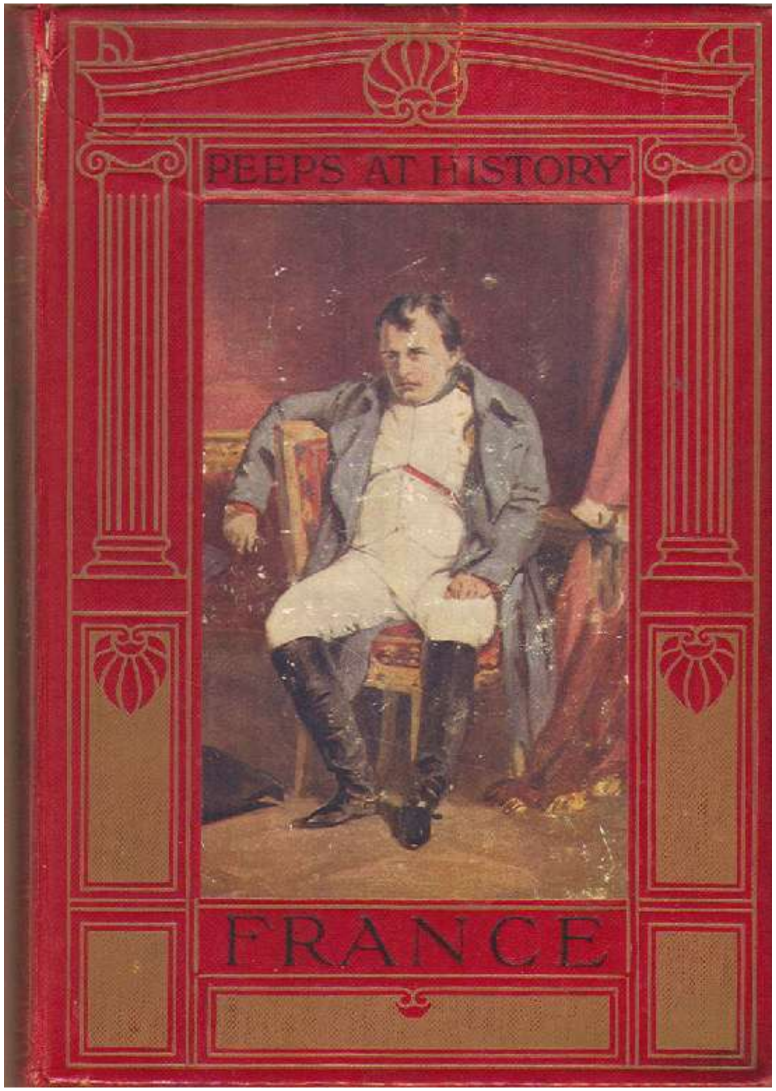

PEEPS AT HISTORY

FRANCE

BY

JOHN FINNEMORE

CONTAINING SIXTEEN FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS, EIGHT OF THEM IN COLOUR, AND FIVE LINE ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE TEXT

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

THE GAULS AND THE FRANKS

The great and famous land of France takes its name from a powerful tribe of Northmen, the Franks, who began to overrun the country about three hundred years after the birth of Christ. Before the day of the Franks the land was known as Gaul, and its people, the Gauls, were a Celtic race of the same blood as the ancient Britons. Like the Britons, they, too, were compelled to bow their necks to the yoke of Rome, and to submit to the great Roman General, Julius Caesar. It was from Gaul that Caesar sailed to attack Britain, and it was of Gaul and its conquest that he wrote in his famous work which is still read by all who study the Latin tongue.

The Gauls had lived in the land for many centuries before they were attacked by Rome. In early days they had been a very wild, fierce people, clad in skins, living by the chase, and divided into tribes which were always at war with each other.

As time went on they learned to grow crops, to work metals, to build houses, to wear clothes and ornaments, and to gather wealth. In religion they worshipped many gods who were supposed to dwell in the hearth-fire, in glades, rocks, and rivers. Their priests were called Druids, and had great authority, not only in religious matters, but in the affairs of everyday life. The Druids were the priests, the judges, the doctors, and the poets of the race. Few dared dispute the decree of the Druids. One who did so was at once cut off from his fellow-tribesmen. The Druids ordered that no one should help him or befriend him in any way, not even speak to him. This terrible punishment soon broke down the disobedience of the most stubborn.

The Gauls were men of great size, with long, yellow hair, and fierce blue eyes and powerful limbs. In battle they were famous for the fury of their onset, but, if once beaten back, they rarely made a second assault with equal power. A Roman soldier who fought against them says; "All the Gauls are of very high stature. They are white, golden-haired, terrible in the fierceness of their eyes, greedy of quarrels, bragging, and insolent. A band of strangers could not resist one of them in a brawl, assisted by his strong, blue-eyed wife, especially when she begins—gnashing her teeth, her neck swollen, brandishing her vast and snowy arms, and kicking with her heels at the same time—to deliver her fisticuffs, like bolts from the twisted strings of a catapult. The voices of many are threatening and formidable. They are quick to anger, but quickly appeased. All are clean in their persons; nor among them is ever seen any man or woman, as elsewhere, squalid in ragged garments. At all ages they are apt for military service. The old man goes forth to the fight with equal strength of breast, with limbs as hardened by cold and constant labour, and as careless of all dangers, as the young. Not one of them—as in Italy is often the case—was ever known to cut off his thumbs to avoid becoming a soldier."

