

# Book I. Death of Louis XV.

## Chapter 1. Louis the Well-Beloved.

President Henault, remarking on royal Surnames of Honour how difficult it often is to ascertain not only why, but even when, they were conferred, takes occasion in his sleek official way, to make a philosophical reflection. 'The Surname of Bien-aime (*Well-beloved*),' says he, 'which Louis XV. bears, will not leave posterity in the same doubt. This Prince, in the year 1744, while hastening from one end of his kingdom to the other, and suspending his conquests in Flanders that he might fly to the assistance of Alsace, was arrested at Metz by a malady which threatened to cut short his days. At the news of this, Paris, all in terror, seemed a city taken by storm: the churches resounded with supplications and groans; the prayers of priests and people were every moment interrupted by their sobs: and it was from an interest so dear and tender that this Surname of Bien-aime fashioned itself, a title higher still than all the rest which this great Prince has earned.' (*Abrege Chronologique de l'Histoire de France* (Paris, 1775), p. 701.)

So stands it written; in lasting memorial of that year 1744. Thirty other years have come and gone; and 'this great Prince' again lies sick; but in how altered circumstances now! Churches resound not with excessive groanings; Paris is stoically calm: sobs interrupt no prayers, for indeed none are offered; except Priests' Litanies, read or chanted at fixed money-rate per hour, which are not liable to interruption. The shepherd of the people has been carried home from Little Trianon, heavy of heart, and been put to bed in his own Chateau of Versailles: the flock knows it, and heeds it not. At most, in the immeasurable tide of French Speech (*which ceases not day after day, and only ebbs towards the short hours of night*), may this of the royal sickness emerge from time to time as an article of news. Bets are doubtless depending; nay, some people 'express themselves loudly in the streets.' (*Memoires de M. le Baron Besenval* (Paris, 1805), ii. 59-90.) But for the rest, on green field and steepled city, the May sun shines out, the May evening fades; and men ply their useful or useless business as if no Louis lay in danger.

Dame Dubarry, indeed, might pray, if she had a talent for it; Duke d'Aiguillon too, Maupeou and the Parlement Maupeou: these, as they sit in their high places, with France harnessed under their feet, know well on what basis they continue there. Look to it, D'Aiguillon; sharply as thou didst, from the Mill of St. Cast, on Quiberon and the invading English; thou, 'covered if not with glory yet with meal!' Fortune was ever accounted inconstant: and each dog has but his day.

Forlorn enough languished Duke d'Aiguillon, some years ago; covered, as we said, with meal; nay with worse. For La Chalotais, the Breton Parlemeuteer, accused him not only of poltroonery and tyranny, but even of concussion (*official plunder of money*); which accusations it was easier to get 'quashed' by backstairs Influences than to get answered: neither could the thoughts, or even the tongues, of men be tied. Thus, under disastrous eclipse, had this grand-nephew of the great Richelieu to glide about; unworshipped by the world; resolute Choiseul, the abrupt proud man, disdaining him, or even forgetting him. Little prospect but to glide into Gascony, to rebuild Chateaus there, (*Arthur Young, Travels during the years 1787-88-89* (Bury St. Edmunds, 1792), i. 44.) and die inglorious killing game! However, in the year 1770, a certain young soldier, Dumouriez by name, returning from Corsica, could see 'with sorrow, at Compiegne, the old King of France, on foot, with doffed hat, in

sight of his army, at the side of a magnificent phaeton, doing homage to—Dubarry.' (*La Vie et les Memoires du General Dumouriez* (Paris, 1822), i. 141.)

Much lay therein! Thereby, for one thing, could D'Aiguillon postpone the rebuilding of his Chateau, and rebuild his fortunes first. For stout Choiseul would discern in the Dubarry nothing but a wonderfully dizen'd Scarlet-woman; and go on his way as if she were not. Intolerable: the source of sighs, tears, of pettings and pouting; which would not end till 'France' (*La France, as she named her royal valet*) finally mustered heart to see Choiseul; and with that 'quivering in the chin (*tremblement du menton natural in such cases*)' (*Besenal, Memoires, ii. 21.*) faltered out a dismissal: dismissal of his last substantial man, but pacification of his scarlet-woman. Thus D'Aiguillon rose again, and culminated. And with him there rose Maupeou, the banisher of Parlements; who plants you a refractory President 'at Croe in Combrailles on the top of steep rocks, inaccessible except by litters,' there to consider himself. Likewise there rose Abbe Terray, dissolute Financier, paying eightpence in the shilling,—so that wits exclaim in some press at the playhouse, "Where is Abbe Terray, that he might reduce us to two-thirds!" And so have these individuals (*verily by black-art*) built them a Domdaniel, or enchanted Dubarrydom; call it an Armida-Palace, where they dwell pleasantly; Chancellor Maupeou 'playing blind-man's-buff' with the scarlet Enchantress; or gallantly presenting her with dwarf Negroes;—and a Most Christian King has unspeakable peace within doors, whatever he may have without. "My Chancellor is a scoundrel; but I cannot do without him." (*Dulaure, Histoire de Paris* (Paris, 1824), vii. 328.)

