

mainder of this year; nor was the whole island completely conquered till the summer of 1769, when it was finally made part of the dominions of Louis XV., and its ecclesiastical affairs subjected to the jurisdiction of the Gallican church.

Thus the power and influence of France, as the chief of the house of Bourbon, was firmly established in Italy, with the consent of the house of Austria, now closely allied with their ancient rivals and most inveterate enemies. The skilful negotiations of the duke de Choiseul may be said to have accomplished, in a time of peace, what Louis XIV., at the head of victorious armies, could never effect; the aggrandizement of his own house, on the ruin of others.

In the midst of these enterprises, the wheels of the French government at home were clogged by fresh disputes between the king and the parliament of Paris, but they were smothered for a few months by the national concern for the death of the queen, whose most amiable disposition, and pious resignation to the will of Providence, had manifested itself in a most exemplary manner, under one of the most mortifying circumstances in life, that of beholding her royal consort a constant dupe to his lascivious desires, and placing all his confidence in, as well as dedicating all his leisure time to, an artful, ambitious mistress. Her majesty died on the 25th of June, after a lingering illness, universally regretted by all ranks of people throughout the kingdom of France. She was the only daughter of Stanislaus, the deposed king of Poland, who died about two years before her, in an extreme old age, of the hurt he received from setting fire to his night-gown, being negligently left alone by his attendants.

One circumstance made this loss still more deeply felt. It had been observed, that the king still permitted his ruling passion to get the better of his reason; but as he was now in the decline of life, decency prevented him from openly taking to his court any new mistress while the queen lived; but she was scarce buried, when the vile panders of a voluptuous prince put every stratagem in force to fix a patroness for themselves in the palace of Versailles, in which we shall find, to the disgrace of their royal master, they succeeded, even beyond their warmest expectations.

In the beginning of the year, the king by an edict had granted some additional privileges to the grand council of state, which affected those of the parliament and encroached on the ancient constitution of the kingdom; the parliaments of France, as usual, had united in an opposition to this measure, and had presented to his majesty very strong remonstrances, couched under the form of requests, praying him to limit the jurisdiction of the grand council within its former bounds; but these applications producing no effect, a full assembly of the parliament was held on the 4th of July, at which the princes of the blood and the prime minister de Choiseul assisted, when it was debated and the question put, that application should be made to the king to abolish the grand council entirely; and this great point was lost only by a majority of two negative votes. However, another resolution was carried; to address his majesty, desiring him to fix, by clear and determinate laws, the line of distinction between the privileges of the council and of the parliament, and to revoke the letters-patent lately granted in favour of the former.

By this time, a general spirit of discontent prevailed on account of the immoderate price of provisions; and though the scarcity of corn, owing to the inclement seasons, had been felt in most parts of Europe for the last two years, yet the people of France, like the malecontents in England, failed not to attribute an event which must occasionally happen in the course of nature, to the misconduct of the ministry, in suffering a free importation and exportation of corn. This subject occasioned remonstrances from all quarters, which served only to expose the poverty of the kingdom, and the oppressed condition of the poorer subjects. Yet neither the king nor his resolute minister showed the least disposition to repeal the laws against the exportation of corn; at length, however, the parliament of Paris in their turn trespassed on the prerogative of their absolute monarch, and of their own authority prohibited the exportation of corn, till it should be certified by the

proper officers, that there was more than sufficient for the consumption of the people for one year. Nothing but the popularity of this act, and the fear of an insurrection, could have made the king submit to this bold step; but though he stifled his resentment for the present, it brought on the dissolution and total overthrow of the parliament of Paris, which had been long meditated by the ministry.

In the spring of the year 1769, the general diet of Sweden was convened by the intrigues of the French minister de Choiseul, and before it broke up, a new treaty of subsidy with France was agreed to, on condition that the arrears of the old subsidies, which amounted to a very considerable sum, were put in a course of payment by the French ministry.