A GALLIC VILLAGE

For three hundred years the Gauls lived under Roman rule, and during this time they made many changes in their manners, their dress, their speech, and their dwellings. They gave up their old wild ways of life, and learned much from their new masters. They adopted the Roman dress and the Roman speech; they built fine houses, made good roads, set up schools and colleges, and advanced a long way in many peaceful pursuits. They gave up the worship of their old heathen gods and became Christians, and each large city had its Bishop, and its temples were changed to churches.

But as time went on a great danger threatened Gaul from the North. Great hordes of savage warriors swept from the vast forests of Germany, and came into Gaul to plunder the land and destroy the people. These fierce tribes did not fear the Roman legions, for the power of Rome was fast dying, and the Gauls had to depend upon themselves to beat off these terrible enemies.

It was about A.D. 300 when these Northmen marched from their fastnesses beyond the Rhine, and began to assail Gaul in search of booty. There were many tribes of them, bearing many names, but all were Teutons, and all had, in a large degree, the same mode of life, the same customs, and the same religion. They were men of the woods and the fields, not lovers of towns—hardy, bold, fierce, and still holding to an ancient pagan faith. They loved battle, and their favourite gods and heroes were all famous for great deeds of prowess.

Their chief deity was Odin, the God of War. Next to Odin came Thor, the God of the Air, who launched the thunder, and whose darts were the flashes of lightning. Their heaven was Valhalla, and to this place none was admitted save the valiant warrior who fell in battle. He who died a peaceful death went to Niflheim, the place of punishment. The maidens who attended upon the God of War were held in high honour by the wild Northmen. These were the famous Valkyrie, whose duty it was to ride the air when battle threatened, and urge the warriors to fiercer and yet fiercer deeds of valour and bloodshed. When the fight was over captives were often offered up in sacrifice, and human blood stained the altars of Odin.

The Gauls fought hard to resist the onset of these terrible warriors, but they fought in vain. Little by little their land fell into the hands of the Northmen, and the country was seized by three great tribes—the Franks, the Burgundians, and the Goths—and from the Franks came the name of France. The Franks settled in the north-eastern part of Gaul; the Burgundians in the south-east; the Goths in the south-west, whence they spread into Spain.

The first great Frankish King was Clovis, who reigned from 481 to 511. He destroyed the last remains of Roman power in Gaul, and beat the Burgundians and the Goths, so that he came to be looked upon as the true founder of the Frankish kingdom.

When Clovis came to the throne he was a heathen, but his wife was a Christian, and strove her utmost to convert her husband. But Clovis still clung to the old faith, until there came a day of fierce battle with a German army, and the Franks were being beaten and driven back. Then Clovis called out to the God of the Christians for help, and vowed that he, too, would become a Christian if victory were given to his men. And in a wonderful way the tide of battle suddenly turned, and the Franks won a great victory. Clovis called his followers together and told them that he meant to become a Christian. They agreed to follow him, and all were baptized at Rheims. For this reason Rheims was looked upon as a sacred city for many centuries, and the Kings of France were crowned there and anointed with oil at a magnificent ceremony called the "Consecration of the King."

Although Clovis became a Christian, he remained at heart the wild, fierce Frank he had always been. He was a man who knew not pity, and he slew both friend and enemy, relation and stranger, if he thought that these stood in his way or were likely to do him harm. In the latter years of his reign he took up his abode at a spot which was to see the rise of one of the most famous cities of the world. It was a little walled town on an island in the River Seine. The Romans had built the town, and, as it lay in the midst of swamps, marshes, and mud-flats, they called it Lutetia, the City of Mud. Then it was inhabited by a tribe called the Parisii, and from them the little town took the name of Paris, and by that name it is known to this day.

When Clovis went to Paris it was already a Christian town. It had been converted by a missionary from Rome named Dionysius, who became the first Bishop of Paris, and was known as Denis. But times of persecution broke out, and the Bishop was seized and beheaded upon a hill about six miles from the city. Above the grave of the martyr a splendid church was built in later days, and consecrated in the name of St. Denis. The church became the burial-place of the Kings of France, and the name of the martyr was the rallying cry of French chivalry. "Montjoye, Saint Denis!" was the shout which rang from French lips over many a battle-field, and no war-cry has ever been more famous.

CHAPTER II

THE MEROVINGS AND CARLOVINGS

When Clovis died his kingdom was divided among his four sons. This was a custom of the Franks, and a very bad one, too; for it led to endless strife among a number of small rulers, each of whom wished to enlarge his kingdom at the expense of his neighbours. The family to which Clovis belonged was known as that of the "Merovings," or "mighty warriors," and the Kings of his line are called the Merovingian Kings. There were twenty of them in all, and their history is that of men who grew weaker and more worthless as the Crown was handed from father to son. They were selfish, idle men, who never attempted to perform any kingly duty, but enjoyed kingly state in slothful ease, and are known in history as the "Puppet Kings." This title was well deserved, for, while the Merovings were Kings in name, the power of ruler was exercised by officers of the Court, who were known as Mayors of the Palace. As a rule, the Mayor of the Palace was an able and powerful man, who not only managed the affairs of the kingdom, but managed the King himself as well.