Beautiful Armida-Palace, where the inmates live enchanted lives; lapped in soft music of adulation; waited on by the splendours of the world;—which nevertheless hangs wondrously as by a single hair. Should the Most Christian King die; or even get seriously afraid of dying! For, alas, had not the fair haughty Chateauroux to fly, with wet cheeks and flaming heart, from that Fever-scene at Metz; driven forth by sour shavelings? She hardly returned, when fever and shavelings were both swept into the background. Pompadour too, when Damiens wounded Royalty 'slightly, under the fifth rib,' and our drive to Trianon went off futile, in shrieks and madly shaken torches,—had to pack, and be in readiness: yet did not go, the wound not proving poisoned. For his Majesty has religious faith; believes, at least in a Devil. And now a third peril; and who knows what may be in it! For the Doctors look grave; ask privily, If his Majesty had not the small-pox long ago?—and doubt it may have been a false kind. Yes, Maupeou, pucker those sinister brows of thine, and peer out on it with thy malign rat-eyes: it is a questionable case. Sure only that man is mortal; that with the life of one mortal snaps irrevocably the wonderfulest talisman, and all Dubarrydom rushes off, with tumult, into infinite Space; and ye, as subterranean Apparitions are wont, vanish utterly,—leaving only a smell of sulphur!

These, and what holds of these may pray,—to Beelzebub, or whoever will hear them. But from the rest of France there comes, as was said, no prayer; or one of an opposite character, 'expressed openly in the streets.' Chateau or Hotel, were an enlightened Philosophism scrutinises many things, is not given to prayer: neither are Rossbach victories, Terray Finances, nor, say only 'sixty thousand Lettres de Cachet' (*which is Maupeou's share*), persuasives towards that. O Henault! Prayers? From a France smitten (*by black-art*) with plague after plague, and lying now in shame and pain, with a Harlot's foot on its neck, what prayer can come? Those lank scarecrows, that prowl hunger-stricken through all highways and byways of French Existence, will they pray? The dull millions that, in the workshop or furrowfield, grind fore-done at the wheel of Labour, like haltered gin-horses, if blind so much the quieter? Or they that in the Bicetre Hospital, 'eight to a bed,' lie waiting their manumission? Dim are those heads of theirs, dull stagnant those hearts: to them the great Sovereign is known mainly as the great Reqrater of Bread. If they hear of his sickness, they will answer with a dull Tant pis pour lui; or

with the question, Will he die?

Yes, will he die? that is now, for all France, the grand question, and hope; whereby alone the King's sickness has still some interest.

## Chapter 2. Realised Ideals.

Such a changed France have we; and a changed Louis. Changed, truly; and further than thou yet seest!—To the eye of History many things, in that sick-room of Louis, are now visible, which to the Courtiers there present were invisible. For indeed it is well said, 'in every object there is inexhaustible meaning; the eye sees in it what the eye brings means of seeing.' To Newton and to Newton's Dog Diamond, what a different pair of Universes; while the painting on the optical retina of both was, most likely, the same! Let the Reader here, in this sick-room of Louis, endeavour to look with the mind too.

Time was when men could (*so to speak*) of a given man, by nourishing and decorating him with fit appliances, to the due pitch, make themselves a King, almost as the Bees do; and what was still more to the purpose, loyally obey him when made. The man so nourished and decorated, thenceforth named royal, does verily bear rule; and is said, and even thought, to be, for example, 'prosecuting conquests in Flanders,' when he lets himself like luggage be carried thither: and no light luggage; covering miles of road. For he has his unblushing Chateauroux, with her band-boxes and rouge-pots, at his side; so that, at every new station, a wooden gallery must be run up between their lodgings. He has not only his Maison-Bouche, and Valetaille without end, but his very Troop of Players, with their pasteboard coulisses, thunder-barrels, their kettles, fiddles, stage-wardrobes, portable larders (*and chaffering and quarrelling enough*); all mounted in wagons, tumbrils, second-hand chaises,—sufficient not to conquer Flanders, but the patience of the world. With such a flood of loud jingling appurtenances does he lumber along, prosecuting his conquests in Flanders; wonderful to behold. So nevertheless it was and had been: to some solitary thinker it might seem strange; but even to him inevitable, not unnatural.

For ours is a most fictile world; and man is the most fingent plastic of creatures. A world not fixable; not fathomable! An unfathomable Somewhat, which is Not we; which we can work with, and live amidst,—and model, miraculously in our miraculous Being, and name World.—But if the very Rocks and Rivers (*as Metaphysic teaches*) are, in strict language, made by those outward Senses of ours, how much more, by the Inward Sense, are all Phenomena of the spiritual kind: Dignities, Authorities, Holies, Unholies! Which inward sense, moreover is not permanent like the outward ones, but forever growing and changing. Does not the Black African take of Sticks and Old Clothes (*say, exported Monmouth-Street cast-clothes*) what will suffice, and of these, cunningly combining them, fabricate for himself an Eidolon (*Idol, or Thing Seen*), and name it Mumbo-Jumbo; which he can thenceforth pray to, with upturned awestruck eye, not without hope? The white European mocks; but ought rather to consider; and see whether he, at home, could not do the like a little more wisely.

So it was, we say, in those conquests of Flanders, thirty years ago: but so it no longer is. Alas, much more lies sick than poor Louis: not the French King only, but the French Kingship; this too, after long rough tear and wear, is breaking down. The world is all so changed; so much that seemed vigorous has sunk decrepit, so much that was not is beginning to be!—Borne over the Atlantic, to the closing ear of Louis, King by the Grace of God, what sounds are these; muffled ominous, new in our centuries? Boston Harbour is black with unexpected Tea: behold a Pennsylvanian Congress gather; and ere long, on Bunker Hill, DEMOCRACY announcing, in rifle-volleys death-winged, under her Star Banner, to

the tune of Yankee-doodle-doo, that she is born, and, whirlwind-like, will envelope the whole world!

