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HISTORICAL AND MORAL VIEW

OF THE

FRENCH REVOLUTION,

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C H A P T E R I.

INTRODUCTION. PROGRESS OF SOCIETY. END OF GOVERNMENT. RISE OF POLITICAL DISCUSSION AMONGST THE FRENCH. REVOLUTION IN AMERICA. VIRTUE ATTEMPTED TO BE BUILT ON FALSE PRINCIPLES. THE CROISADES, AND THE AGE OF CHIVALRY. ADMINISTRATION OF RICHELIEU, AND OF CARDINAL MAZARIN. THEATRICAL ENTERTAINMENTS, AND DRAMATIC POETS OF THE FRENCH,—MOLIERE,—CORNEILLE,—RACINE. LOUIS XIV. THE REGENCY. LOUIS XV.

WHEN we contemplate the infancy of man, his gradual advance towards maturity, his miserable weakness as a solitary being, and the crudeness of his first notions respecting the nature of civil society, it will not appear extraordinary, that the acquirement of political knowledge has been so extremely slow ;

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or that public happiness has not been more rapidly and generally diffused.

The perfection attained by the ancients, it is true, has ever afforded the imagination of the poetical historian a theme to deck with the choicest flowers of rhetoric; though the cool investigation of facts seems clearly to prove, that the civilization of the world, hitherto, has consisted rather in cultivating the taste, than in exercising the understanding. And were not these vaunted improvements also confined to a small corner of the globe, whilst, the political view of the wisest legislators seldom extending beyond the splendour and aggrandizement of their individual nation, they trampled with a ferocious affectation of patriotism on the most sacred rights of humanity? When the arts flourished in Greece, and literature began to shed it's blandishments on society, the world was mostly inhabited by barbarians, who waged eternal war with their more polished neighbours, the imperfection of whose government sapping it's foundation, the science of politics necessarily received a check in the bud—and when we find, likewise, the roman empire crumbling into atoms, from the germ of a deadly malady implanted

planted in it's vitals; whilst voluptuousness stopped the progress of civilization, which makes the perfection of the arts the dawn of science; we shall be convinced, that it demanded ages of improving reason and experience in moral philosophy, to clear away the rubbish, and exhibit the first principles of social order.

We have probably derived our great superiority over those nations from the discovery of the polar attraction of the needle, the perfection which astronomy and mathematics have attained, and the fortunate invention of printing. For, whilst the revival of letters has added the collected wisdom of antiquity to the improvements of modern research, the latter most useful art has rapidly multiplied copies of the productions of genius and compilations of learning, bringing them within the reach of all ranks of men: the scientific discoveries also have not only led us to new worlds; but, facilitating the communication between different nations, the friction of arts and commerce have given to society the transcendently pleasing polish of urbanity; and thus, by a gradual softening of manners, the complexion of social life has been completely changed. But the remains of super-

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stition,

stitution, and the unnatural distinction of privileged classes, which had their origin in barbarous folly, still fettered the opinions of man, and sullied his native dignity; till several distinguished english writers discussed political subjects with the energy of men, who began to feel their strength; and, whilst only a rumour of these sentiments roused the attention and exercised the minds of some men of letters in France, a number of staunch disputants, who had more thoroughly digested them, fled from oppression, to put them to the test of experience in America.

Locke, following the track of these bold thinkers, recommended in a more methodical manner religious toleration, and analyzed the principles of civil liberty: for in his definition of liberty we find the elements of *The Declaration of the Rights of Man*. which, in spite of the fatal errors of ignorance, and the perverse obstinacy of selfishness, is now converting sublime theories into practical truths.

The revolution, it is true, soon introduced the corruption, that has ever since been corroding british freedom.—Still, when the rest of Europe groaned under the weight of the most unjust and cruel laws, the life and property

perty of englishmen were comparatively safe ; and, if an impress-warrant respected the distinction of ranks, when the glory of England was at stake, splendid victories hid this flaw in the best existing constitution ; and all exultingly recollected, that the life or liberty of a man never depended on the will of an individual.

Englishmen were then, with reason, proud of their constitution ; and, if this noble pride have degenerated into arrogance, when the cause became less conspicuous, it is only a venial lapse of human nature ; to be lamented merely as it stops the progress of civilization, and leads the people to imagine, that their ancestors have done every thing possible to secure the happiness of society, and meliorate the condition of man, because they have done much.

When learning was confined to a small number of the citizens of a state, and the investigation of it's privileges was left to a number still smaller, governments seem to have acted, as if the people were formed only for them ; and, ingeniously confounding their rights with metaphysical jargon, the luxurious grandeur of individuals has been sup-

ported by the misery of the bulk of their fellow creatures, and ambition gorged by the butchery of millions of innocent victims.

The most artful chain of despotism has ever been supported by false notions of duty, enforced by those who were to profit by the cheat. Thus has the liberty of man been restrained; and the spontaneous flow of his feelings, which would have fertilized his mind, being choked at the source, he is rendered in the same degree unhappy as he is made unnatural. Yet, certain opinions, planted by superstition and despotism, hand in hand, have taken such deep root in our habits of thinking, it may appear daringly licentious, as well as presumptuous, to observe, that what is often termed virtue, is only want of courage to throw off prejudices, and follow the inclinations which fear not the eye of heaven, though they shrink from censure not founded on the natural principles of morality. But at no period has the scanty diffusion of knowledge permitted the body of the people to participate in the discussion of political science; and if philosophy at length have simplified the principles of social union, so as to render them easy to be comprehended by every sane  
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and thinking being ; it appears to me, that man may contemplate with benevolent complacency and becoming pride, the approaching reign of reason and peace.

Besides, if men have been rendered unequalled to judge with precision of their civil and political rights, from the involved state in which sophisticating ignorance has placed them, and thus reduced to surrender their reasoning powers to noble fools, and pedantic knaves, it is not surprizing, that superficial observers have formed opinions unfavourable to the degree of perfection, which our intellectual faculties are able to attain, or that despotism should attempt to check the spirit of inquiry, which, with colossian strides, seems to be hastening the overthrow of oppressive tyranny and contumelious ambition.

Nature having made men unequal, by giving stronger bodily and mental powers to one than to another, the end of government ought to be, to destroy this inequality by protecting the weak. Instead of which, it has always leaned to the opposite side, wearing itself out by disregarding the first principle of it's organization.

It appears to be the grand province of government, though scarcely acknowledged, so to hold the balance, that the abilities or riches of individuals may not interfere with the equilibrium of the whole. For, as it is vain to expect, that men should master their passions during the heat of action, legislators should have this perfection of laws ever in view, when, calmly grasping the interest of humanity, reason assures them, that their own is best secured by the security of the commonweal. The first social systems were certainly founded by passion; individuals wishing to fence round their own wealth or power, and make slaves of their brothers to prevent encroachment. Their descendants have ever been at work to solder the chains they forged, and render the usurpations of strength secure, by the fraud of partial laws: laws that can be abrogated only by the exertions of reason, emancipating mankind, by making government a science, instead of a craft; and civilizing the grand mass, by exercising their understandings about the most important objects of inquiry.

After the revolution in 1688, however, political questions were no longer discussed in



England on a broad scale ; because that degree of liberty was enjoyed, which enabled thinking men to pursue without interruption their own business ; or, if some men complained, they attached themselves to a party, and descanted on the unavoidable misery produced by contending passions.

But in France the bitterness of oppression was mingled in the daily cup, and the serious folly of superstition, pampered by the sweat of labour, stared every man of sense in the face. Against superstition then did the writers contending for civil liberty principally direct their force, though the tyranny of the court increased with it's viciousness.

Voltaire leading the way, and ridiculing with that happy mixture of satire and gaiety, calculated to delight the french, the inconsistent puerilities of a puppet-show religion, had the art to attach the bells to the fool's cap, which tinkled on every side, rousing the attention and piquing the vanity of his readers. Rousseau also ranged himself on the same side ; and, praising his fanciful state of nature, with that interesting eloquence, which embellishes reasoning with the charms  
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of sentiment, forcibly depicted the evils of a priest-ridden society, and the sources of oppressive inequality, inducing the men who were charmed with his language to consider his opinions.