Early in the eighth century the Mayor of the Palace was a very brave and wise man, who was called Charles Martel—that is, Charles the Hammer. He won this name because he was strong and dauntless, and struck his enemies most dreadful blows. Such a man was badly needed in the land of the Franks, for terrible foes were approaching its borders. These foes were the Saracens—hosts of fierce warriors from Arabia, and followers of Mahomet. They were marching from country to country, aiming at conquest and the spread of their religion. They invaded Africa, crossed into Spain, pushed northward over the Pyrenees, and entered the territory of the Franks. Everywhere they burned, plundered, and destroyed, and slew those who would not adopt their faith; their object was to sweep through Europe and conquer it for Mahomet.

The Mayor of the Palace met them at Tours, and there was fought one of the greatest battles in the world's history, when the Frankish hosts and the hordes of fiery Saracens strove together for mastery. Charles won, and Europe was saved. Vast numbers of the Moslems were slain, and the rest were driven out of France.

Charles the Hammer was followed in his office by his son Pepin, but the Franks were now tired of their Puppet Kings, and wanted a real leader and ruler. The line of the Merovings was set aside, and in 752 Pepin was crowned King of the Franks, and both title and power were given to a strong man. Pepin ruled wisely and well, but he was followed by a son so great and powerful that Pepin is remembered to this day more because of his son than for anything he did himself.

This son was the mighty Charlemagne, Charles the Great, the most famous monarch that France has ever known, and one of the greatest rulers the world has seen. Charlemagne came to the throne in 768, and at once made his power felt in Europe. He won so many lands by the sword that his kingdom became very large, and he ruled over a great part of Western Europe—over France, a large part of Germany and Italy, and the North of Spain. He received from the Pope of Rome the proud title of Emperor of the West.

The Saracens were still deadly foes, and were never tired of marching from Spain to assail the Christian Franks. Charlemagne attacked the Moslems and drove them across the Pyrenees, and tore the northern part of Spain from their grip. The right hand of Charlemagne in dealing with the fierce Saracens was his nephew Roland, a brave and noble knight, who was never happier than when fighting for the poor and feeble who needed his help. In many a battle had he overthrown the Moslem foe, and the latter feared and hated him very much.

But one day, as Roland and a few followers were passing through a deep, narrow valley, called the Valley of Roncevaux, they were trapped in it by a horde of Saracens who held the heights above. The Moslems hurled rocks and trees down in order to crush the little band of Christians, and soon none save Roland was left alive. Then he seized the horn which hung about his neck, and blew a tremendous blast to summon help. The Saracens knew the ringing note for the call of Roland, and it filled them with such fear that they fled in all directions. But as they fled they hurled a last avalanche of rocks and stones into the valley, and Roland fell, crushed to death.

STATUE OF CHARLEMAGNE

Charlemagne was a great warrior; he was a still greater ruler. When he had made conquest of a district, he treated its people kindly, saw that order was kept, introduced laws, and did his best for the welfare of his new subjects. Many of his laws were wise and good, and, in forms suited to modern times, they exist in France to this day. He had a deep respect for learning, and set up many schools. There was a school at his own palace, and the head of it was an English monk named Alcuin, one of the most learned men of the day. Charlemagne often visited this school, and one day he heard that some of the boys, sons of great nobles, were very idle and careless. He spoke very sharply to them. "You think," said he, "that because your fathers are rich men that there is no need to attend to your lessons, and that you need only amuse yourselves. Let me tell you that you will never receive honours and favours from me if you behave in such a way. You will get no good from Charlemagne till you have shown yourselves deserving of it."

This great King died in 814, and was laid in a splendid tomb at Aix-la-Chapelle.

He was followed by a line of Carlovingian Kings: the Carlovings, who took their name from their founder—Charlemagne, or Carl the Great. Among the Carlovings there were some able rulers, while some were weak and worthless, but never one who could wield the sceptre of Charlemagne. In time his wide dominions were broken up and shared among many Princes, and the power of the Carlovings grew less and less. The line of Charlemagne ruled from 814 to 987, and during the early part of this period the Normans (the Northmen) made good their footing in the land.

After the death of Charlemagne there was terrible confusion and misery in the land of France. One Prince fought with another, there was continual bloodshed and strife, and the unhappy people suffered worst of all. It was useless to sow crops, for the fields were trampled by war-horses, and the barns were plundered by hungry soldiery. Famine stalked through the land, and was followed by pestilence. Towns and villages were destroyed by marauders, or set on fire by warring parties; and the Saracens rushed in from Spain, and swept across the country with fire and sword.

In the midst of these troubles there appeared on the northern coasts fleets of long warships, bearing the pagan Northmen of Norway and Denmark. These Normans sailed into the mouths of the rivers of the north, pushed up the broad streams, and landed on the banks to plunder towns, villages, and farmhouses. At first they came only in search of booty, but in time they seized the land and made their homes in it. Within seventy years after the death of Charlemagne, the Normans had taken a great part of the north of France for themselves.

When it was seen that it would be quite impossible to drive the Normans away, it was resolved to make friends with them. A Carlovingian King, Charles the Simple, offered terms of peace to the great Norman chief, Rolf or Rollo. If he and his people would become Christians and agree to accept Charles as their overlord, then Rolf should receive the daughter of Charles in marriage, and become the ruler of the province in which he dwelt. Rolf agreed, and thus became a vassal of King Charles, and the first Duke of Normandy.