Sovereigns die and Sovereignties: how all dies, and is for a Time only; is a 'Time-phantasm, yet reckons itself real!' The Merovingian Kings, slowly wending on their bullock-carts through the streets of Paris, with their long hair flowing, have all wended slowly on,—into Eternity. Charlemagne sleeps at Salzburg, with truncheon grounded; only Fable expecting that he will awaken. Charles the Hammer, Pepin Bow-legged, where now is their eye of menace, their voice of command? Rollo and his shaggy Northmen cover not the Seine with ships; but have sailed off on a longer voyage. The hair of Towhead (*Tete d'etoupes*) now needs no combing; Iron-cutter (*Taillefer*) cannot cut a cobweb; shrill Fredegonda, shrill Brunhilda have had out their hot life-scold, and lie silent, their hot life-frenzy cooled. Neither from that black Tower de Nesle descends now darkling the doomed gallant, in his sack, to the Seine waters; plunging into Night: for Dame de Nesle how cares not for this world's gallantry, heeds not this world's scandal; Dame de Nesle is herself gone into Night. They are all gone; sunk,—down, down, with the tumult they made; and the rolling and the trampling of ever new generations passes over them, and they hear it not any more forever.

And yet withal has there not been realised somewhat? Consider (*to go no further*) these strong Stone-edifices, and what they hold! Mud-Town of the Borderers (*Lutetia Parisiorum or Barisiorum*) has paved itself, has spread over all the Seine Islands, and far and wide on each bank, and become City of Paris, sometimes boasting to be 'Athens of Europe,' and even 'Capital of the Universe.' Stone towers frown aloft; long-lasting, grim with a thousand years. Cathedrals are there, and a Creed (*or memory of a Creed*) in them; Palaces, and a State and Law. Thou seest the Smoke-vapour; unextinguished Breath as of a thing living. Labour's thousand hammers ring on her anvils: also a more miraculous Labour works noiselessly, not with the Hand but with the Thought. How have cunning workmen in all crafts, with their cunning head and right-hand, tamed the Four Elements to be their ministers; yoking the winds to their Sea-chariot, making the very Stars their Nautical Timepiece;—and written and collected a Bibliotheque du Roi; among whose Books is the Hebrew Book! A wondrous race of creatures: these have been realised, and what of Skill is in these: call not the Past Time, with all its confused wretchednesses, a lost one.

Observe, however, that of man's whole terrestrial possessions and attainments, unspeakably the noblest are his Symbols, divine or divine-seeming; under which he marches and fights, with victorious assurance, in this life-battle: what we can call his Realised Ideals. Of which realised ideals, omitting the rest, consider only these two: his Church, or spiritual Guidance; his Kingship, or temporal one. The Church: what a word was there; richer than Golconda and the treasures of the world! In the heart of the remotest mountains rises the little Kirk; the Dead all slumbering round it, under their white memorial-stones, 'in hope of a happy resurrection:—dull wert thou, O Reader, if never in any hour (*say of moaning midnight, when such Kirk hung spectral in the sky, and Being was as if swallowed up of Darkness*) it spoke to thee—things unspeakable, that went into thy soul's soul. Strong was he that had a Church, what we can call a Church: he stood thereby, though 'in the centre of Immensities, in the conflux of Eternities,' yet manlike towards God and man; the vague shoreless Universe had become for him a firm city, and dwelling which he knew. Such virtue was in Belief; in these words, well spoken: I believe. Well might men prize their Credo, and raise stateliest Temples for it, and reverend Hierarchies, and give it the tithes of their substance; it was worth living for and dying for.

Neither was that an inconsiderable moment when wild armed men first raised their Strongest aloft on the buckler-throne, and with clanging armour and hearts, said solemnly: Be thou our Acknowledged Strongest! In such Acknowledged Strongest (*well named King, Kon-ning, Can-ning, or Man that was*

*Able*) what a Symbol shone now for them,—significant with the destinies of the world! A Symbol of true Guidance in return for loving Obedience; properly, if he knew it, the prime want of man. A Symbol which might be called sacred; for is there not, in reverence for what is better than we, an indestructible sacredness? On which ground, too, it was well said there lay in the Acknowledged Strongest a divine right; as surely there might in the Strongest, whether Acknowledged or not,—considering who made him strong. And so, in the midst of confusions and unutterable incongruities (*as all growth is confused*), did this of Royalty, with Loyalty environing it, spring up; and grow mysteriously, subduing and assimilating (*for a principle of Life was in it*); till it also had grown world-great, and was among the main Facts of our modern existence. Such a Fact, that Louis XIV., for example, could answer the expostulatory Magistrate with his "L'Etat c'est moi (*The State? I am the State*);" and be replied to by silence and abashed looks. So far had accident and forethought; had your Louis Elevenths, with the leaden Virgin in their hatband, and torture-wheels and conical oubliettes (*man-eating!*) under their feet; your Henri Fourths, with their prophesied social millennium, 'when every peasant should have his fowl in the pot;' and on the whole, the fertility of this most fertile Existence (*named of Good and Evil*),—brought it, in the matter of the Kingship. Wondrous! Concerning which may we not again say, that in the huge mass of Evil, as it rolls and swells, there is ever some Good working imprisoned; working towards deliverance and triumph?

How such Ideals do realise themselves; and grow, wondrously, from amid the incongruous ever-fluctuating chaos of the Actual: this is what World-History, if it teach any thing, has to teach us, How they grow; and, after long stormy growth, bloom out mature, supreme; then quickly (*for the blossom is brief*) fall into decay; sorrowfully dwindle; and crumble down, or rush down, noisily or noiselessly disappearing. The blossom is so brief; as of some centennial Cactus-flower, which after a century of waiting shines out for hours! Thus from the day when rough Clovis, in the Champ de Mars, in sight of his whole army, had to cleave retributively the head of that rough Frank, with sudden battleaxe, and the fierce words, "It was thus thou clavest the vase" (*St. Remi's and mine*) "at Soissons," forward to Louis the Grand and his L'Etat c'est moi, we count some twelve hundred years: and now this the very next Louis is dying, and so much dying with him!—Nay, thus too, if Catholicism, with and against Feudalism (*but not against Nature and her bounty*), gave us English a Shakspeare and Era of Shakspeare, and so produced a blossom of Catholicism—it was not till Catholicism itself, so far as Law could abolish it, had been abolished here.