The talents of these two writers were particularly formed to effect a change in the sentiments of the french, who commonly read to collect a fund for conversation ; and their biting retorts, and flowing periods, were retained in each head, and continually slipped off the tongue in numerous sprightly circles.

In France, indeed, new opinions fly from mouth to mouth, with an electrical velocity, unknown in England ; so that there is not such a difference between the sentiments of the various ranks in one country, as is observable in the originality of character to be found in the other. At our theatres, the boxes, pit, and galleries, relish different scenes ; and some are condescendingly born by the more polished part of the audience, to allow the rest to have their portion of amusement. In France, on the contrary, a highly wrought sentiment of morality, probably rather romantic than sublime, produces a burst  
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of applause, when one heart seems to agitate every hand.

But men are not content merely to laugh at oppression, when they can scarcely catch from his gripe the necessities of life ; so that from writing epigrams on superstition, the galled french began to compose philippics against despotism. The enormous and iniquitous taxes, which the nobles, the clergy, and the monarch, levied on the people, turned the attention of benevolence to this main branch of government, and the profound treatise of the humane M. Quesnai produced the sect of the *economists*, the first champions for civil liberty.

On the eve of the american war, the enlightened administration of the comptroller general Turgot, a man formed in this school, afforded France a glimpse of freedom, which, streaking the horizon of despotism, only served to render the contrast more striking. Eager to correct abuses, equally impolitic and cruel, this most excellent man, suffering his clear judgment to be clouded by his zeal, roused the nest of wasps, that rioted on the honey of industry in the sunshine of court favour ; and he was obliged to retire from

the office, which he so worthily filled. Disappointed in his noble plan of freeing France from the fangs of despotism, in the course of ten years, without the miseries of anarchy, which make the present generation pay very dear for the emancipation of posterity, he has nevertheless greatly contributed to produce that revolution in opinion, which, perhaps, alone can overturn the empire of tyranny.

The idle caprices of an effeminate court had long given the tone to the awe-struck populace, who, stupidly admiring what they did not understand, lived on a *vive le roi*, whilst his blood-sucking minions drained every vein, that should have warmed their honest hearts.

But the irresistible energy of the moral and political sentiments of half a century, at last kindled into a blaze the illuminating rays of truth, which, throwing new light on the mental powers of man, and giving a fresh spring to his reasoning faculties, completely undermined the strong holds of priestcraft and hypocrisy.

At this glorious era, the toleration of religious opinions in America, which the spirit of the times, when that continent was peopled  
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with persecuted europeans, produced, aided, not a little, to diffuse these rational sentiments, and exhibited the phenomenon of a government established on the basis of reason and equality. The eyes of all Europe were watchfully fixed on the practical success of this experiment in political science ; and whilst the crowns of the old world were drawing into their focus the hard-earned recompence of the toil and care of the simple citizens, who lived detached from courts, deprived of the comforts of life, the just reward of industry, or, palsied by oppression, pined in dirt and idleness ; the anglo-americans appeared to be another race of beings, men formed to enjoy the advantages of society, and not merely to benefit those who governed ; the use to which they had been appropriated in almost every state ; considered only as the ballast which keeps the vessel steady, necessary, yet despised. So conspicuous in fact was the difference, that, when frenchmen became the auxiliaries of those brave people, during their noble struggle against the tyrannical and inhuman ambition of the british court, it imparted to them that stimulus, which alone was wanting to give wings to freedom, who, hovering over France,

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led her indignant votaries to wreak their vengeance on the tottering fabric of a government, the foundation of which had been laid by benighted ignorance, and it's walls cemented by the calamities of millions that mock calculation—and, in it's ruins a system was entombed, the most baneful to human happiness and virtue.

America fortunately found herself in a situation very different from all the rest of the world; for she had it in her power to lay the first stones of her government, when reason was venturing to canvass prejudice. Availing herself of the degree of civilization of the world, she has not retained those customs, which were only the expedients of barbarism; or thought that constitutions formed by chance, and continually patched up, were superiour to the plans of reason, at liberty to profit by experience.

When society was first regulated, the laws could not be adjusted so as to take in the future conduct of it's members, because the faculties of man are unfolded and perfected by the improvements made by society: consequently the regulations established as circumstances required were very imperfect.

What

What then is to hinder man, at each epoch of civilization, from making a stand, and new modelling the materials, that have been hastily thrown into a rude mass, which time alone has consolidated and rendered venerable?

When society was first subjugated to laws, probably by the ambition of some, and the desire of safety in all, it was natural for men to be selfish, because they were ignorant how intimately their own comfort was connected with that of others; and it was also very natural, that humanity, rather the effect of feeling than of reason, should have a very limited range. But, when men once see, clear as the light of heaven,—and I hail the glorious day from afar!—that on the general happiness depends their own, reason will give strength to the fluttering wings of passion, and men will “*do unto others, what they wish they should do unto them.*”

What has hitherto been the political perfection of the world? In the two most celebrated nations it has only been a polish of manners, an extension of that family love, which is rather the effect of sympathy and selfish passions, than reasonable humanity. And in what has ended their so much extolled patriotism?

patriotism? In vain glory and barbarity—every page of history proclaims. And why has the enthusiasm for virtue thus passed away like the dew of the morning, dazzling the eyes of it's admirers? Why?—because it was factitious virtue.

During the period they had to combat against oppression, and rear an infant state, what instances of heroism do not the annals of Greece and Rome display! But it was merely the blaze of passion, “live smoke;” for after vanquishing their enemies, and making the most astonishing sacrifices to the glory of their country, they became civil tyrants, and preyed on the very society, for whose welfare it was easier to die, than to practise the sober duties of life, which insinuate through it the contentment that is rather felt than seen. Like the parents who forget all the dictates of justice and humanity, to aggrandize the very children whom they keep in a state of dependence, these heroes loved their country, because it was their country, ever showing by their conduct, that it was only a part of a narrow love of themselves.

It is time, that a more enlightened moral love of mankind should supplant, or rather support



support physical affections. It is time, that the youth approaching manhood should be led by principles, and not hurried along by sensations—and then we may expect, that the heroes of the present generation, still having their monsters to cope with, will labour to establish such rational laws throughout the world, that men will not rest in the dead letter, or become artificial beings as they become civilized.

We must get entirely clear of all the notions drawn from the wild traditions of original sin : the eating of the apple, the theft of Prometheus, the opening of Pandora's box, and the other fables, too tedious to enumerate, on which priests have erected their tremendous structures of imposition, to persuade us, that we are naturally inclined to evil : we shall then leave room for the expansion of the human heart, and, I trust, find, that men will insensibly render each other happier as they grow wiser. It is indeed the necessity of stifling many of it's most spontaneous desires, to obtain the factitious virtues of society, that makes man vicious, by depriving him of that dignity of character, which rests only on truth. For it is not paradoxical to assert, that the social virtues

are nipt in the bud by the very laws of society. One principal of action is sufficient—Respect thyself—whether it be termed fear of God—religion ; love of justice—morality ; or, self-love—the desire of happiness. Yet, how can a man respect himself ; and if not, how believe in the existence of virtue ; when he is practising the daily shifts, which do not come under the cognisance of the law, in order to obtain a respectable situation in life ? It seems, in fact, to be the business of a civilized man, to harden his heart, that on it he may sharpen the wit ; which, assuming the appellation of sagacity, or cunning, in different characters, is only a proof, that the head is clear, because the heart is cold.

Besides, one great cause of misery in the present imperfect state of society is, that the imagination, continually tantalized, becomes the inflated wen of the mind, draining off the nourishment from the vital parts. Nor would it, I think, be stretching the inference too far, to insist, that men become vicious in the same proportion as they are obliged, by the defects of society, to submit to a kind of self-denial, which ignorance, not morals, prescribes.

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But these evils are passing away; a new spirit has gone forth, to organise the body-politic; and where is the criterion to be found, to estimate the means, by which the influence of this spirit can be confined, now enthroned in the hearts of half the inhabitants of the globe? Reason has, at last, shown her captivating face, beaming with benevolence; and it will be impossible for the dark hand of despotism again to obscure it's radiance, or the lurking dagger of subordinate tyrants to reach her bosom. The image of God implanted in our nature is now more rapidly expanding; and, as it opens, liberty with maternal wing seems to be soaring to regions far above vulgar annoyance, promising to shelter all mankind.

