuits was restored. They subsequently became prominent in France as educators and religious teachers, especially under Louis Napoleon. Since the establishment of the Republic they have been again expelled (1880).

² See Paragraph 158.

³ See Paragraph 63.

will last my day." Nothing was now really safe. The king had no respect for the property or the liberty of his subjects. Thousands of citizens were cast into prison and left there for years, not only without so much as the form of a trial, but even without being charged with any offense. Any person obnoxious to Louis or to any one in authority might be arrested on a private royal warrant¹ and hurried off to a dungeon of the Bastille. No one knew whither he had disappeared. The grave could not have kept its secret better. Wife and children might mourn him as dead, for it was doubtful if they ever again beheld him.

In time the issue of these warrants became a regular trade, the whole number granted during the reign reaching one hundred and fifty thousand. They could always be purchased by the highest bidder, since the king signed them in blank and distributed them liberally to his favorites.

If a man had an enemy, or even a troublesome creditor that he wished to get rid of, nothing was easier, providing he could pay for it. A few hundred francs, or even less, would get an order for his secret incarceration; and if the payments were repeated often enough, the unfortunate prisoner might perhaps never again see the light of day except through the bars of his cell.

Sometimes, however, these facilities for putting people out of the way were found by those who employed them to have the disadvantage of working both ways. It is said that an influential nobleman walking down the street in Paris met the young and pretty wife of a tradesman of his acquaintance; her eyes were sparkling with joy. "Ah, Jeanette," said he, "I see that you are in good spirits this morning." "Well, your lordship, I have reason to be," she answered; "for I have just bought a royal warrant which will put that brute of a husband of mine where he deserves to be."

¹ Technically called a *lettre de cachet* (laytr deh kâ-shâ'), a warrant in the form of a letter sealed with the royal seal.

Two years later the same nobleman chanced to meet Jeanette again. But how changed! She was now bent, emaciated, haggard, and could but just drag herself along. "Why, my poor girl," said he, "what has happened to you; I thought you had locked up your husband and were happy?" "Alas, my lord," said the unfortunate woman, "he was too quick for me. I had paid a round sum for my warrant and was going for it the next day; but he chanced to hear of it, and by offering more, got one for me instead, and I have been in the Bastille ever since."

169. The Compact of Famine. — With all his defects, Louis XIV had possessed the merit of at least trying to exalt the greatness of France; but Louis XV cared for nothing but low pleasures. Helped on by the unprincipled Madame de Pompadour,¹ he had exhausted every means of extorting money from his people to waste in his shameless debaucheries. The question was, how to get more. For a time it seemed impossible to devise any fresh scheme of taxation; but at last one was hit upon. A courtier suggested to the king that a private company — a kind of gigantic "ring" — should be formed for buying up the grain of the country. An artificial scarcity of food would result, and the company could then sell wheat at famine prices, thus making an enormous profit.

The king eagerly adopted the suggestion. He, with a few nobles, got a monopoly of the grain of the kingdom; and soon the distress was so great that the people had to choose between starvation or paying the king's price for bread.

Thus the royal coffers were filled, and Louis "the Well Beloved"² and his favorites found means for new rounds of extravagant dissipation.

170. Death of the King; Literature of the Period; Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau. — In 1774 Louis died, the victim of

¹ See Paragraph 166.

² The title of "Well Beloved" had been rashly given to the king when he was dangerously ill, during the campaign of the Netherlands.

his own vices. When at the height of his power he had realized that France could hardly endure another such reign, and used to say to Madame de Pompadour, "After us the deluge." "Yes," she would reply; "after us." She had ruled for nearly twenty years (1745-1764). Largely through her baleful influence the king had ruined himself and ruined his country. She had thrust able men out of power, and put incompetent men in their places. She died abhorred, but she died as fearlessly (1764) and as unrepentant as she had lived. Meanwhile the "deluge" was coming slowly, but surely, as the tide. When at last, in the next reign, its waves should roll in, they would utterly sweep away the France of that day.

Three great writers — Montesquieu,¹ Voltaire, and Rousseau² — were even then preparing the way for the final catastrophe. Montesquieu was at that time engaged in the composition of his chief work, "The Spirit of Laws," which was published about the middle of the reign of Louis XV. In it he attempted to set forth the true principles of constitutional government, and to show how, as in England, liberty might be reconciled with law. Twenty-two editions of the book were published in a year and a half. Voltaire expressed the general admiration of it, when he said, "The human race had lost its title-deeds; Montesquieu found and restored them."

Voltaire, the second of these writers in point of time, but the most powerful of all in ability, was famous throughout Europe. In numerous noted works he had attacked religious intolerance and political corruption and oppression. In the early part of his career, his books had been condemned to be burned, and the author was locked up in the Bastille. Voltaire soon regained his liberty, however, and left France. He lived to wield that terrible weapon of mockery, which, as Macaulay

¹ Montesquieu (mōn-tēs-keh-uh').

² Rousseau (roo-sō').

declares,¹ "made bigots and tyrants, who had never been moved by the wailing and cursing of millions, turn pale at his name."

The third writer, Rousseau, distinguished himself by his earnest advocacy of the principles of social and political equality. For good or evil, these men had definitively broken with the past. They, with Diderot² and other reputed or avowed atheists, labored to undermine all authority save that of reason. With them the Revolution had already begun in idea; when they had completed their work, then would come the outward Revolution, written not in ink, but in blood.

171. Summary. — The leading events of the period are: (1) the building up of the absolute power of the crown by Richelieu, followed by the despotism of Louis XIV and XV; (2) the wars of France for the acquisition of territory and supremacy of power in Europe; (3) the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, with the persecution and flight of the Huguenots, to the serious injury of France; (4) the Mississippi scheme and its disastrous failure; (5) the struggle for the possession of India and America, and the ultimate gain of both by England; (6) the expulsion of the Jesuits; (7) the preparation for the Revolution through the bad government, corruption, and extravagance of the crown, and the radical utterances of the distinguished speakers and literary men of the age.

¹ See Macaulay's essay on Frederick the Great, and compare, also, his essay on Ranke's History of the Popes.

² Diderot (de-dro'): he was editor-in-chief of the Encyclopædia, in thirty-seven folio volumes, the first of which appeared in 1751, and the last in 1780. It undertook to sum up all knowledge and to "strike the balance-sheet of the human intellect." The general tone of the work was skeptical and aggressive. It aided powerfully in helping forward the Revolution, by advocating independence of thought and of action.