But of those decadent ages in which no Ideal either grows or blossoms? When Belief and Loyalty have passed away, and only the cant and false echo of them remains; and all Solemnity has become Pageantry; and the Creed of persons in authority has become one of two things: an Imbecility or a Macchiavelism? Alas, of these ages World-History can take no notice; they have to become compressed more and more, and finally suppressed in the Annals of Mankind; blotted out as spurious,—which indeed they are. Hapless ages: wherein, if ever in any, it is an unhappiness to be born. To be born, and to learn only, by every tradition and example, that God's Universe is Belial's and a Lie; and 'the Supreme Quack' the hierarch of men! In which mournfulest faith, nevertheless, do we not see whole generations (*two, and sometimes even three successively*) live, what they call living; and vanish,—without chance of reappearance?

In such a decadent age, or one fast verging that way, had our poor Louis been born. Grant also that if the French Kingship had not, by course of Nature, long to live, he of all men was the man to accelerate Nature. The Blossom of French Royalty, cactus-like, has accordingly made an astonishing progress. In those Metz days, it was still standing with all its petals, though bedimmed by Orleans Regents and Roue Ministers and Cardinals; but now, in 1774, we behold it bald, and the virtue nigh gone out of it.

Disastrous indeed does it look with those same 'realised ideals,' one and all! The Church, which in its palmy season, seven hundred years ago, could make an Emperor wait barefoot, in penance-shift; three days, in the snow, has for centuries seen itself decaying; reduced even to forget old purposes and enmities, and join interest with the Kingship: on this younger strength it would fain stay its decrepitude; and these two will henceforth stand and fall together. Alas, the Sorbonne still sits there, in its old mansion; but mumbles only jargon of dotage, and no longer leads the consciences of men: not the Sorbonne; it is Encyclopedies, Philosophie, and who knows what nameless innumerable multitude of ready Writers, profane Singers, Romancers, Players, Disputators, and Pamphleteers, that now form the Spiritual Guidance of the world. The world's Practical Guidance too is lost, or has glided into the same miscellaneous hands. Who is it that the King (*Able-man, named also Roi, Rex, or Director*) now guides? His own huntsmen and prickers: when there is to be no hunt, it is well said, 'Le Roi ne fera rien (*To-day his Majesty will do nothing*). (*Memoires sur la Vie privee de Marie Antoinette, par Madame Campan* (Paris, 1826), i. 12). He lives and lingers there, because he is living there, and none has yet laid hands on him.

The nobles, in like manner, have nearly ceased either to guide or misguide; and are now, as their master is, little more than ornamental figures. It is long since they have done with butchering one another or their king: the Workers, protected, encouraged by Majesty, have ages ago built walled towns, and there ply their crafts; will permit no Robber Baron to 'live by the saddle,' but maintain a gallows to prevent it. Ever since that period of the Fronde, the Noble has changed his fighting sword into a court rapier, and now loyally attends his king as ministering satellite; divides the spoil, not now by violence and murder, but by soliciting and finesse. These men call themselves supports of the throne, singular gilt-pasteboard caryatides in that singular edifice! For the rest, their privileges every way are now much curtailed. That law authorizing a Seigneur, as he returned from hunting, to kill not more than two Serfs, and refresh his feet in their warm blood and bowels, has fallen into perfect desuetude,—and even into incredibility; for if Deputy Lapoule can believe in it, and call for the abrogation of it, so cannot we. (*Histoire de la Revolution Francaise, par Deux Amis de la Liberte* (Paris, 1793), ii. 212.) No Charolois, for these last fifty years, though never so fond of shooting, has been in use to bring down slaters and plumbers, and see them roll from their roofs; (*Lacretelle, Histoire de France pendant le 18me Siecle* (Paris, 1819) i. 271.) but contents himself with partridges and grouse. Close-viewed, their industry and function is that of dressing gracefully and eating sumptuously. As for their debauchery and depravity, it is perhaps unexampled since the era of Tiberius and Commodus. Nevertheless, one has still partly a feeling with the lady Marechale: "Depend upon it, Sir, God thinks twice before damning a man of that quality." (*Dulaure, vii. 261.*) These people, of old, surely had virtues, uses; or they could not have been there. Nay, one virtue they are still required to have (*for mortal man cannot live without a conscience*): the virtue of perfect readiness to fight duels.

Such are the shepherds of the people: and now how fares it with the flock? With the flock, as is inevitable, it fares ill, and ever worse. They are not tended, they are only regularly shorn. They are sent for, to do statute-labour, to pay statute-taxes; to fatten battle-fields (*named 'Bed of honour'*) with their bodies, in quarrels which are not theirs; their hand and toil is in every possession of man; but for themselves they have little or no possession. Untaught, uncomforted, unfed; to pine dully in thick obscurity, in squalid destitution and obstruction: this is the lot of the millions; people taillable et corveable a merci et misericorde. In Brittany they once rose in revolt at the first introduction of Pendulum Clocks; thinking it had something to do with the Gabelle. Paris requires to be cleared out periodically by the Police; and the horde of hunger-stricken vagabonds to be sent wandering again over space—for a time. 'During one such periodical clearance,' says Lacretelle, 'in May, 1750, the Police had presumed withal to carry off some reputable people's children, in the hope of extorting

ransoms for them. The mothers fill the public places with cries of despair; crowds gather, get excited: so many women in distraction run about exaggerating the alarm: an absurd and horrid fable arises among the people; it is said that the doctors have ordered a Great Person to take baths of young human blood for the restoration of his own, all spoiled by debaucheries. Some of the rioters,' adds Lacretelle, quite coolly, 'were hanged on the following days:' the Police went on. (*Lacretelle, iii. 175.*) O ye poor naked wretches! and this, then, is your inarticulate cry to Heaven, as of a dumb tortured animal, crying from uttermost depths of pain and debasement? Do these azure skies, like a dead crystalline vault, only reverberate the echo of it on you? Respond to it only by 'hanging on the following days?'—Not so: not forever! Ye are heard in Heaven. And the answer too will come,—in a horror of great darkness, and shakings of the world, and a cup of trembling which all the nations shall drink.