It is a vulgar error, built on a superficial view of the subject, though it seems to have the sanction of experience, that civilization can only go as far as it has hitherto gone, and then must necessarily fall back into barbarism. Yet thus much appears certain, that a state will infallibly grow old and feeble, if hereditary riches support hereditary rank, under any description. But when courts and primogeniture are done away, and simple equal laws are established, what is to prevent each generation

from retaining the vigour of youth?—What can weaken the body or mind, when the great majority of society must exercise both, to earn a subsistence, and acquire respectability?

The french revolution is a strong proof how far things will govern men, when simple principles begin to act with one powerful spring against the complicated wheels of ignorance; numerous in proportion to their weakness, and constantly wanting repair, because expedients of the moment are ever the spawn of cowardly folly, or the narrow calculations of selfishness. To elucidate this truth, it is not necessary to rake among the ashes of barbarous ambition; to show the ignorance and consequent folly of the monarchs, who ruled with a rod of iron, when the hordes of european savages began to form their governments; though the review of this portion of history would clearly prove, that narrowness of mind naturally produces ferociousness of temper.

We may boast of the poetry of those ages, and of those charming flights of imagination, which, during the paroxysms of passion, flash out in those single acts of heroic virtue, that throw a lustre over a whole thoughtless life;

but the cultivation of the understanding, in spite of these northern lights, appears to be the only way to tame men, whose restlessness of spirit creates the vicious passions, that lead to tyranny and cruelty. When the body is strong, and the blood warm, men do not like to think, or adopt any plan of conduct, unless broken-in by degrees: the force that has often spent itself in fatal activity becomes a rich source of energy of mind.

Men exclaim, only noticing the evil, against the luxury introduced with the arts and sciences; when it is obviously the cultivation of these alone, emphatically termed the arts of peace, that can turn the sword into a ploughshare. War is the adventure naturally pursued by the idle, and it requires something of this species, to excite the strong emotions necessary to rouse inactive minds. Ignorant people, when they appear to reflect, exercise their imagination more than their understanding; indulging reveries, instead of pursuing a train of thinking; and thus grow romantic; like the croisaders; or like women, who are commonly idle and restless.

If we turn then with disgust from enflamed regal pomp, and the childish raree-

shows that amuse the enslaved multitude, we shall feel still more contempt for the order of men, who cultivated their faculties, only to enable them to consolidate their power, by leading the ignorant astray ; making the learning they concentrated in their cells, a more polished instrument of oppression. Struggling with so many impediments, the progress of useful knowledge for several ages was scarcely perceptible ; though respect for the public opinion, that great softener of manners, and only substitute for moral principles, was gaining ground.

The croisades, however, gave a shake to society, that changed it's face ; and the spirit of chivalry, assuming a new character during the reign of the gallant Francis the first, began to meliorate the ferocity of the ancient gauls and franks. The *point d'honneur* being settled, the character of a *gentleman*, held ever since so dear in France, was gradually formed ; and this kind of bastard morality, frequently the only substitute for all the ties that nature has rendered sacred, kept those men within bounds, who obeyed no other law.

The same spirit mixed with the sanguinary treachery of the Guises, and gave support to  
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the manly dignity of Henry the fourth, on whom nature had bestowed that warmth of constitution, tenderness of heart, and rectitude of understanding, which naturally produce an energetic character.—A supple force, that, exciting love, commands esteem.

During the ministry of Richelieu, when the dynasty of *favouritism* commenced, the arts were patronized, and the italian mode of governing by intrigue tended to weaken bodies, polished by the friction of continual finesse. Diffimulation imperceptibly slides into falsehood, and Mazarin, diffimulation personified, paved the way for the imposing pomp and false grandeur of the reign of the haughty and inflated Louis 14th; which, by introducing a taste for majestic frivolity, accelerated the perfection of that species of civilization, which consists in the refining of the senses at the expence of the heart; the source of all real dignity, honour, virtue, and every noble quality of the mind. Endeavouring to make bigotry tolerate voluptuousness, and honour and licentiousness shake hands, sight was lost of the line of distinction, or vice was hid under the mask of it's correlative virtue. The glory of France, a bubble raised by the heated breath

of the king, was the pretext for undermining happiness ; whilst politeness took place of humanity, and created that sort of dependance, which leads men to barter their corn and wine, for unwholesome mixtures of they know not what, that, flattering a depraved appetite, destroy the tone of the stomach.

The feudal taste for tournaments and martial feasts was now naturally succeeded by a fondness for theatrical entertainments ; when feats of valour became too great an exertion of the weakened muscles to afford pleasure, and men found that resource in cultivation of mind, which renders activity of body less necessary to keep the stream of life from stagnating.

All the pieces written at this period, except Moliere's, reflected the manners of the court, and thus perverted the forming taste. That extraordinary man alone wrote on the grand scale of human passions, for mankind at large, leaving to inferior authors the task of imitating the drapery of manners, which points out the *costume* of the age.

Corneille, like our Dryden, often tottering on the brink of absurdity and nonsense, full of noble ideas, which, crowding indistinctly  
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on his fancy, he expresses obscurely, still delights his readers by sketching faint outlines of gigantic passions; and, whilst the charmed imagination is lured to follow him over enchanted ground, the heart is sometimes unexpectedly touched by a sublime or pathetic sentiment, true to nature.

Racine, soon after, in elegant harmonious language painted the manners of his time, and with great judgement gave a picturesque cast to many unnatural scenes and factitious sentiments: always endeavouring to make his characters amiable, he is unable to render them dignified; and the refined morality, scattered throughout, belongs to the code of politeness rather than to that of virtue\*. Fearing to stray from courtly propriety of behaviour, and shock a fastidious audience, the gallantry of his heroes interests only the gallant, and literary people, whose minds are open to different species of amusement. He was, in fact, the father of the french stage. Nothing can equal the fondness which the french

\* What else could be expected from the courtier, who could write in these terms to madame de Maintenon: *God has been so gracious to me, madam, that, in whatever company I find myself, I never have occasion to blush for the gospel or the king.*

french suck in with their milk for public places, particularly the theatre ; and this taste, giving the tone to their conduct, has produced so many stage tricks on the grand theatre of the nation, where old principles vamped up with new scenes and decorations, are continually represented.

Their national character is, perhaps, more formed by their theatrical amusements, than is generally imagined ; they are in reality the schools of vanity. And, after this kind of education, is it surprising, that almost every thing is said and done for stage effect ? or that cold declamatory extasies blaze forth, only to mock the expectation with a show of warmth ?

Thus sentiments spouted from the lips come oftner from the head than the heart, Indeed natural sentiments are only the characters given by the imagination to recollected sensations ; but the french, by the continual gratification of their senses, stifle the reveries of their imagination, which always requires to be acted upon by outward objects ; and seldom reflecting on their feelings, their sensations are ever lively and transitory ; exhaled  
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by every passing beam, and dissipated by the slightest storm.

If a relish for the broad mirth of *fun* characterize the lower class of english, the french of every denomination are equally delighted with a phosphorical, sentimental gilding. This is constantly observable at the theatres. The passions are deprived of all their radical strength, to give smoothness to the ranting sentiments, which, with mock dignity, like the party-coloured rags on the shrivelled branches of the tree of liberty, stuck up in every village, are displayed as something very grand and significant.

The wars of Louis were, likewise, theatrical exhibitions; and the business of his life was adjusting ceremonials, of which he himself became the dupe, when his grandeur was in the wane, and his animal spirits were spent \*. But, towards the close even of his reign, the writings of Fenelon, and the conversation of his pupil, the duke of Burgundy, gave rise to different political discussions, of which the  
theoretical

\* For example, the reception of a portuguese adventurer, under the character of a persian ambassador. A farce made by the court to rouse the blunted senses of the king.

theoretical basis was the happiness of the people—till death, spreading a huge pall over the family and glory of Louis, compassion draws his faults under the same awful canopy, and we sympathize with the man in adversity, whose prosperity was pestiferous.

Louis, by imposing on the senses of his people, gave a new turn to the chivalrous humour of the age: for, with the true spirit of quixotism, the french made a point of honour of adoring their king; and the glory of the *grand monarque* became the national pride, even when it cost them most dear.