As time went on the authority of the Carlovings grew steadily weaker. This was owing to the great power which lay in the hands of the nobles of the land. Each Baron ruled like a little king in his own district; he built for himself a great castle, where no enemy could easily reach him; he had a strong band of soldiers, who guarded him and assailed his enemies; he governed the farmers and peasants of the neighbourhood at his own will. Some of these lords were so powerful that they could offer defiance to the King himself, and when a number joined their forces they could bear him down easily.

Now, among these great Barons there was one who was called the Duke of France. He ruled over the district around Paris, and towards the end of the Carlovingian period, the Duke of France was the most powerful and important Baron in the country. Then, when the last Carloving died in 987, Hugh Capet, Duke of France, was chosen King, and the line of Charlemagne came to an end.

CHAPTER III

THE HOUSE OF CAPET

Under Hugh Capet, we begin to see the first shaping of the modern kingdom of France. He was King of France, true, but in his day France was but a small portion of the land we now know by that name. It was a mere province, set among other provinces which considered themselves to be of equal importance with France itself; these were the great fiefs of Anjou, Burgundy, Normandy, Aquitane, and many smaller ones.

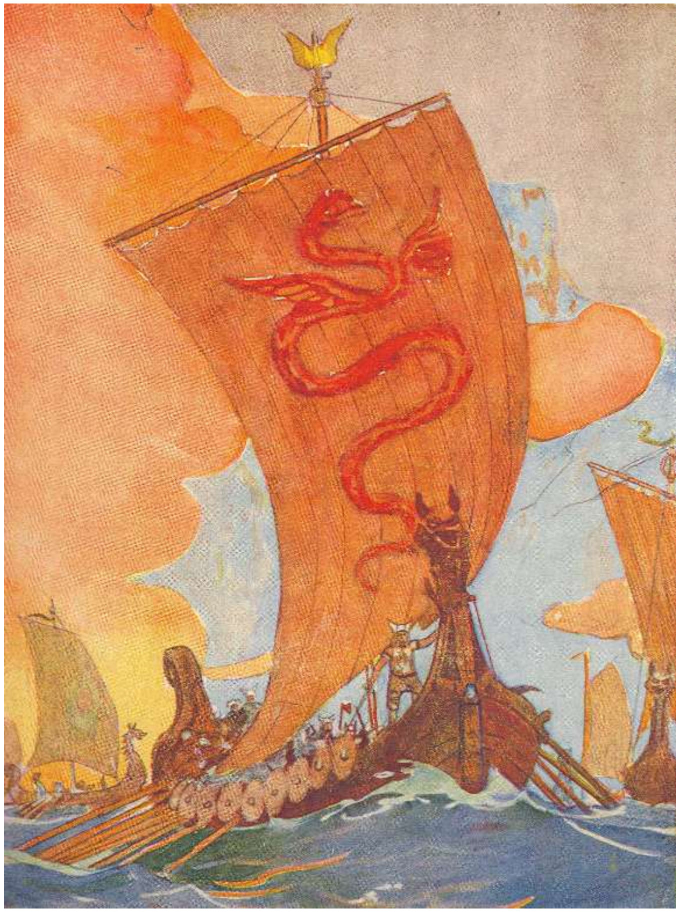
Each province was ruled by its own Duke, who handed down his authority in his own family. In name he was a vassal, a servant, of the King or France, but in fact he was often as strong as the King, and sometimes stronger, so that he paid very little respect to his master. For hundreds of years, then, the task of the Kings of France was this—to master these provinces, and to take the power of the vassal lords into their own hands. Little by little this was done, and as each great district passed under the actual rule of the King of France, so the name France spread until it covered the land as we know it at the present time.

The first of these great provinces to fall into the hands of the King of France was Normandy. In 1066 William, Duke of Normandy, became King of England. But, as Duke of Normandy, he still owed fealty to the French Crown. This formed a strong connection between England and France. The connection grew stronger when Henry II. came to the English throne in 1154, for Henry held wide lands in France—lands so broad that, together with Normandy, he ruled far more of France than the French King himself. But in the time of his son, the false and cowardly King John, all these lands were lost. John was accused of the murder of his nephew Arthur, and Philip of France called upon John, as a vassal of the Crown of France, to appear before him. John refused, and Philip made war on him, and took from him his French possessions.

This was the period when the great movements known as the Crusades were in progress. For a long time great numbers of pilgrims had set out from Europe to Palestine to visit the tomb of Christ at Jerusalem. In those unsettled days it was a long and dangerous journey; the pilgrim had to face perils by land and sea—perils of storms, of robbers, of heat and cold, hunger and thirst. But the greatest peril of all was to be faced when he gained the Holy City itself, for it was in the hands of the Saracens—men who were Moslems and bitter enemies of the Christian faith. The Saracens treated the Christian pilgrims so cruelly that armies were gathered in France, England, and other countries, to march into Palestine and drive out the Saracens. These movements of armed hosts were called Crusades, or Wars of the Cross, and there were many such expeditions over a space of more than two hundred years.

But in the reign of Philip II. there was not only a Crusade to Jerusalem, but a Crusade in France itself. In the southern part of the country was a district called Languedoc. At that time it did not belong to France; it was ruled by its own Counts, and was a rich and prosperous province, with fine towns filled with well-to-do citizens, and the fertile plains were dotted with pleasant and thriving villages. The chief city was Toulouse, and this name was sometimes given to the province as well.