Remark, meanwhile, how from amid the wrecks and dust of this universal Decay new Powers are fashioning themselves, adapted to the new time and its destinies. Besides the old Noblesse, originally of Fighters, there is a new recognised Noblesse of Lawyers; whose gala-day and proud battle-day even now is. An unrecognised Noblesse of Commerce; powerful enough, with money in its pocket. Lastly, powerfulest of all, least recognised of all, a Noblesse of Literature; without steel on their thigh, without gold in their purse, but with the 'grand thaumaturgic faculty of Thought' in their head. French Philosophism has arisen; in which little word how much do we include! Here, indeed, lies properly the cardinal symptom of the whole wide-spread malady. Faith is gone out; Scepticism is come in. Evil abounds and accumulates: no man has Faith to withstand it, to amend it, to begin by amending himself; it must even go on accumulating. While hollow langour and vacuity is the lot of the Upper, and want and stagnation of the Lower, and universal misery is very certain, what other thing is certain? That a Lie cannot be believed! Philosophism knows only this: her other belief is mainly that, in spiritual supersensual matters no Belief is possible. Unhappy! Nay, as yet the Contradiction of a Lie is some kind of Belief; but the Lie with its Contradiction once swept away, what will remain? The five unsatiated Senses will remain, the sixth insatiable Sense (*of vanity*); the whole daemonic nature of man will remain,—hurled forth to rage blindly without rule or rein; savage itself, yet with all the tools and weapons of civilisation; a spectacle new in History.

In such a France, as in a Powder-tower, where fire unquenched and now unquenchable is smoking and smouldering all round, has Louis XV. lain down to die. With Pompadourism and Dubarryism, his Fleur-de-lis has been shamefully struck down in all lands and on all seas; Poverty invades even the Royal Exchequer, and Tax-farming can squeeze out no more; there is a quarrel of twenty-five years' standing with the Parlement; everywhere Want, Dishonesty, Unbelief, and hotbrained Sciolists for state-physicians: it is a portentous hour.

Such things can the eye of History see in this sick-room of King Louis, which were invisible to the Courtiers there. It is twenty years, gone Christmas-day, since Lord Chesterfield, summing up what he had noted of this same France, wrote, and sent off by post, the following words, that have become memorable: 'In short, all the symptoms which I have ever met with in History, previous to great Changes and Revolutions in government, now exist and daily increase in France.' (*Chesterfield's Letters: December 25th, 1753.*)

## Chapter 3. Viaticum.

For the present, however, the grand question with the Governors of France is: Shall extreme unction, or other ghostly viaticum (*to Louis, not to France*), be administered?

It is a deep question. For, if administered, if so much as spoken of, must not, on the very threshold of the business, Witch Dubarry vanish; hardly to return should Louis even recover? With her vanishes Duke d'Aiguillon and Company, and all their Armida-Palace, as was said; Chaos swallows the whole again, and there is left nothing but a smell of brimstone. But then, on the other hand, what will the Dauphinists and Choiseulists say? Nay what may the royal martyr himself say, should he happen to get deadly worse, without getting delirious? For the present, he still kisses the Dubarry hand; so we, from the ante-room, can note: but afterwards? Doctors' bulletins may run as they are ordered, but it is 'confluent small-pox,'—of which, as is whispered too, the Gatekeepers's once so buxom Daughter lies ill: and Louis XV. is not a man to be trifled with in his viaticum. Was he not wont to catechise his very girls in the Parc-aux-cerfs, and pray with and for them, that they might preserve their—orthodoxy? (*Dulaure, viii. (217), Besenval, &c.*) A strange fact, not an unexampled one; for there is no animal so strange as man.

For the moment, indeed, it were all well, could Archbishop Beaumont but be prevailed upon—to wink with one eye! Alas, Beaumont would himself so fain do it: for, singular to tell, the Church too, and whole posthumous hope of Jesuitism, now hangs by the apron of this same unmentionable woman. But then 'the force of public opinion'? Rigorous Christophe de Beaumont, who has spent his life in persecuting hysterical Jansenists and incredulous Non-confessors; or even their dead bodies, if no better might be,—how shall he now open Heaven's gate, and give Absolution with the corpus delicti still under his nose? Our Grand-Almoner Roche-Aymon, for his part, will not higgel with a royal sinner about turning of the key: but there are other Churchmen; there is a King's Confessor, foolish Abbe Moudon; and Fanaticism and Decency are not yet extinct. On the whole, what is to be done? The doors can be well watched; the Medical Bulletin adjusted; and much, as usual, be hoped for from time and chance.