Every sum taken from the treasury of France at this time was highly distressing: for the reduction of Corsica had cost near twenty millions of livres, and the internal state of the kingdom plainly showed that the people could bear no farther imposts; for bankruptcies in trade of the most alarming nature happened every day, and among the number of private failures were reckoned some very considerable bankers, besides a variety of persons who stood connected with government, and had been ruined by advancing money in its service on securities which depended on the good faith of its administration, but which were now invalidated by one of those arbitrary acts of power, frequent in this country, but unjustifiable in any, the reduction of the interest of the public funds. This was another instance of the resolute spirit of the minister, and of the completion of his political principles. He knew that something must be done to balance the large demands on the finances for Corsica, and to continue Sweden and other subsidiary states firm in the French interests; and he remembered that France had cancelled all her debts by a notorious breach of faith in the time of Louis XIV., and yet that her credit revived, and she was able, after such an act of cruel fraud, to borrow money for the service of Louis XV., in the early part of his reign, nearly on as good terms as the ministry of England, where the national honour, secured by the sanction of parliament, had never been violated. He therefore boldly ventured to reduce the interest on the public funds one-half, and took away the benefit of survivorship from the tontines; a darling object with the French, who, by outliving their friends and acquaintance, often became possessed of considerable life-annuities; and we may venture to affirm, that this measure has done incredible mischief to the finances of France; for the tontines were always a sure, easy, and expeditious resource for raising money in time of war. This event took place in the course of this year, and together with the bankruptcy of the East India company, and the stagnation of private credit in all the great commercial cities of France, threw the nation into a general ferment, and raised such a clamour against de Choiseul, that even the bastille could not silence. His power now began to decline, and fearing that with the confidence of the people he should lose that of his royal master, he shifted the scenes, and endeavoured to regain the former by a very popular measure. On a sudden he became the zealous friend of the parliaments of France, and made it apparent that the influence of a minister over a weak king is capable of producing a desirable effect in one day, which volumes of remonstrances from his loving subjects could not accomplish in a course of years, perhaps in a whole reign.

In the month of July, the king restored the old parliament of Brittany, and recalled the exiled members who had given him so much trouble. In short, Choiseul, having succeeded in his great defensive plan of political operations, calculated to cover the internal weakness of the nation by strong alliances, and having, by military exertions over powers on the continent, who were not able to oppose him, exhibited an appearance of remaining strength, which might deter any of the principal powers of Europe from breaking with France upon any slight misunderstanding, saw himself now under a necessity to take part against his own court, to whose intrigues he was on the point of being sacrificed. The growing credit of his rival the duke d'Aiguillon, soon required his whole attention, and he quickly found out an expedient to rid

himself of this dangerous favourite, which must have succeeded effectually, if he had not been secretly undermined by female fascination, which continued, as usual, to work miraculous changes in the conduct of Louis XV. A new mistress had been introduced to the king by the creatures of the duke d'Aiguillon, who not only screened this nobleman from the just resentment of his injured countrymen, but, in the end, so completely triumphed over every principle of sound policy, decency, and decorum, that this very man, the object of universal detestation, was made prime minister in the room of the duke de Choiseul. But the struggle was great, and lasted a considerable time; the dismissal of Choiseul was not so easily effected as that of the great Maurepas, who, after thirty years of constant application to the king's business, was banished instantly by Madame la Pompadour's interest, only for a few jocular reflections on that lady's ascendancy at court.

It will be proper, however, to notice the remaining acts of ministerial policy, conducted by the duke de Choiseul, in the midst of this growing opposition to his person and his measures.

The election of Clement XIV. was attended with a singular circumstance, which added lustre to the solemnity. The emperor of Germany, then on his travels, accompanied by his brother, the grand duke of Tuscany, happened to be at Rome while the conclave was sitting, and staid there till the election was over, but did not appear in his imperial character; however, he received despatches from France about this time, as it appears that the active genius of the duke de Choiseul was then at work in riveting the last link of that political chain, which was to secure and render permanent, the force of the family-compact, by a fresh union with the house of Austria. A negotiation was carrying on for marrying the dauphin to the archduchess Maria Antoinette, the emperor's youngest sister; and as his majesty's concurrence, to some secret articles in the treaty, respecting the Low Countries, was indispensably necessary, advantage was taken of his travelling into Italy, to bring this business to a conclusion, which had been already approved of by the dowager-empress at Vienna.