Now the people of Languedoc became very dissatisfied with the manner in which their priests conducted the religious services. They also saw that the lives of many of these men were not such as they should be. Nor did they agree with all that was taught by order of the Pope. In the end a movement sprang up in favour of reforming the Church, and it began at a town called Albi. The reformers were known as Albigenses. The Pope became very angry with these men who had broken away from his authority, and ordered their ruler, Count Raymond, to force them to obey the Church of Rome. But Raymond was not willing to do this. He knew that the Albigenses were quiet, honest people, of upright lives, who wished to follow their own faith and do no harm to anyone.



THE COMING OF THE NORTHMEN

Then the Pope called for a Crusade against the Albigenses. He declared it would be as pious an act as to march against the Saracens. Soon a large army had gathered to attack the "heretics," as the Pope called all those who did not agree with him and follow him. It was easy to collect soldiers to attack Languedoc, for it was known that the province was wealthy and prosperous, and there would be no lack of rich booty.

But the Albigenses fought well, and were not easily overcome. Army after army was sent against them, and in these fierce and cruel wars the beautiful and fertile country was laid waste—the towns and villages became heaps of fire-blackened ruins; the fields lay naked and barren; the people were driven away or put to death. The fighting was of the most savage order: the fierce soldiery of the Pope slew all who fell into their hands, admitting none to mercy. At one desperate encounter the Pope's legate was present; he was a great Churchman, who was there on behalf of the Pope. Word was brought to him that many Catholics were mingled with the heretics whom his men were murdering. "Kill them all," said the legate; "God will know His own."

This terrible persecution began in 1208, and when it closed in 1229 Languedoc was little better than a desert. In the end the territory fell to the Crown of France, for the daughter of the Count of Toulouse married the brother of the King of France, and so a second province passed under French authority.

By this time Philip II. was dead, and his grandson, Louis IX., was on the throne. Louis IX. was so good, so wise, and so gentle, that he won the name of "St. Louis," and for many centuries his memory was held in deep respect among his people. Louis IX. had great regard for law and order, and any who wished to make complaint and seek redress were admitted at once to his presence. He used to sit beneath the shade of a great spreading oak in a forest near Paris, and here he was sought by rich and poor, and he listened to all, and decided every case with the greatest care.

He put down the practice of trial by combat. Hitherto, if two men had a dispute, they took sword and shield, or lance and war-horse, and fought the matter out, and the winner was supposed to have right on his side. But Louis saw that the man in the wrong might easily win if he happened to be the better warrior, and he put aside this foolish plan, and saw that each suit was decided according to the law.

When Louis had been twenty years on the throne, bad news came from the Holy Land. A great army of fierce heathen marauders marched from Northern Asia into Palestine, and seized Jerusalem. These were the Tartars, wild and terrible people, who destroyed all before them as they marched. Now Louis was a devoted son of the Church, and he resolved to go on Crusade and fight against the enemies of his faith. He and his wife and two of his brothers set sail for the East, and landed in Egypt, where at first he won some battles against the Saracens. But the latter proved terrible enemies, and caused great loss to the French army by attacking the camp and flinging into it great masses of Greek fire. This was flaming bitumen hurled from machines, so that it flew through the air like huge balls of fire, setting ablaze the tents and stores, and burning numbers of men. Next many of the Crusaders fell ill, owing to the heat and the badness of the food and water, and soon the army of Louis was so weak that it could not withstand a fierce assault of the enemy, and Louis and his men were made captives by the Saracens.

The King was set free upon payment of a great ransom, but he did not return to France. He was still anxious to strike another blow for the Christian faith, and he stayed another four years in Syria, fortifying and strengthening such towns as were in Christian hands. At last he received news that his mother, the good Queen Blanche, was dead. In her strong and wise hands he had left the government of France, but now he came back to rule the land once more.

For sixteen years he did his duty faithfully, but in his heart he longed to take the Cross again, and go to fight with the infidels. So in I270 he sailed to Africa, and landed at Tunis. Here his army suffered very much from heat, thirst, and the constant assaults of the Moors of Barbary. Pestilence broke out in the camp, and St. Louis fell before it. He died there, and his death marks the close of the last Crusade. His body was carried back to Paris, and laid in the famous old church of St. Denis, amid the sorrow of his people.

CHAPTER IV

THE HOUSE OF CAPET *(CONTINUED)*

St. Louis was followed on the throne by his son, Philip the Bold. Philip the Bold was not as good a man as his father. He was idle and pleasure-loving, and allowed himself to fall into the hands of favourites. His reign is remembered for the terrible massacre of French people in the island of Sicily. Philip's uncle, Charles of Anjou, had become the ruler of Sicily, but he ruled so badly that his fiery subjects hated him bitterly, and because of him they hated the many thousands of French people living in their midst. So the Sicilians resolved to sweep every Frenchman out of the island.

A secret plot was formed, and everything was ready for an attack on the French, when the matter was brought suddenly to a head. One evening, when the bells of Palermo were ringing to Vespers to evening prayers—a quarrel arose between a Frenchman and a Sicilian. With one accord the people flew to arms, and murdered every French man, woman, and child in the city. The example was followed in other cities and villages, and scarce a Frenchman was left alive throughout the whole of Sicily. This dreadful slaughter is remembered as "The Sicilian Vespers," because it commenced at eventide, when the sweet bells were ringing to Vesper prayers.