As a proof of the perversion of mind at that period, and the false political opinions which prevailed, making the unhappy king the slave of his own despotism, it is sufficient to select one anecdote.

A courtier assures us,\* that the most humiliating circumstance that ever happened to the king, and one of those which gave him most pain, was the publication of a memorial circulated with great diligence by his enemies throughout France. In this memorial the allies invited the french to demand the assembling of their ancient *states-general*. They tell

\* *Memoires du marechal de Richelieu.*

tell them, “ that the ambition and pride of  
 “ the king were the only causes of the wars  
 “ during his reign ; and that, to secure them-  
 “ selves a lasting peace, it was incumbent on  
 “ them not to lay down their arms till the  
 “ states-general were convoked.”

It almost surpasses belief to add, that, in spite of the imprisonment, exile, flight, or execution of two millions of french, this memorial produced little effect. But the king, who was severely hurt, took care to have a reply written \*; though he might have comforted himself with the recollection, that, when they were last assembled, Louis XIII dismissed them with empty promises, forgotten as soon as made.

The enthusiasm of the french, which, in general, hurries them from one extreme to another, at this time produced a total change of manners.

During the regency, vice was not only barefaced, but audacious ; and the tide completely turned : the hypocrites were now all ranged  
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\* In this reply will be found many of the reasons, that have been lately repeated ; and some (a proof of the progress of reason), which no one had the audacity to repeat, when standing up in defence of privileges.

on the other side, the courtiers, labouring to show their abhorrence of religious hypocrisy, set decency at defiance, and did violence to the modesty of nature, when they wished to outrage the squeamish puerilities of superstition.

In the character of the regent we may trace all the vices and graces of false refinement ; forming the taste by destroying the heart. Devoted to pleasure, he so soon exhausted the intoxicating cup of all it's sweets, that his life was spent in searching amongst the dregs, for the novelty that could give a gasp of life to enjoyment. The wit, which at first was the zest of his nocturnal orgies, soon gave place, as flat, to the grossest excesses, in which the principal variety was flagitious immorality. And what has he done to rescue his name from obloquy, but protect a few debauched artists and men of letters ? His goodness of heart only appeared in sympathy. He pitied the distressed of the people, when before his eyes ; and as quickly forgot these yearnings of heart in his sensual sty.

He often related, with great pleasure, an anecdote of the prior de Vendôme, who

chanced to please a mistress of Charles II, and the king could only get rid of his rival by requesting Louis XIV to recall him.

At those moments he would bestow the warmest praises on the english constitution; and seemed enamoured of liberty, though authorising at the time the most flagrant violations of property, and despotic arts of cruelty. The only good he did his country\* arose from this frivolous circumstance; for introducing the fashion of admiring the english, he led men to read and translate some of their masculine writers, which greatly contributed to rouse the sleeping manhood of the french. His love of the fine arts, however, has led different authors to strew flowers over his unhallowed dust—fit emblem of the brilliant qualities, that ornamented only the soil on which they grew.

The latter part of the reign of Louis XV is notorious for the same atrocious debaucheries, unvarnished by wit, over which modesty  
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\* It is well known, that for a long time he wished to convoke the states-general; and it was not without difficulty, that Dubois made him abandon this design. During the year 1789, a curious memorial has been reprinted, which he wrote on this occasion; and it is, like the author, a model of impudence.

would fain draw a veil, were it not necessary to give the last touches to the portrait of that vile despotism, under the lash of which twenty-five millions of people groaned ; till, unable to endure the increasing weight of oppression, they rose like a vast elephant, terrible in his anger, treading down with blind fury friends as well as foes.

Impotence of body, and indolence of mind, rendered Louis XV the slave of his mistresses, who sought to forget his nauseous embraces in the arms of knaves, who found their account in careffing them. Every corner of the kingdom was ransacked to satiate these cormorants, who wrung the very bowels of industry, to give a new edge to sickly appetites ; corrupting the morals whilst breaking the spirit of the nation.



## CHAPTER II.

MARIE-ANTOINETTE. LOUIS XVI. ADMINISTRATION OF NECKER, AND OF CALONNE. NOTABLES CONVENED. CALONNE DISGRACED,—AND OBLIGED TO FLEE THE KINGDOM. HIS CHARACTER. CAUSES OF THE ENSLAVED STATE OF EUROPE.

DURING this general depravation of manners, the young and beautiful *dauphine* arrived; and was received with a kind of idolatrous adoration, only to be seen in France; for the inhabitants of the metropolis, literally speaking, could think and talk of nothing else; and in their eagerness to pay homage, or gratify affectionate curiosity, an immense number were killed.

In such a voluptuous atmosphere, how could she escape contagion? The profligacy of Louis XIV, when love and war were his amusements, was soberness, compared with the capricious intemperance of the inebriated imagination at this period. Madame du Barry was then in the zenith of her power, which quickly excited the jealousy of this princess, whose strongest passion was that intolerable family pride, which heated the blood of the

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whole house of Austria. An inclination for court intrigue, under the mask of the most profound dissimulation, to preserve the favour of Louis XV, was instantly called into action; and it soon became the only business of her life, either to gratify resentment, or cheat the satiety, which the continual and unrestrained indulgence of pleasure produced.

Her character thus formed, when she became absolute mistress, the court of the passive Louis, not only the most dissolute and abandoned that ever displayed the folly of royalty, but audaciously negligent with respect to that attention to decency, which is necessary to delude the vulgar, was deserted by all persons, who had any regard for their moral character, or the decorum of appearances. Constrained by the *etiquette*, which made the principal part of the imposing grandeur of Louis XIV, the queen wished to throw aside the cumbersome brocade of ceremony, without having discernment enough to perceive, that it was necessary to lend mock dignity to a court, where there was not sufficient virtue, or native beauty; to give interest or respectability to simplicity. The harlot is seldom such a fool as to neglect her  
meretricious

meretricious ornaments, unless she renounces her trade ; and the pageantry of courts is the same thing on a larger scale. The lively predilection, likewise, of the queen for her native country, and love for her brother Joseph, to whom she repeatedly sent considerable sums, purloined from the public, tended greatly to inspire the most ineffable contempt for royalty, now stript of the frippery which had concealed it's deformity : and the sovereign disgust excited by her ruinous vices, completely destroying all reverence for that majesty, to which power alone lent dignity, contempt soon produced hatred.

The infamous transaction of the necklace, in which she was probably the dupe of the knaves she fostered, exasperated also both the nobility and the clergy ; and, with her mes-salinian feasts at *Trianon*, made her the common mark of ridicule and satire.

The attention of the people once roused was not permitted to sleep ; for fresh circumstances daily occurred, to give a new spring to discussions, that the most iniquitous and heavy taxes brought home to every bosom ; till the extravagance of the royal family be-

came the general subject of sharpening execrations.

The king, who had not sufficient resolution to support the administration of Turgot, whom his disposition for moderation had chosen, being at a loss what measures to take, called to the helm the plausible Necker. He, only half comprehending the plans of his able predecessor, was led by his vanity cautiously to adopt them ; first publishing his *Compte-rendu*, to clear the way to popularity. This work was read with astonishing rapidity by all ranks of men ; and alarming the courtiers, Necker was, in his turn, dismissed. He retired to write his observations on the administration of the finances, which kept alive the spirit of inquiry, that afterwards broke the talisman of courts, and showed the disenchanted multitude, that those, whom they had been taught to respect as supernatural beings, were not indeed men—but monsters ; deprived by their station of humanity, and even sympathy.

Several abortive attempts were then made by two succeeding ministers, to keep alive public credit, and find resources to supply the expenditure of the state, and the dissipation of  
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the court, when the king was persuaded to place the specious Calonne at the head of these embarrassed affairs.

During the prodigal administration of this man, who acted with an audacity peculiar to the arrogance common in men of superficial yet brilliant talents, every consideration was sacrificed to the court ; the splendid folly and wanton prodigality of which eclipsing all that has been related in history, or told in romance, to amuse wondering fools, only served to accelerate the destruction of public credit, and hasten the revolution, by exciting the clamorous indignation of the people. Numberless destructive expedients of the moment brought money into the state coffers, only to be dissipated by the royal family, and its train of parasites ; till all failing, the wish of still supporting himself in a situation so desirable as that of comptroller general of the finances, determined him to convene an assembly of *notables* : whose very appellation points them out as men in the aristocratical interest.