Having thus put the affairs of France on the continent upon the best footing, the duke de Choiseul was at leisure, the beginning of the year 1770, to support the prosecution then commenced by the restored parliament of Brittany, against his avowed enemy, the duke d'Aiguillon, their former governor. This nobleman had been the occasion of all the hardships the members had suffered, and had carried on a criminal process for four years against M. de Chalotais, their attorney-general, whose life would have been sacrificed to his resentment, if the duke de Choiseul had not prevailed with the king, to despatch an express order to stay the execution of this venerable old man, on the point of being conducted to the scaffold at Morlaix. The whole kingdom seemed interested in the punishment of this tyrannical governor, whose cruelties and oppressions in the province were well known; but hitherto it had been reckoned dangerous even to attempt to bring him to a trial. Encouraged, however, by the countenance of the minister, and the general hatred of the people, the parliament of Brittany now succeeded, and his trial began at Versailles, in the presence of the king, in the month of April. The princes of the blood, and the peers of France, with the rest of the members of the parliament of Paris, were his judges. In the course of the evidence it appeared, that M. de Chalotais, animated by the true spirit of patriotism, had vigorously exerted himself in opposing the mal-administration of the duke, who, in revenge, had not only procured the dissolution of the parliament of Brittany, by means of exaggerated misrepresentations of their conduct to the king, but had employed persons to take off this venerable magistrate, now upwards of seventy years of age by poison: failing in this base attempt, it was proved, that he had erected a mock tribunal in the castle of Morlaix, and suborned evidences to accuse him of treason. In fine, that a most arbitrary, cruel, and unjust sentence of death had been pronounced against him, which would have been privately executed upon the good old man, if timely notice had not been given to the duke de Choiseul of this horrid transaction.

The whole court was so clearly convinced of the duke's guilt, that nothing remained but to make an example of the noble culprit, when the king, of a sudden, stepped in to rescue him from the hands of justice, and put a stop to all farther inquiries into his conduct; obliging letters-patent to be registered for that purpose, in the presence of all the princes and peers, who were thunderstruck at this manifest violation of the laws. The duke of Orleans, first prince of the blood, sensibly affected, expostulated with the chancellor upon this unprecedented step: but the king, apprehensive of the consequences, if the parliament should meet, and summon the princes and peers upon this subject, took the precaution peremptorily to forbid their attendance. He began with the duke of Orleans, and ordered him to communicate this prohibition to the other princes of the blood; but he excused himself, saying, it would better become his majesty to deliver such unwelcome commands. Soon after, to complete this act of despotism, the king took the duke d'Aiguillon with him on a party of pleasure to Marli. The public detestation of the protected favourite now became universal, and all the parliaments of the kingdom loudly resented the insult offered to the princes of the blood, to the peers, and to the parliament of Paris; the latter assembled, and published an arret, depriving the duke of his seat in parliament, and of all the privileges of the peerage, till he submitted to a trial in obedience to the laws. The king in council cancelled this arret, and commanded the duke to resume his functions and his place in parliament. This was considered as a tyrannical act of power, which struck at the root of all the rights of the peerage and of the parliament. The whole summer was spent in fruitless attempts to induce the king to withdraw his letters-patent, and to permit the trial to go on. The parliaments of Bourdeaux and Toulouse divested the dutchy of Aiguillon of all the privileges of peerage, reducing it to the condition of a private estate, till the duke should be acquitted by his peers of the high crimes laid to his charge. The parliament of Brittany never ceased imploring the king for justice; and they entertained some hopes of success, when they were allowed to send a deputation to court to know the king's pleasure; but this was only the prelude to an act of unexampled brutality: the deputies were admitted to audience only to be reprimanded in the severest terms, and to behold two of their members seized by the officers in waiting, and ordered to prison as an example to the rest, for having presumed to remonstrate against the king's letters-patent, which, he said, should have been implicitly obeyed, without reply. This open violation of the right of humanity itself, which gives to every man authority to expostulate with his superior, provided decent respect is observed in the address, alarmed, but could not terrify, the parliament of Paris, which continued sitting at the usual season of vacation, and sent deputation upon deputation to the king, from whom they could obtain no answer, for he would neither see nor hear his parliament. And, in order to put a stop to all farther applications on this disagreeable subject, he once more had recourse to a *lit de justice*, which seems to have been the *ultima ratio* of Louis XV., as the mouth of the cannon was of Louis XIV. On the 3d of September, his majesty unexpectedly arrived at Paris, attended by an extraordinary corps of guards, who immediately surrounded the parliament house; the king entered soon after, and having severely reproached the members, in the bitterest terms, he ordered the two chambers of inquests and requests to withdraw, and then calling for all the papers relative to the proceedings against the duke d'Aiguillon, they were delivered up to him: these he carried away, and all the decrees passed in parliament against the duke he made the chancellor erase from their registers. This officer likewise informed them, that the king now imposed an absolute silence upon them; that he forbade all correspondence between them and his other parliaments, and if disobeyed, he should consider it as a confederacy against his person and authority; and the presidents of the parliament were enjoined, under pain of the royal displeasure, to break up all assemblies wherein any propositions should be stated, tending to revive debates upon subjects concerning which he had commanded silence.