After Philip the Bold came Philip the Handsome, but he was only handsome in his looks, and not at all in his ways. He was a cold, crafty, money-loving King, whose chief purpose was to increase his power and his wealth. The time had now come when the personal power of the King of France began to grow steadily. This growth had started under St. Louis, and it had come about easily under that good King, because he was so well beloved and used his power to such good ends, that his subjects were glad to see him gain authority. One great reason for the growth of kingly power was that the power of the great Barons was failing and growing less. The time when these feudal lords ruled their estates like little kings was passing away, and they could no longer join together and overawe their King. The King was now really their overlord, and his army was the chief in the land, and gave him mastery over all.

THE ROMAN ARCH AT ORANGE, IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE. THIS SHOWS ONE OF THE BEAUTIFUL BUILDINGS RAISED BY THE ROMANS WHEN THEY WERE MASTERS OF GAUL.

By the gain of the French possessions of the English Kings and the province of Toulouse, France had greatly extended her borders. She now touched the Channel, the Atlantic, and the Mediterranean, and the French King was constantly on the watch to interfere in the affairs of the great provinces not yet in his hands, in order to seize them if an opportunity should come.

Upon one neighbouring province Philip made an attack, and tried to seize it, but here he burned his fingers. This country was Flanders, and at first Philip made good headway, for he took the Count of Flanders prisoner and set a Frenchman in his place. Up rose the Flemings like one man, and in 1302 there was a battle at Courtrai, in Flanders, where the French had a most terrible beating. Four hundred golden spurs were found upon the battle-field, showing how great a number of the French nobles and knights had fallen at the hands of the tradesmen and citizens who filled the Flemish ranks. In 1304 Philip made peace with them, and the brave Flemings recovered their independence.

Philip's love of money caused him to cast greedy eyes on the wealth of the Templars. The Templars were an Order of religious knights, of Crusaders, who wore a red cross upon the left shoulder to show their devotion to the Christian faith. The founders of this Order were so poor that they adopted, as a device to show their poverty, a picture of two knights riding on one horse, and they called themselves "Poor soldiers of the Holy Cross." But as time went on the traditions of poverty were cast aside, and the Templars grew into a very powerful and wealthy body. Not only did they bring home vast booty from the East, but many fair estates and great sums of money had been left to them by rich and pious people, who thought they were thus aiding in the defense of Christendom.

Philip dared not attack them openly, for these famous warriors would have easily put to flight his best soldiers. So he laid a plot against them, and on a certain day, at a certain hour, every Templar was seized, cast into prison, and loaded with chains. Then the prisoners were tortured in order to make them confess that they had been guilty of many evil deeds, and the tortures were so terrible that many were ready to confess anything in order to escape from the dreadful pain they were forced to endure. Upon these confessions all their wealth was taken from them by Philip, and many were put to death. The head of them all, the Grand Master of the Order, was burned to death in company with one of his chief officers.

Philip's reign is also marked by the calling together of the States-General, the Parliament of France. The people of France were looked upon as belonging to three Estates. The clergy formed the First Estate, the nobles the Second Estate, the townspeople or burghers the Third Estate. Members were chosen by each Estate to represent them at the meeting of the States-General, and these members were called Deputies. The King asked the States-General for aid or money; the States-General asked for new laws, or made complaints as to matters that had gone wrong in the affairs of the country. All this sounds very much like our early English Parliaments, but we must observe one most important difference. In England, as a rule, nobles and commons stood shoulder to shoulder against a bad Sovereign; in France they were enemies, and divided. Thus the King could play one Estate off against another, and their quarrels gave him much greater strength.

When Philip the Handsome died in 1314, he left three sons, Louis, Philip, and Charles, and each of them came to the throne in turn as Louis X., Philip V., and Charles IV. Louis X. did not enjoy a long reign. He was weak and sickly, a feeble man and a feeble ruler. His reign is to be noted, because at its close the Salic Law was set up in France. This law forbade a woman to come to the throne as Queen of France in her own right. Louis was the first King of France who died and left no son to take his place. He had a daughter, but she was set aside, and his brother took the crown.

This brother, Philip V., called Philip the Long, because he was a tall man, was as feeble in health as Louis, and only reigned six years. He made, however, some good laws. His short reign was much disturbed by a rising among the poorer people of his realm. Vast numbers of poor labourers and shepherds became filled with the idea of going on a Crusade, and they left their work and their homes. They rambled through the land in great riotous troops, killing all the Jews they could seize, and plundering houses and shops for food. In some towns the citizens drove them away, and there were disturbances in which many were killed on both sides. At last an army was sent against them, when many were killed or taken prisoners. The rest fled, and made their way back to their homes as well as they could. This is remembered as the "Shepherds' Crusade."

There was also great trouble with the unhappy lepers, of whom there were many in France. The dreadful disease of leprosy cannot be cured, so that people who suffered from it were driven apart from their fellows lest it should spread to the healthy. A rumour flew through the land that the lepers were poisoning the wells and streams, so that the healthy would be seized with leprosy or some other mortal illness. There was no proof that this story was true, but it was believed on all hands, and the French people went wild with fright. By order of the King all lepers were shut up, and many were put to death. Those left alive were not allowed again to ramble about the country begging for food, as it had been their custom to do. They had now to depend on their friends or charitable people, who brought food to the places where they were imprisoned.