The doors are well watched, no improper figure can enter. Indeed, few wish to enter; for the putrid infection reaches even to the Oeil-de-Boeuf; so that 'more than fifty fall sick, and ten die.' Mesdames the Princesses alone wait at the loathsome sick-bed; impelled by filial piety. The three Princesses, Graille, Chiffe, Coche (*Rag, Snip, Pig, as he was wont to name them*), are assiduous there; when all have fled. The fourth Princess Loque (*Dud*), as we guess, is already in the Nunnery, and can only give her orisons. Poor Graille and Sisterhood, they have never known a Father: such is the hard bargain Grandeur must make. Scarcely at the Debotter (*when Royalty took off its boots*) could they snatch up their 'enormous hoops, gird the long train round their waists, huddle on their black cloaks of taffeta up to the very chin;' and so, in fit appearance of full dress, 'every evening at six,' walk majestically in; receive their royal kiss on the brow; and then walk majestically out again, to embroidery, small-scandal, prayers, and vacancy. If Majesty came some morning, with coffee of its own making, and swallowed it with them hastily while the dogs were uncoupling for the hunt, it was received as a grace of Heaven. (*Campan, i. 11-36.*) Poor withered ancient women! in the wild tossings that yet await your fragile existence, before it be crushed and broken; as ye fly through hostile countries, over tempestuous seas, are almost taken by the Turks; and wholly, in the Sansculottic Earthquake, know not your right hand from your left, be this always an assured place in your remembrance: for the act was good and loving! To us also it is a little sunny spot, in that dismal howling waste, where we hardly find another.

Meanwhile, what shall an impartial prudent Courtier do? In these delicate circumstances, while not only death or life, but even sacrament or no sacrament, is a question, the skilfulest may falter. Few are so happy as the Duke d'Orleans and the Prince de Conde; who can themselves, with volatile salts, attend the King's ante-chamber; and, at the same time, send their brave sons (*Duke de Chartres*,

*Egalite that is to be; Duke de Bourbon, one day Conde too, and famous among Dotards*) to wait upon the Dauphin. With another few, it is a resolution taken; *jacta est alea*. Old Richelieu,—when Beaumont, driven by public opinion, is at last for entering the sick-room,—will twitch him by the rochet, into a recess; and there, with his old dissipated mastiff-face, and the oiliest vehemence, be seen pleading (*and even, as we judge by Beaumont's change of colour, prevailing*) 'that the King be not killed by a proposition in Divinity.' Duke de Fronsac, son of Richelieu, can follow his father: when the Cure of Versailles whimpers something about sacraments, he will threaten to 'throw him out of the window if he mention such a thing.'

Happy these, we may say; but to the rest that hover between two opinions, is it not trying? He who would understand to what a pass Catholicism, and much else, had now got; and how the symbols of the Holiest have become gambling-dice of the Basest,—must read the narrative of those things by Besenval, and Soulavie, and the other Court Newsmen of the time. He will see the Versailles Galaxy all scattered asunder, grouped into new ever-shifting Constellations. There are nods and sagacious glances; go-betweens, silk dowagers mysteriously gliding, with smiles for this constellation, sighs for that: there is tremor, of hope or desperation, in several hearts. There is the pale grinning Shadow of Death, ceremoniously ushered along by another grinning Shadow, of Etiquette: at intervals the growl of Chapel Organs, like prayer by machinery; proclaiming, as in a kind of horrid diabolic horse-laughter, Vanity of vanities, all is Vanity!

## Chapter 4. Louis the Unforgotten.

Poor Louis! With these it is a hollow phantasmagory, where like mimes they mope and mowl, and utter false sounds for hire; but with thee it is frightful earnest.

Frightful to all men is Death; from of old named King of Terrors. Our little compact home of an Existence, where we dwelt complaining, yet as in a home, is passing, in dark agonies, into an Unknown of Separation, Foreignness, unconditioned Possibility. The Heathen Emperor asks of his soul: Into what places art thou now departing? The Catholic King must answer: To the Judgment-bar of the Most High God! Yes, it is a summing-up of Life; a final settling, and giving-in the 'account of the deeds done in the body:' they are done now; and lie there unalterable, and do bear their fruits, long as Eternity shall last.

Louis XV. had always the kingliest abhorrence of Death. Unlike that praying Duke of Orleans, Egalite's grandfather,—for indeed several of them had a touch of madness,—who honestly believed that there was no Death! He, if the Court Newsmen can be believed, started up once on a time, glowing with sulphurous contempt and indignation on his poor Secretary, who had stumbled on the words, *feu roi d'Espagne* (*the late King of Spain*): "Feu roi, Monsieur?"—"Monseigneur," hastily answered the trembling but adroit man of business, "*c'est une titre qu'ils prennent* (*'tis a title they take*)." (*Besenval, i. 199.*) Louis, we say, was not so happy; but he did what he could. He would not suffer Death to be spoken of; avoided the sight of churchyards, funereal monuments, and whatsoever could bring it to mind. It is the resource of the Ostrich; who, hard hunted, sticks his foolish head in the ground, and would fain forget that his foolish unseeing body is not unseen too. Or sometimes, with a spasmodic antagonism, significant of the same thing, and of more, he would go; or stopping his court carriages, would send into churchyards, and ask 'how many new graves there were today,' though it gave his poor Pompadour the disagreeablest qualms. We can figure the thought of Louis that day, when, all royally caparisoned for hunting, he met, at some sudden turning in the Wood of Senart, a ragged Peasant with

a coffin: "For whom?"—It was for a poor brother slave, whom Majesty had sometimes noticed slaving in those quarters. "What did he die of?"—"Of hunger:"—the King gave his steed the spur. (*Campan, iii. 39.*)