Louis XVI, with a considerable portion of common sense, and a desire to promote useful reformation, though always governed by those around him, gave without hesitation the neces-

fary orders for calling together the assembly, that afforded the wearied nation the most pleasing prospect, because it was a new one ; but conveyed to their astonished minds at the same time the knowledge of the enormity of a *deficit*, which a series of vice and folly had augmented beyond all precedent.

The immoralities of Calonne, however, had created a general distrust of all his designs ; but with an overweening presumption, the characteristic of the man, he still thought, that he could dexterously obtain the supplies wanted to keep the wheels of government in motion, and quiet the clamours of the nation, by proposing the equalization of taxes ; which, humbling the nobility and dignified clergy, who were thus to be brought down from their privileged height, to the level of citizens, could not fail to be grateful to the rest of the nation. And the parliaments, he concluded, would not dare to oppose his system, lest they should draw on themselves the distrust and hatred of the public.

Without canvassing Calonne's intentions, which the most enlarged charity, after his former extravagance, can scarcely suppose to have been the interest of the people, moderate  
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men imagined this project might have been productive of much good ; giving the french all the liberty they were able to digest ; and, warding off the tumults that have since produced so many disastrous events, whilst coolly preparing them for the reception of more, the effervescence of vanity and ignorance would not have rendered their heads giddy, or their hearts savage. Yet some sensible observers, on the contrary, rather adopted the opinion, that as the people had discovered the magnitude of the *deficit*, they were now persuaded, that a specific remedy was wanting, *a new constitution* ; to cure the evils, which were the excrescences of a gigantic tyranny, that appeared to be draining away the vital juices of labour, to fill the insatiable jaws of thousands of fawning slaves and idle sycophants. But though the people might, for the present, have been satisfied with this salutary reform, which would gradually have had an effect, reasoning from analogy, that the financier did not take into his account, the nobility were not sufficiently enlightened to listen to the dictates of justice or prudence. It had been, indeed, the system of ministers, ever since Richelieu, to humble the nobles, to increase the power

of the court ; and as the ministry, the generals, and the bishops, were always noble, they aided to support the favourite, who depressed the whole body, only for the chance of individual preferment. But this bare-faced attempt to abolish their privileges raised a nest of hornets about his ears, eager to secure the plunder on which they lived ; for by what other name can we call the pensions, places and even estates of those who, taxing industry, rioted in idleness duty free \* ?

\* Since the constituent assembly equalized the impost, Calonne has boasted, that he proposed a mode of levying equal taxes ; but that the nobility would not listen to any such motion, tenaciously maintaining their privileges. This blind obstinacy of opposing all reform, that touched their exemptions, may be reckoned among the foremost causes, which, in hurrying the removal of old abuses, tended to introduce violence and disorder.—And if it be kept in remembrance, that a conduct equally illiberal and disingenuous warped all their political sentiments, it must be clear, that the people, from whom they considered themselves as separated by immutable laws, had cogent grounds to conclude, that it would be next to impossible to effect a reform of the greater part of those perplexing exemptions and arbitrary customs, the weight of which made the peculiar urgency, and called with the most forcible energy for the revolution. Surely all the folly of the people taken together was less reprehensible, than this total want of discernment, this adherence to a prejudice, the jaundiced perception of contumacious igno-



An approaching national bankruptcy was the ostensible reason assigned for the convening of the *notables* in 1787 ; but the convocation, in truth, ought to be ascribed to the voice of reason, founded through the organ of twenty-five millions of human beings, who, though under the fetters of a detestable tyranny, felt, that the crisis was at hand, when the rights of man, and his dignity ascertained were to be enthroned on the eternal basis of justice and humanity.

The *notables*, once assembled, being sensible that their conduct would be inspected by an awakened public, now on the watch, scrupulously examined into every national concern; and seriously investigated the causes, that had produced the *deficit*, with something like the independent spirit of freemen. To their inquiries, however, the minister gave only the

rance, in a class of men, who from the opportunity they had of acquiring knowledge, ought to have acted with more judgment. For they were goaded into action by inhuman provocations, by acts of the most flagrant injustice, when they had neither rule nor experience to direct them, and after their temperance had been destroyed by years of sufferings, and an endless catalogue of reiterated and contemptuous privations.

evasive reply, 'that he had acted in obedience to the pleasure of the king:' when it was notorious to all Europe, that his majesty was merely a cypher at Versailles; and even the accusation brought against Calonne, by La Fayette, of exchanging the national domains, and appropriating millions of it's revenue to gratify the queen, the count d'Artois, and the rest of the cabal, who kept him in place, was generally believed. In fact, the state had been fleeced, to support the unremitting demands of the queen; who would have dismembered France, to aggrandize Austria, and pamper her favourites. Thus the court conniving at peculation, the minister played a sure game; whilst the honest labourer was groaning under a thousand abuses, and yielding the solace of his industry, or the hoards, which youthful strength had reserved for times of scarcity or decrepit age, to irritate the increasing wants of a thoughtless, treacherous princess, and the avarice of her unprincipled agents.

This artful, though weak, machiavelian politician suffered no other person to approach the king; who, seduced into confidence by his colloquial powers, could not avoid being  
dazzled

dazzled by his plausible schemes. He had, nevertheless, a powerful enemy to contend with, in M. de Breteuil ; who, having gratified some of the little passions of the dauphine, during her first struggles for dominion, was now protected by the absolute power of the queen. Endeavouring to measure his strength with her's, the minister was discomfited ; and the whole swarm of flatterers, who had partaken of the spoil of rapine, were instantly alert to open the eyes of Louis, over which they had long been scattering poppies, and soon convinced him of the perfidy of his favourite ; whilst the two privileged orders joined their forces, to overwhelm their common enemy, attending to their vengeance at the very time they followed the dictates of prudence.

The accusations of La Fayette served, perhaps, as the ostensible reason with the public, and even with the king ; yet it can hardly be supposed, that they had any effect on the cabal, who invented, or connived at the plans necessary to raise a continual supply for their pleasures. The fact is, that, most probably being found unequal to the task, or no longer choosing to be a docile instrument of mischief, he was thrown aside as unfit for use.

Disgraced, he quickly retired to his estate ; but was not long permitted to struggle with the malady of exiled ministers, in the gloomy silence of inactivity ; for, hearing that he had been denounced by the parliament, he fled in a transport of rage out of the kingdom, covered with the execrations of an injured people, in whose hatred, or admiration, the mellowed shades of reflection are seldom seen.

The extravagance of his administration exceeded that of any other scourge of France ; yet it does not appear, that he was actuated by a plan, or even desire, of enriching himself. So far from it, with wild prodigality he seems to have squandered away the vast sums he extorted by force or fraud, merely to gratify or purchase friends and dependents ; till, quite exhausted, he was obliged to have recourse to Necker's scheme of loans. But not possessing like him the confidence of the public, he could not with equal facility obtain a present supply, the weight of which would be thrown forward to become a stumbling-block to his successors. Necker, by the advantageous terms which he held out to money-holders, had introduced a pernicious system of stock-jobbing, that was slowly detected, because

because those who could best have opened the eyes of the people were interested to keep them closed.—Still Calonne could not induce the same body of men to trust to his offers; which, not choosing to accept, they made a point of discrediting, to secure the interest and exorbitant premiums that were daily becoming due.

With an uncommon quickness of comprehension, and audacity in pursuing crude schemes, rendered plausible by a rhetorical flow of words, Calonne, a strong representative of the national character, seems rather to have wanted principles than feelings of humanity; and to have been led astray more by vanity and the love of pleasure, which imperceptibly smooth away moral restraints, than by those deep plans of guilt, that force men to see the extent of the mischief they are hatching, whilst the crocodile is still in the egg. Yet, as mankind ever judge by events, the inconsiderate presumption, if not the turpitude of his conduct, brought on him universal censure: for, at a crisis when the general groans of an oppressed nation proclaimed the disease of the state, and even when the government was on the verge of dissolution, did he not

waste the treasures of his country, forgetful not only of moral obligations, but the ties of honour, of that regard for the tacit confidence of it's citizens, which a statesman ought to hold sacred? since which he has been caressed at almost every court in Europe, and made one of the principal agents of despotism in the croisades against the infant liberty of France.