The third brother, Charles IV., reigned six years, the same time as his brother, Philip the Long, and, like his father, he was called "le Bel," the Handsome. His reign was of slight importance, and it was the last of the House of Capet. When he died he left a daughter, and her succession was barred by the Salic Law. So the crown went to his cousin, Philip of Valois, the first of the line of Valois Kings.

CHAPTER V

THE HOUSE OF VALOIS

The name of Philip IV., the first of the Valois Kings, is a familiar one in English history, for his reign saw the opening of the great Hundred Years' War between England and France. Edward III. of England laid claim to the French crown because his mother, Isabella, was the sister of Charles the Handsome, the last of the Capet Kings. The claim was not good, because the Salic Law stood in the way, but Edward hoped to win France by the sword. In 1346 Edward landed in France, and marched almost to the gates of Paris. Here he turned back in retreat, and was followed by Philip at the head of a powerful army. Philip came up with the English at a place called Cressy, and here a famous battle was fought. The English, commanded by Edward and led by the Black Prince, won a great victory, wherein the stout English archers with their cloth-yard shafts had the chief share. Philip fled from the field, and sought refuge at a castle. The night had fallen, and the warder challenged the fugitives. "Who comes so late?" he cried. "It is I," replied Philip; "it is the Fortune of France!"

From Cressy the English army marched to Calais, but Edward did not capture the town for nearly a year. At last famine forced the people of Calais to give up their town, and Edward turned them out and put Englishmen in their places. Calais now remained an English town for more than two hundred years.

In 1348 the plague, the Black Death, swept over Europe, and France suffered very severely. This dreadful pestilence spread swiftly, and killed its victims in a very short time. In many places every person in a town or village was destroyed by it. The houses were empty, grass grew in the streets, not a living thing was to be seen. It was a kind of fever which easily arises among people whose habits and surroundings are dirty. In those days people took little care that the food they ate and the water they drank were clean and wholesome, or that their houses were kept in a cleanly manner. Then when the plague broke out, it spread swiftly through the unclean homes and filthy streets.

Philip died in 1350, and was followed by his son John, who in 1356 led an army against the Black Prince. The English Prince had made a raid into France, and John met him at Poitiers. Things looked hopeless for the English. The Black Prince was at the head of eight thousand men, half-starved, for their food had run short, and many of them suffering from sickness. John commanded a magnificent army of fifty thousand of the finest troops of France. So confident did he feel that, when the Black Prince offered to give up the towns and villages he had taken, and also said he would not make war again in France for seven years, John would not listen to him. John would accept no terms save the surrender of the Black Prince himself with his bravest knights. The English at once made up their minds to fight. Once more the famous archers won for them a mighty victory. The splendid chivalry of France was destroyed, and King John and his son Philip were taken prisoners and carried to England.

For four years the King of France was a captive in London, and while he was absent there were dreadful doings in his country. We have already seen how hard was the life of the peasant, the small farmer, in France. Upon him was laid the whole load of the taxes, and when a French noble wanted money, it was from the people who tilled his land that he sought it. Many of the French nobles were cruel, careless men, who mocked at the peasant and gave him the nickname of "Jacques Bonhomme," Goodman Jack. "There is only one way to squeeze his money from Goodman Jack," they said, "and that is to give him a good beating." Very often the ill-treatment went much farther than beating. A peasant who was suspected of having money was often taken to the castle of his lord, and there tortured in a most horrible fashion until he confessed where his little hoard was concealed.

At the Battle of Poitiers great numbers of French nobles were taken prisoners. The English captors demanded large ransoms before they would give up the nobles they had seized, and the French lords sought to wring the last coins from their tenants' purses to pay the sums demanded. The long patience of "Jacques Bonhomme" at last ran out. Filled with fury, the peasantry rose in revolt. They gathered in their thousands and attacked the castles of their masters. They seized the women, the children, the servants who manned these strongholds, and treated them as they had been treated, putting them to death with dreadful tortures. Maddened with blood and the memory of their sufferings, they burned and slew and destroyed, behaving more like wild beasts than like men.

This was the dreadful rising known as the "Jacquerie," the rebellion of the Jacks. For a time they carried all before them, but soon a powerful army of trained soldiers was hurled upon them. Against these, the ill-armed, untrained peasants could not stand, and the flame of revolt was quenched in blood. Vast numbers of the peasants were slain, so many that wide stretches of country became silent deserts, and the very roads that led into Paris stood deep in grass.

King John was a captive in England for four years. Then by the Treaty of Bretigny in 1360 he regained his freedom. By this treaty he promised to give up much land in the west of France to Edward III., and to pay three thousand gold crowns as a ransom. On his part Edward agreed to give up his claims to the crown of France, and to the provinces which the Kings of England had once held. John also gave hostages to Edward, among them his own son, the Duke of Anjou. After a time John heard that his son had broken faith and escaped from England. He at once went to the English Court and gave himself up, for, as he often said, "If good faith were banished from the earth, it should find a place in the hearts of Princes." In a few months he fell ill and died, and the English King gave him a splendid funeral, and laid his body in a noble tomb in St. Paul's Cathedral.