But figure his thought, when Death is now clutching at his own heart-strings, unlooked for, inexorable! Yes, poor Louis, Death has found thee. No palace walls or life-guards, gorgeous tapestries or gilt buckram of stiffest ceremonial could keep him out; but he is here, here at thy very life-breath, and will extinguish it. Thou, whose whole existence hitherto was a chimera and scenic show, at length becomest a reality: sumptuous Versailles bursts asunder, like a dream, into void Immensity; Time is done, and all the scaffolding of Time falls wrecked with hideous clangour round thy soul: the pale Kingdoms yawn open; there must thou enter, naked, all unking'd, and await what is appointed thee! Unhappy man, there as thou turnest, in dull agony, on thy bed of weariness, what a thought is thine! Purgatory and Hell-fire, now all-too possible, in the prospect; in the retrospect,—alas, what thing didst thou do that were not better undone; what mortal didst thou generously help; what sorrow hadst thou mercy on? Do the 'five hundred thousand' ghosts, who sank shamefully on so many battle-fields from Rossbach to Quebec, that thy Harlot might take revenge for an epigram,—crowd round thee in this hour? Thy foul Harem; the curses of mothers, the tears and infamy of daughters? Miserable man! thou 'hast done evil as thou couldst:' thy whole existence seems one hideous abortion and mistake of Nature; the use and meaning of thee not yet known. Wert thou a fabulous Griffin, devouring the works of men; daily dragging virgins to thy cave;—clad also in scales that no spear would pierce: no spear but Death's? A Griffin not fabulous but real! Frightful, O Louis, seem these moments for thee.—We will pry no further into the horrors of a sinner's death-bed.

And yet let no meanest man lay flattering unction to his soul. Louis was a Ruler; but art not thou also one? His wide France, look at it from the Fixed Stars (*themselves not yet Infinitude*), is no wider than thy narrow brickfield, where thou too didst faithfully, or didst unfaithfully. Man, 'Symbol of Eternity imprisoned into 'Time!' it is not thy works, which are all mortal, infinitely little, and the greatest no greater than the least, but only the Spirit thou workest in, that can have worth or continuance.

But reflect, in any case, what a life-problem this of poor Louis, when he rose as Bien-Aime from that Metz sick-bed, really was! What son of Adam could have swayed such incoherences into coherence? Could he? Blindest Fortune alone has cast him on the top of it: he swims there; can as little sway it as the drift-log sways the wind-tossed moon-stirred Atlantic. "What have I done to be so loved?" he said then. He may say now: What have I done to be so hated? Thou hast done nothing, poor Louis! Thy fault is properly even this, that thou didst nothing. What could poor Louis do? Abdicate, and wash his hands of it,—in favour of the first that would accept! Other clear wisdom there was none for him. As it was, he stood gazing dubiously, the absurdest mortal extant (*a very Solecism Incarnate*), into the absurdest confused world;—wherein at lost nothing seemed so certain as that he, the incarnate Solecism, had five senses; that were Flying Tables (*Tables Volantes, which vanish through the floor, to come back reloaded*). and a Parc-aux-cerfs.

Whereby at least we have again this historical curiosity: a human being in an original position; swimming passively, as on some boundless 'Mother of Dead Dogs,' towards issues which he partly saw. For Louis had withal a kind of insight in him. So, when a new Minister of Marine, or what else it might be, came announcing his new era, the Scarlet-woman would hear from the lips of Majesty at supper: "He laid out his ware like another; promised the beautifulest things in the world; not a thing of which will come: he does not know this region; he will see." Or again: "'Tis the twentieth time I hear all that; France will never get a Navy, I believe." How touching also was this: "If I were Lieutenant of

Police, I would prohibit those Paris cabriolets." (*Journal de Madame de Hausset, p. 293, &c.*)

Doomed mortal;—for is it not a doom to be Solecism incarnate! A new Roi Faineant, King Donothing; but with the strangest new Mayor of the Palace: no bow-legged Pepin now, but that same cloud-capt, fire-breathing Spectre of DEMOCRACY; incalculable, which is enveloping the world!—Was Louis no wickeder than this or the other private Donothing and Eatall; such as we often enough see, under the name of Man, and even Man of Pleasure, cumbering God's diligent Creation, for a time? Say, wretcheder! His Life-solecism was seen and felt of a whole scandalised world; him endless Oblivion cannot engulf, and swallow to endless depths,—not yet for a generation or two.

However, be this as it will, we remark, not without interest, that 'on the evening of the 4th,' Dame Dubarry issues from the sick-room, with perceptible 'trouble in her visage.' It is the fourth evening of May, year of Grace 1774. Such a whispering in the Oeil-de-Boeuf! Is he dying then? What can be said is, that Dubarry seems making up her packages; she sails weeping through her gilt boudoirs, as if taking leave. D'Aiguillon and Company are near their last card; nevertheless they will not yet throw up the game. But as for the sacramental controversy, it is as good as settled without being mentioned; Louis can send for his Abbe Moudon in the course of next night, be confessed by him, some say for the space of 'seventeen minutes,' and demand the sacraments of his own accord.

Nay, already, in the afternoon, behold is not this your Sorceress Dubarry with the handkerchief at her eyes, mounting D'Aiguillon's chariot; rolling off in his Duchess's consolatory arms? She is gone; and her place knows her no more. Vanish, false Sorceress; into Space! Needless to hover at neighbouring Ruel; for thy day is done. Shut are the royal palace-gates for evermore; hardly in coming years shalt thou, under cloud of night, descend once, in black domino, like a black night-bird, and disturb the fair Antoinette's music-party in the Park: all Birds of Paradise flying from thee, and musical windpipes growing mute. (*Campan, i. 197.*) Thou unclean, yet unmalignant, not unpitiable thing! What a course was thine: from that first trucklebed (*in Joan of Arc's country*) where thy mother bore thee, with tears, to an unnamed father: forward, through lowest subterranean depths, and over highest sunlit heights, of Harlotdom and Rascaldom—to the guillotine-axe, which shears away thy vainly whimpering head! Rest there uncursed; only buried and abolished: what else befitted thee?