From this day, Louis XV. lost the title of *bien aimé*; he was no longer the *well beloved*, for silent and secret detestation possessed the hearts of his subjects, and gloomy despair lowered on their countenances. Afraid to speak their sentiments on the dreadful aspect of affairs, a solemn stillness reigned throughout Paris for some days; the places of public amusement were deserted, and a sudden check put to the natural vivacity of the French. *Letters de cachet* and the *bastille* were continually before their eyes, while suspicion and dismay made every man a stranger almost to his bosom friend. Military detachments were sent to compel the other parliaments to register the king's letters-patent, in favour of the duke d'Aiguillon, and great outrages were committed in the execution of these mandates. Nothing remained to be done on the part of the oppressed parliaments, but to publish protests against this subversion of the constitution. The parliament of Paris set the example, and declared that the proceedings of the court plainly manifested a deep-laid scheme to change the form of government. This prediction we shall find verified in the course of the ensuing narrative.

## LETTER VII.

*View of the internal State of France, continued to the Death of Louis XV.*

THE internal state of France was at this time truly calamitous: but the sequel will show that matters had not yet arrived at their crisis. The king had lived four or five years without a mistress; and had expressed an intention of relinquishing his habits of incontinence: but his resolutions of reform were momentary. He continued to gratify his licentious appetite with women of the court, wives of tradesmen, or girls of low birth; but they were soon dismissed, and had no influence on him in relation to affairs of state. The duke d'Aiguillon, and the chancellor Mirapau, however, who secretly regulated all the motions of the infatuated monarch, now brought forward upon the scene of action a new mistress, who was destined to be the scourge and curse of France.

Mademoiselle l'Ange, the female now referred to, though meanly born and destitute of the advantages of education, and, what is worse, nurtured in prostitution, fascinated by her beauty the weak monarch whom she enslaved for the rest of his life. In the prime of her youth she was reckoned extremely handsome, but at the period when she was pitched upon to fascinate the voluptuous monarch of France, the charms of her person had suffered greatly by the depredations of time, and the course of life to which she had been accustomed from fourteen to thirty years of age. The lilies and roses implanted by nature on her lovely features, had long since begun to make it necessary that art should supply the defect from the repository of the perfumer. The remaining lustre of a fine eye, with exact symmetry of shape, and a most engaging air and address, were, nevertheless, sufficient external graces to arrest the king's notice at the first interview, placed, as she purposely was, in a situation where she could not fail of being seen by him, and thoroughly instructed in the part she was to act, should his majesty accost her. It had been customary with the king, in his hunting parties, to separate from the court, and attended by one or two noblemen to ride about his parks to view the company assembled on these occasions. Madame l'Ange took her station in a private recess, where there was little danger of interruption, and the duke d'Aiguillon, who had concerted the whole scheme, conducted the king to the spot. The interview produced an assignation, and at a private *petit souper* the conquest was completed by the vivacity of her conversation, the sweetness of her temper, and the refined taste which the king professed to have discovered in her. To save appearances with his subjects, he ordered her to be married, *pro forma*, to the brother of one of her paramours, who styled himself the count de Barré, and having got this accomplished, he resolved, in defiance of decency, and the remonstrances of de Choi-