Reflecting on the conduct of the tools of courts, we are enabled in a great measure to account for the slavery of Europe; and to discover, that it's misery has not arisen more from the imperfection of civilization, than from the fallacy of those political systems, which necessarily made the favourite of the day a knavish tyrant, eager to amass riches sufficient to save himself from oblivion, when the honours, so hardly wrestled for, should be torn from his brow. Besides, whilst ministers have found impunity in the omnipotence, which the seal of power gave them, and in the covert fear of those who hoped one day to enjoy the same emoluments, they have been led by the prevalence of depraved manners, to the commission of every atrocious folly. Kings have been the dupes of ministers, of mistresses,

and secretaries, not to notice sly valets and cunning waiting-maids, who are seldom idle ; and these are most venal, because they have least independence of character to support ; till in the circle of corruption no one can point out the first mover. Hence proceeds the great tenacity of courts to support them ; hence originates their great objection to republican forms of government, which oblige their ministers to be accountable for delinquency ; and hence, likewise, might be traced their agonizing fears of the doctrine of civil equality.

## CHAPTER III.

ADMINISTRATION OF DE'BRIENNE. DISSOLUTION OF THE NOTABLES. LAND TAX AND STAMP DUTY RECOMMENDED BY THEM, BUT REFUSED TO BE SANCTIONED BY THE PARLIAMENT. BED OF JUSTICE. THE PARLIAMENT BANISHED TO TROYES,—BUT SOON COMPROMISED FOR IT'S RECALL. STRUGGLES OF THE COURT PARTY TO PREVENT THE CONVOCAION OF THE STATES-GENERAL. BANISHMENT OF THE DUKE OF ORLEANS, AND TWO SPIRITED MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENT. COUR PLENIERE. REMARKS ON THE PARLIAMENTS. IMPRISONMENT OF THE MEMBERS. DEPUTIES OF THE PROVINCE OF BRITANNY SENT TO THE BASTILLE. THE SOLDIERY LET LOOSE UPON THE PEOPLE.

AFTER the dismissal of Calonne, M. de Brienne, a man whose talents Turgot had over-rated, was now chosen by the queen, because he had formerly seconded her views, and was still the obsequious slave of that power, which he had long been courting, to obtain the so much envied place of minister. Having taken more pains to gain the post than to prepare himself to fulfil it's functions, his weak and timid mind was in a continual tumult ; and he adopted with head-long confusion the taxes proposed by his predecessor ; because money must be had, and he knew not where to turn  
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to procure it by an unhacknied mode of extortion.

The *notables* were now dissolved; and it would have been a natural consequence of the dismissal of the minister who assembled them, even if their spirited inquiries had not rendered their presence vexatious to the court. This, however, was an impolitic measure; for they returned highly disgusted to their respective abodes, to propagate the free opinions, to which resentment and argumentation had given birth.

Before the breaking up of the *notables*, they were nevertheless prevailed upon to recommend a land and stamp tax; and the edicts were sent to the parliament to be enregistered. But these magistrates, never forgetting that they enjoyed, in virtue of their office, the privileged exemption from taxes, to elude sanctioning the first, which was to have been an equal impost, took advantage of the public odiousness of the second; thus avoiding, with a show of patriotism, an avowed opposition to the interest of the people, that would clearly have proved, how much dearer they held their own.

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The gaudy and meretricious pageantry of the court was now displayed, to intimidate the parliament, at what was termed a bed of justice, though in reality of all justice a solemn mockery; and, whilst pretending to consult them, the edicts were enregistered by a mandate of state. The parliament, in the mean time, making a merit of necessity, declared, that the right of sanctioning the impost belonged only to the states-general, the convocation of which they demanded. Provoked by their sturdy opposition, the court banished them to Troyes; and they compromised for their recall by enregistering the prolongation of the *deuxieme vingtieme*, a cowardly desertion of their former ground.

A century before (a proof of the progress of reason) the people, digesting their disappointment, would have submitted, with brutal acquiescence, to the majestic WILL of the king, without daring to scan it's import; but now, recognizing their own dignity, they insisted, that all authority, which did not originate with them, was illegal and despotic, and loudly refounded the grand truth—That it was necessary to convoke the states-general. The government, however, like a  
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dying wretch cut off by intemperance, whilst the lust of enjoyment still remaining prompts him to exhaust his strength by struggling with death, fought some time longer inauspiciously for existence, depending on the succour of the court empirics, who vainly flattered themselves, that they could prevent it's dissolution. From the moment, indeed, that Brienne succeeded Calonne, all the machinery, which the demon of despotism could invent, was put in motion, to divert the current of opinion, bearing on it's fair bosom the new sentiments of liberty with irresistible force, and overwhelming, as it swelled, the perishing monuments of venerable folly, and the fragile barriers of superstitious ignorance.

But supplies were still wanting ; and the court, being fruitful in stratagems to procure a loan, which was the necessary lever of it's insidious designs, coalesced with some of the members of the parliament, and the agreement was to have been ratified in a *séance royale*. Yet, as the parliament had determined to be governed by a clear majority, the scheme of the keeper of the seals, who intended to have the business hurried over without telling the votes, was completely defeated.

The discovery of this unfair attempt made the indignant magistrates, glad to seize an occasion to recover their popularity, maintain with boldness their own character, and the interest of the people. The duke of Orleans, also, somewhat tauntingly suggesting to the king, that this was only another bed of justice, was exiled, with two other members, who had remonstrated with courage. These magistrates, now become the objects of public adoration, were considered by the grateful public as their only bulwark against the attacks of the ministry; which continued to harass invention, to contrive means to counteract a concurrence of circumstances, that were driving before them all opposition.

The court, for I consider the government, at this period, completely at an end, continued to stumble out of one blunder into another, till at last they rested all their hopes on the popular reforms projected by Brienne, in conjunction with Lamoignon, a man with more strength of character, to cajole the people and crush the parliament. Several strokes, the feeble blows of angry men, who wished still to retain the stolen sweets of office, were aimed at this body, calculated to mislead the people, who  
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were also promised a reformed code of penal laws. But the time when partial remedies would have been eagerly swallowed was past, and the people saw distinctly, that their will would soon be law, and their power omnipotent. But the minister, Brienne, not aware of this, to steer clear of further opposition, proposed the plan of a *cour plénière*: an heterogeneous assembly of princes, nobles, magistrates, and soldiers. A happy substitute, as he imagined, for the parliament; and which, by restoring the ancient forms of the kings of France, would awe and amuse the people. He did not consider, that their minds were now full of other objects, and their enthusiasm turned into another channel.

This conduct proved more destructive to the court than any former folly its advisers had committed. Imbecility now characterized every measure. The parliament however fell into the snare, and forfeited the esteem and confidence of the people by opposing some popular edicts; particularly one in favour of the protestants, which they themselves had demanded ten years before, and to which they now objected, only because it came from another quarter. Yet the court, regardless of

experience, endeavoured to restore it's credit by persecution ; whilst, making all the clashing movements that fear could dictate to manifest it's power and overawe the nation, it united all parties, and drew the whole kingdom to one point of action.

The despotic and extravagant steps taken, to give efficiency to the *cour plénière*, awakened the sensibility of the most torpid ; and the vigilance of twenty-five millions of centinels was roused, to watch the movements of the court, and follow it's corrupt ministers, through all the labyrinths of sophistry and tergiversation, into the very dens of their nefarious machinations. To prevent the different parliaments from deliberating, and forming in consequence a plan of conduct together, the edict to sanction this packed cabinet was to be presented to them all on the same day ; and a considerable force was assembled, to intimidate the members, who should dare to prove refractory. But, they were forewarned in time, to avoid being surpris'd into acquiescence : for, having received an intimation of the design, a copy of the edict had been purloined from the press, by means of the universal engine of corruption, money.