Louis, meanwhile, is in considerable impatience for his sacraments; sends more than once to the window, to see whether they are not coming. Be of comfort, Louis, what comfort thou canst: they are under way, those sacraments. Towards six in the morning, they arrive. Cardinal Grand-Almoner Roche-Aymon is here, in pontificals, with his pyxes and his tools; he approaches the royal pillow; elevates his wafer; mutters or seems to mutter somewhat;—and so (*as the Abbe Georgel, in words that stick to one, expresses it*) has Louis 'made the amende honorable to God;' so does your Jesuit construe it.—"Wa, Wa," as the wild Clotaire groaned out, when life was departing, "what great God is this that pulls down the strength of the strongest kings!" (*Gregorius Turonensis, Histor. lib. iv. cap. 21.*)

The amende honorable, what 'legal apology' you will, to God:—but not, if D'Aiguillon can help it, to man. Dubarry still hovers in his mansion at Ruel; and while there is life, there is hope. Grand-Almoner Roche-Aymon, accordingly (*for he seems to be in the secret*), has no sooner seen his pyxes and gear repacked, then he is stepping majestically forth again, as if the work were done! But King's Confessor Abbe Moudon starts forward; with anxious acidulent face, twitches him by the sleeve; whispers in his ear. Whereupon the poor Cardinal must turn round; and declare audibly; "That his Majesty repents of any subjects of scandal he may have given (*a pu donner*); and purposes, by the strength of Heaven

assisting him, to avoid the like—for the future!" Words listened to by Richelieu with mastiff-face, growing blacker; answered to, aloud, 'with an epithet,'—which Besenval will not repeat. Old Richelieu, conqueror of Minorca, companion of Flying-Table orgies, perforator of bedroom walls, (*Besenval, i. 159-172. Genlis; Duc de Levis, &c.*) is thy day also done?

Alas, the Chapel organs may keep going; the Shrine of Sainte Genevieve be let down, and pulled up again,—without effect. In the evening the whole Court, with Dauphin and Dauphiness, assist at the Chapel: priests are hoarse with chanting their 'Prayers of Forty Hours;' and the heaving bellows blow. Almost frightful! For the very heaven blackens; battering rain-torrents dash, with thunder; almost drowning the organ's voice: and electric fire-flashes make the very flambeaux on the altar pale. So that the most, as we are told, retired, when it was over, with hurried steps, 'in a state of meditation (*recueillement*),' and said little or nothing. (*Weber, Memoires concernant Marie-Antoinette* (London, 1809), *i. 22.*)

So it has lasted for the better half of a fortnight; the Dubarry gone almost a week. Besenval says, all the world was getting impatient *que cela finit*; that poor Louis would have done with it. It is now the 10th of May 1774. He will soon have done now.

This tenth May day falls into the loathsome sick-bed; but dull, unnoticed there: for they that look out of the windows are quite darkened; the cistern-wheel moves discordant on its axis; Life, like a spent steed, is panting towards the goal. In their remote apartments, Dauphin and Dauphiness stand road-ready; all grooms and equerries booted and spurred: waiting for some signal to escape the house of pestilence. (*One grudges to interfere with the beautiful theatrical 'candle,' which Madame Campan (i. 79) has lit on this occasion, and blown out at the moment of death. What candles might be lit or blown out, in so large an Establishment as that of Versailles, no man at such distance would like to affirm: at the same time, as it was two o'clock in a May Afternoon, and these royal Stables must have been some five or six hundred yards from the royal sick-room, the 'candle' does threaten to go out in spite of us. It remains burning indeed—in her fantasy; throwing light on much in those Memoires of hers.*) And, hark! across the Oeil-de-Boeuf, what sound is that; sound 'terrible and absolutely like thunder'? It is the rush of the whole Court, rushing as in wager, to salute the new Sovereigns: Hail to your Majesties! The Dauphin and Dauphiness are King and Queen! Over-powered with many emotions, they two fall on their knees together, and, with streaming tears, exclaim, "O God, guide us, protect us; we are too young to reign!"—Too young indeed.

Thus, in any case, 'with a sound absolutely like thunder,' has the Horologe of Time struck, and an old Era passed away. The Louis that was, lies forsaken, a mass of abhorred clay; abandoned 'to some poor persons, and priests of the Chapelle Ardente,'—who make haste to put him 'in two lead coffins, pouring in abundant spirits of wine.' The new Louis with his Court is rolling towards Choisy, through the summer afternoon: the royal tears still flow; but a word mispronounced by Monseigneur d'Artois sets them all laughing, and they weep no more. Light mortals, how ye walk your light life-minuet, over bottomless abysses, divided from you by a film!

For the rest, the proper authorities felt that no Funeral could be too unceremonious. Besenval himself thinks it was unceremonious enough. Two carriages containing two noblemen of the usher species, and a Versailles clerical person; some score of mounted pages, some fifty palfreniers; these, with torches, but not so much as in black, start from Versailles on the second evening with their leaden bier. At a high trot they start; and keep up that pace. For the jibes (*brocards*) of those Parisians, who stand

planted in two rows, all the way to St. Denis, and 'give vent to their pleasantry, the characteristic of the nation,' do not tempt one to slacken. Towards midnight the vaults of St. Denis receive their own; unwept by any eye of all these; if not by poor Loque his neglected Daughter's, whose Nunnery is hard by.

Him they crush down, and huddle under-ground, in this impatient way; him and his era of sin and tyranny and shame; for behold a New Era is come; the future all the brighter that the past was base.

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