seul and others against so imprudent a step, to have her introduced at court with the usual etiquette.

The dutchess of Grammont, sister to the duke de Choiseul, had conceived the hope of becoming mistress to the king; but her advances being neglected, and the young countess preferred, she became the victim of resentment and jealousy. The duke, her brother, considering his power to be too firmly established to be shaken by this new attachment, disdained to court the favourite, and opposed her growing influence by occasional insinuations in the ears of his sovereign. The countess de Barré was not long in giving intimations that she expected to be the dauphin and dauphiness. The former, after some warm altercations with the king, found it expedient to comply; but the latter, with a noble greatness of soul, is said to have told the king, "Sire, if I had been born your subject, I must have obeyed, but as the daughter and sister of an emperor, your majesty must excuse me." The ladies of the court, however, could obtain no such indulgence; they were obliged to pay due homage to the new favourite, and one example of the effects of resistance was sufficient to induce compliance. The dutchess de Grammont, first lady of honour to the queen, being in a box at the opera, the countess de Barré came into it, and attempted to seat herself beside the dutchess; but the latter requested the countess to retire, and on her refusal, the dutchess rose, courtesying to the people, who expressed universal applause, on which she left the box and retired to another. This being reported to the king, she was favoured with a *lettre de cachet* banishing her to her country seat, at a distance from Paris, during his majesty's pleasure.

Madame Barré in the first years of her promotion enjoyed a plentitude of power unknown to Pompadour, and which with all her talents she never durst attempt. She solicited and obtained a power to draw on the treasury under her own signature. As soon as the news of this extraordinary instance of royal imbecility reached the ears of the duke de Choiseul, it is said he passionately exclaimed, *C'en est fait de moi,—all is over with me*. But that his adversaries might not have an easy victory to boast of, notwithstanding this presage of his disgrace, he put every stratagem in force to ruin their protectress; and among the rest, he attempted to supplant the countess by introducing a rival; this was the widow of an officer, who brought a petition to the minister, but finding her very handsome and sprightly, de Choiseul referred her to the king, and gave her an opportunity of presenting her person and her petition, but the former produced only a slight, if any, effect, and the plan totally miscarried, but not without being made known to the countess, who now entered more deeply than ever into the politics of the times, with a determined resolution to remove the two de Choiseuls: and in this she succeeded, to the great dishonour of the king, and to the regret of all the true friends of France; but as this event did not take place till 1771, it is proper to return to the remaining occurrences of the year 1770.

Another effort was made in the course of this year to revive the declining credit of the French funds: a council of state was held, and the duke de Choiseul, as prime minister, was authorized to order the king's ministers at foreign courts to declare, that their master would make good all contracts of a pecuniary nature he had entered into with foreigners, and that funds would be deposited, for that purpose, in the hands of the comptroller-general of the finances.

On the 19th of May, the nuptials of Louis XVI. with the archduchess Maria Antoinette, were solemnized at the royal chapel of Versailles, and during the rejoicings upon this happy and important event, all animosities and internal troubles seemed to have been totally forgotten; such was the general satisfaction expressed by all ranks of people, on account of this union of the ancient rival houses of Bourbon and Austria: but a dreadful catastrophe most unexpectedly put an end to the gayety and good-humour which had reigned in Paris; from the time of the arrival of the dauphiness in France.

The greatest preparations had been made for exhibiting superb fireworks in the square of Louis XV., in honour of this marriage, under the direction