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Warmed by the discovery of this surreptitious attempt to cheat them into blind obedience, they bound themselves by an oath, to act in concert ; and not to enregister a decree, that had been obtained through a medium, which violated the privilege they had usurped of having a share in the legislation, by rendering their sanction of edicts necessary to give them force : a privilege that belonged only to the states-general. Still, as the government had often found it convenient to make the parliaments a substitute for a power they dreaded to see in action, these magistrates sometimes availed themselves of this weakness, to remonstrate against oppression ; and thus, covering usurpation with a respectable veil, the twelve parliaments were considered by the people as the only barriers to resist the encroachments of despotism. Yet the sagacious chancellor L'Hôpital, not deceived by their accidental usefulness, guarded the french against their illegal ambition : for was it not a dangerous courtesy of the people, to allow an aristocracy of lawyers, who bought their places, to be as it were the only representatives of the nation ? Still their resistance had frequently been an impediment in the way of tyranny, and now provoked a discussion,

which led to the most important of all questions—namely, in whose hands ought the sovereignty to rest?—who ought to levy the impost, and make laws?—and the answer was the universal demand of a fair representation, to meet at stated periods, without depending on the caprice of the executive power. Unable to effect their purpose by art or force, the weak ministry, stung by the disappointment, determined at least to wreak their vengeance on two of the boldest of the members. But the united magistrates disputing the authority of the armed force, it was necessary to send to Versailles, to make the king sign an express order; and towards five o'clock the next morning the sanctuary of justice was profaned, and the two members dragged to prison, in contempt of the visible indignation of the people. Soon after, to fill up the measure of provocations, a deputation sent by the province of Brittany, to remonstrate against the establishment of the *cour plénière*, were condemned to silence in the Bastille.

Without money, and afraid to demand it, excepting in a circumlocutory manner, the court, like mad men, spent themselves in idle exertions of strength: for, whilst the citizens  
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of Paris were burning in effigy the two obnoxious ministers, who thus outraged them in the person of their magistrates, they were delivered up to the fury of the hired slaves of despotism, and trampled under foot by the cavalry; who were called in to quell a riot purposely excited.

Cries of horror and indignation resounded throughout the kingdom; and the nation, with one voice, demanded justice—Alas! justice had never been known in France. Retaliation and vengeance had been it's fatal substitutes. And from this epoch we may date the commencement of those butcheries, which have brought on that devoted country so many dreadful calamities, by teaching the people to avenge themselves with blood!

The hopes of the nation, it is true, were still turned towards the promised convocation of the states-general; which every day became more necessary. But the infatuated ministers, though unable to devise any scheme to extricate themselves out of the crowd of difficulties, into which they had heedlessly plunged, could not think of convening a power, which they foresaw, without any  
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great stretch of sagacity, would quickly annihilate their own.

The ferment, mean time, continued, and the blood that had been shed served only to increase it ; nay, the citizens of Grenoble prepared with calmness to resist force by force, and the myrmidons of tyranny might have found it a serious contest, if the intelligence of the dismissal of the ministers had not produced one of those moments of enthusiasm, which by the most rapid operation of sympathy unites all hearts. Touched by it, the men who lived on the wages of slaughter threw down their arms, and melting into tears in the embraces of the citizens whom they came to murder, remembered that they were countrymen, and groaned under the same oppression : and, their conduct, quickly applauded with that glow of sensibility which excites imitation, served as an example to the whole army, forcing the soldiers to think of their situation, and might have proved a salutary lesson to any court less depraved and insensible than that of Versailles.

## CHAPTER IV.

NECKER RECALLED. HIS CHARACTER. NOTABLES CONVENED A SECOND TIME. COALITION OF THE NOBILITY AND CLERGY IN DEFENCE OF THEIR PRIVILEGES. PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLIES OF THE PEOPLE. POLITICAL PUBLICATIONS IN FAVOUR OF THE TIERS-ETAT. GENERAL REFLECTIONS ON REFORM,—ON THE PRESENT STATE OF EUROPE,—AND ON THE REVOLUTION IN FRANCE.

SUCH were the measures pursued to exasperate a people beginning to open their eyes, and now clamourously demanding the restitution of their long-estranged rights; when the court, having in vain attempted to terrify or deceive them, found it expedient to still the storm by recalling Necker. This man had the confidence of France, which he in some degree merited for the light he had thrown on the state of the revenue, and for the system of economy, that he had endeavoured to adopt during his former administration: but unfortunately he did not possess talents or political sagacity sufficient to pilot the state in this perilous season. Bred up in a counting-house, he acquired that knowledge of detail, and attention to little advantages, so necessary when

when a man desires to amass riches with what is termed a fair character: and, having accumulated a very large fortune by unremitting industry; or, to borrow the commercial phrase, *attention to the main chance*, his house became the resort of the men of letters of his day.

The foibles of a rich man are always fostered, sometimes perhaps insensibly, by his numerous dependents and visitants, who find his table amusing or convenient. It is not then surprising, that, with the abilities of a tolerable financier, he was soon persuaded, that he was a great author, and consummate statesman. Besides, when the manners of a nation are very depraved, the men who wish to appear, and even to be, more moral than the multitude, in general become pedantically virtuous; and, continually contrasting their morals with the thoughtless vices around them, the artificial, narrow character of a sectary is formed; the manners are rendered stiff, and the heart cold. The dupes also of their flimsy virtue, many men are harshly called hypocrites, who are only weak; and popularity often turns the head giddy, that  
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would have soberly fulfilled the common duties of a man in the shade of private life.

Having adopted with a timid hand many of the sagacious plans of his model, the clear headed, unaffected Turgot, Necker was considered by the greater part of the nation as a consummate politician : neither was it surprising, that the people, snatched from despondency, should have mistaken the extent of his political knowledge, when they had estimated it by that of the greatest statesman, which France, or, perhaps, any other country, ever produced.

Having written on a subject, that naturally attracted the attention of the public, he had the vanity to believe, that he deserved the exaggerated applause he received, and the reputation of wise, when he was only shrewd. Not content with the fame he acquired by writing on a subject, which his turn of mind and profession enabled him to comprehend, he wished to obtain a higher degree of celebrity, by forming into a large book various metaphysical shreds of arguments, which he had collected from the conversation of men, fond of ingenious subtilties ; and the style, excepting some declamatory passages,

passages, was as inflated and confused as the thoughts were far fetched and unconnected\*.

As it is from this period, that we must date the commencement of those great events, which, outrunning expectation, have almost rendered observation breathless, it becomes necessary to enter on the task with caution ; as it ought not to be more the object of the historian to fill up the sketch, than to trace the hidden springs and secret mechanism, which have put in motion a revolution, the most important that has ever been recorded in the annals of man. This was a crisis that demanded boldness and precision ; and no man in France, excepting Necker, had the reputation of possessing extensive political talents ; because the old system of government scarcely afforded a field, in which the abilities of men could be unfolded, and their judgment matured by experience. Yet, whilst the kingdom was in the greatest fermentation, he seems to have thought of none but those timid half-way measures, which always prove disastrous in desperate cases, when the wound requires to be probed to the quick.

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\* Importance of religious opinions.

The old government was then only a vast ruin ; and whilst it's pillars were trembling on their baseless foundations, the eyes of all France were directed towards their admired minister. In this situation, with all his former empiricism he began his second career, like another Sangrado. But the people could no longer bear bleeding—for their veins were already so lacerated, it was difficult to find room to make a fresh incision ; and the emollient prescriptions, the practice of former times, were now insufficient to stop the progress of a deadly disease. In this situation, listening to the voice of the nation, because he was at a loss what step to take to maintain his popularity, he determined to hasten the convocation of the states-general : first recalling the exiled magistrates, and restoring the parliaments to the exercise of their functions. His next care was to dissipate all apprehension of a famine ; a fear that had been artfully excited by the court agents, in order to have a pretext to form magazines of provision for an army, which they had previously resolved to assemble in the vicinity of Paris.

Thus far he seems to have acted with some degree of prudence, at least ; but, inattentive

to the robust strength which the public opinion had then acquired, he wavered as to the mode of constituting the states-general, whilst the parliament passed a decree to prevent their assembling in any other manner than they did in 1614. This obstinate pretention to legislate for the nation was no longer to be tolerated, when they opposed the wishes of the people : yet, with the common instinct of corporate bodies, they wrapped themselves up in the precedents that proved their winding-sheet, provoking universal contempt ; for the herculean force of the whole empire was now clearing away every obstacle to freedom.

At this critical moment, the minister, enjoying great popularity, had it in his power, could he have governed the court, to have suggested a system, which might ultimately have proved acceptable to all parties ; and thus have prevented that dreadful convulsion, which has shook the kingdom from one extremity to the other. Instead of that, he convened a second time the *notables*, to take their opinion on a subject, respecting which the public had already decided, not daring himself to sanction it's decision. The strongest  
proof



proof he could give, that his mind was not sufficiently elastic to expand with the opening views of the people ; and that he did not possess the eye of genius, which, quickly distinguishing what is possible, enables a statesman to act with firm dignity, resting on his own centre.

Carried away by the general impulsion, with the inconsiderate fervour of men, whose hearts always grow hard as they cool, when they have been warmed by some sudden glow of enthusiasm or sympathy, the *notables* showed, by their subsequent conduct, that, though they had been led by eloquence to support some questions of a patriotic tendency, they had not the principles necessary to impel them to give up local advantages, or personal prerogatives, for the good of the whole community, in which they were only eventually to share. Indeed romantic virtue, or friendship, seldom goes further than professions ; because it is merely the effect of that fondness for imitating great, rather than acquiring moderate qualities, common to vain people.

The *notables* had now two essential points to settle ; namely, to regulate the election of  
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the deputies, and how they were afterwards to vote. The population and wealth of several provinces, from commercial advantages and other causes, had given a new face to the country since the former election; so much so, that, if the ancient division were adhered to, the representation could not fail to be very unequal. Yet if the natural order of population were followed, the grand question of voting by orders or by voices seemed to be prejudged by the great increase of the members of the *tiers-etat*.

The nobles and the clergy immediately rallied round the standard of privileges, insisting, that France would be ruined, if their *rights* were touched: and so true were they now to their insulated interest, that all the committees into which the *notables* were divided, excepting that of which *monseigneur* was president, determined against allowing the *tiers-etat* that increase of power necessary to enable them to be useful. Whilst, however, these disputes and cabals seemed to promise no speedy determination, the people, weary of procrastination, and disgusted with the obstacles continually thrown in the way of the meeting of the states-general, by a court that

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was ever secretly at work, to regain the trifling privileges, which it pretended to sacrifice to the general good, began to assemble, and even to decide the previous question, by deliberating together in several places. Dauphine set the example; and the three orders uniting sketched a plan for the organization of the whole kingdom, which served as a model for the other provincial states, and furnished grounds for the constituent assembly to work on when forming the constitution. Though the rumour was spread abroad, the court, still so stupidly secure as not to see, that the people, who at this period dared to think for themselves, would not now be noosed like beasts, when strength is brought into subjection by reason, beheld with wonder the arrival of deputations from different quarters, and heard with astonishment the bold tones of men speaking of their rights, tracing society to its origin, and painting with the most forcible colours the horrid depredations of the old government. For after the minds of men had been fatigued by the stratagems of the court, the feeble measures of the minister, and the narrow, selfish views of the parliaments, they examined with avidity the pro-

ductions of a number of able writers, who were daily pouring pamphlets from the press, to excite the *tiers-etat*, to assert it's rights on enlarged principles, and to oppose vigorously the exorbitant claims of the privileged orders, who stood up for ancient usurpations, as if they were the natural rights of a particular *genus* of man. Those of the abbé Sieyes and the marquis de Condorcet were the most philosophical; whilst the unctuous eloquence of Mirabeau softened these dry researches, and fed the flame of patriotism.

In this posture of affairs, Necker, perceiving that the people were grown resolute, prevailed on the council to decree, that the number of the deputies of the *tiers-etat* should be equal to that of the two other orders taken together: but whether they were to vote by chambers, or in the same body, was still left undetermined.

The people, whose patience had been worn out by injuries and insults, now only thought of preparing instructions for their representatives.—But, instead of looking for gradual improvement, letting one reform calmly produce another, they seemed determined to strike at the root of all their misery at once:  
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the united mischiefs of a monarchy unrestrained, a priesthood unnecessarily numerous, and an over grown nobility: and these hasty measures, become a subject worthy of philosophical investigation, naturally fall into two distinct subjects of inquiry.

1st. If, from the progress of reason, we be authorized to infer, that all governments will be meliorated, and the happiness of man placed on the solid basis, gradually prepared by the improvement of political science: if the degrading distinctions of rank born in barbarism, and nourished by chivalry, be really becoming in the estimation of all sensible people so contemptible, that a modest man, in the course of fifty years would probably blush at being thus distinguished: if the complexion of manners in Europe be completely changed from what it was half a century ago, and the liberty of it's citizens tolerably secured: if every day extending freedom be more firmly established in consequence of the general dissemination of truth and knowledge: it then seems injudicious for statesmen to force the adoption of any opinion, by aiming at the speedy destruction of obstinate prejudices; because these premature reforms, instead of promoting, destroy the comfort

of those unfortunate beings, who are under their dominion, affording at the same time to despotism the strongest arguments to urge in opposition to the theory of reason. Besides, the objects intended to be forwarded are probably retarded, whilst the tumult of internal commotion and civil discord leads to the most dreadful consequence—the immolating of human victims.

But, 2dly, it is necessary to observe, that, if the degeneracy of the higher orders of society be such, that no remedy less fraught with horror can effect a radical cure; and if enjoying the fruits of usurpation, they domineer over the weak, and check by all the means in their power every humane effort, to draw man out of the state of degradation, into which the inequality of fortune has sunk him; the people are justified in having recourse to coercion, to repel coercion. And, further, if it can be ascertained, that the silent sufferings of the citizens of the world under the iron feet of oppression are greater, though less obvious, than the calamities produced by such violent convulsions as have happened in France; which, like hurricanes whirling over the face of nature, strip off all it's bloom-

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ing graces ; it may be politically just, to pursue such measures as were taken by that regenerating country, and at once root out those deleterious plants, which poison the better half of human happiness. For civilization hitherto, by producing the inequality of conditions, which makes wealth more desirable than either talents or virtue, has so weakened all the organs of the body-politic, and rendered man such a beast of prey, that the strong have always devoured the weak till the very signification of justice has been lost sight of, and charity, the most specious system of slavery, substituted in it's place. The rich have for ages tyrannized over the poor, teaching them how to act when possessed of power, and now must feel the consequence. People are rendered ferocious by misery ; and misanthropy is ever the offspring of discontent. Let not then the happiness of one half of mankind be built on the misery of the other, and humanity will take place of charity, and all the ostentatious virtues of an universal aristocracy. How, in fact, can we expect to see men live together like brothers, when we only see master and servant in society ? For till men learn mutually to assist without governing each other, little

can be done by political associations towards perfecting the condition of mankind.

Europe will probably be, for some years to come, in a state of anarchy ; till a change of sentiments, gradually undermining the strongholds of custom, alters the manners, without rousing the little passions of men, a pack of yelping curs pampered by vanity and pride. It is in reality these minor passions, which during the summer of idleness mantle on the heart, and taint the atmosphere, because the understanding is still.

Several acts of ferocious folly have justly brought much obloquy on the grand revolution, which has taken place in France ; yet, I feel confident of being able to prove, that the people are essentially good, and that knowledge is rapidly advancing to that degree of perfectibility, when the proud distinctions of sophistifying fools will be eclipsed by the mild rays of philosophy, and man be considered as man—acting with the dignity of an intelligent being.

From implicitly obeying their sovereigns, the french became suddenly all sovereigns ; yet, because it is natural for men to run out of one extreme into another, we should guard  
against



against inferring, that the spirit of the moment will not evaporate, and leave the disturbed water more clear for the fermentation. Men without principle rise like foam during a storm sparkling on the top of the billow, in which it is soon absorbed when the commotion dies away. Anarchy is a fearful state, and all men of sense and benevolence have been anxiously attentive, to observe what use frenchmen would make of their liberty, when the confusion incident to the acquisition should subside : yet, whilst the heart sickens over a detail of crimes and follies, and the understanding is appalled by the labour of unravelling a black tissue of plots, which exhibits the human character in the most revolting point of view ; it is perhaps, difficult to bring ourselves to believe, that out of this chaotic mass a fairer government is rising than has ever shed the sweets of social life on the world.— But things must have time to find their level.