THE MORNING OF AGINCOURT

John died in 1364, and he was followed by his eldest son, Charles V., called Charles the Wise, for he proved an able ruler. It was not that he was himself very clever or strong, but he had the sense to choose wise men to act in the council-chamber, and great warriors to lead his armies. First among his captains stood the famous Breton gentleman, Bertrand du Guesclin. Bertrand was at once the ugliest man and the finest soldier in France. He was short and thick-set, with shoulders of great width, arms of great length, a huge head, and a broad face in which twinkled with a strange and brilliant light a pair of very small green eyes. As a little boy he was the despair of his parents and friends. He had a most furious temper, and if anyone tried to correct him, his temper flamed up with ten times the fury. Yet he loved those who treated him kindly, for his heart was good, and he could easily be led by those who did not try to drive him. He grew up to be the greatest soldier of his time, and became the right hand of King Charles in the wars and troubles of that day.

Little by little France began to recover from the desolation caused by the ravages of the plague and the Jacquerie. Farms were once more tilled, and homesteads repaired or rebuilt, but the country was not yet free to regain its lost prosperity. Many parts of the land were much disturbed by bands of foreign troops, known as the "Free Companies" or "Grand Companies." These men were soldiers of fortune, who had come to France and offered their swords for pay to Prince or King who would hire them. As the land settled and war died down, there was no longer need for these mercenary soldiers, and no one would pay for them. Then these strong and desperate men marched through a country-side, robbing and plundering, and slaying all those who tried to withstand them.

To rid France of these dangerous people, Charles gathered them into an army, and sent them into Spain with Du Guesclin at their head. Charles wished them to attack his enemy, Pedro the Cruel, King of Castile. Pedro was a man of the worst character, who had poisoned his wife, a French Princess, and had tried to poison his half-brother, Henry. Henry now wished to seize the throne of Castile, and Charles of France was aiding him. Bertrand du Guesclin drove Pedro before him with ease, and Pedro fled to the Black Prince, who was at Bordeaux, and begged for aid. Backed by the Black Prince and his stout English archers, Pedro won the Battle of Navarette, and next Pedro bribed the "Free Companies" to desert from Du Guesclin and come over to him. They did so, and Du Guesclin was taken prisoner and fell into the hands of the Black Prince. Charles had to pay a heavy ransom to free his great captain, but he paid it gladly, for he needed Bertrand's aid. Charles thought the time had come when he could win back the provinces yielded to the English by the Treaty of Bretigny. Edward III. was growing old, and the Black Prince was a feeble and dying man. Events proved that Charles was right. Du Guesclin was made Constable of France, the highest post in the King's gift, and he led his men so well that the lost provinces were recovered. But when Charles sought to seize Brittany, the Constable's native province, Du Guesclin laid down his high office and prepared to retire into Spain. But he was seized with mortal illness, and died in 1380, and King Charles died soon afterwards.

CHAPTER VI

THE HOUSE OF VALOIS *(CONTINUED)*

Another Charles now came to the throne, Charles VI., called Charles the Well-Beloved, because of his amiable disposition. But this unhappy King spent most of his life under the dark shadow of madness, and his reign was filled with such disorder and strife that France has scarcely known a time of greater misery. Charles was only eleven years old when he was crowned, and his uncles ruled on his behalf. They proved cruel tyrants, who laid such heavy taxes on the people that rebellion sprang up on all sides, and there were great disturbances in Paris and other parts of France.

When Charles had been twelve years on the throne, he marched to Brittany to punish a great noble who had been doing very evil deeds. On his way, he and his followers were passing through a deep forest, when a huge, wild-looking man, scarce half-clad, leapt from a thicket and seized the King's horse by the bridle. "O King, go no farther," he cried; "you are betrayed!" Then he bounded back into the thicket and was lost to sight.

For some time the King rode on, not speaking a word or glancing up. Then there was a sharp clash of steel. It was but a trifling matter. The King's squires were riding behind him. The lance of one happened by accident to strike against the helmet of another. But the ringing sound seemed to startle the King, and he trembled from head to foot. He took it for the first sound of assault. "I am betrayed!" he screamed, and drove his horse furiously among his friends, and struck such fierce blows with his sword that some were killed, while the rest fled in terror. When the latter came back, they found the King stretched on the ground in a deep sleep, as of one thoroughly worn out. They watched beside him, but he awoke a madman, and so he remained for the rest of his life.

THE MAID OF ORLEANS

For many years there was a bitter quarrel as to who should hold the reins of office on behalf of the poor mad King. One party wished the King's uncle, the Duke of Burgundy, to rule; another party supported his brother, the Duke of Orleans.

First the Duke of Orleans was murdered, and then the Duke of Burgundy was slain by the Orleans party. The latter party was joined by the Dauphin, the eldest son of the King, and the struggle of these factions caused great distress in the country. It was at this time that the Hundred Years' War was renewed. Henry V. of England saw that France was weakened by civil war, and he crossed the Channel to seize, if possible, the French crown.

A powerful army, six times as strong as the English force, was gathered to meet Henry, but he overthrew the French with terrible slaughter at the great battle of Agincourt in 1415. Henry now found that the French resistance was broken down, and he became master of the North of France. Tired of war, first among themselves and then against the English, the French gave up the struggle. It was agreed by the Treaty of Troyes in 1420 that Henry V. should marry Catherine, daughter of the King of France, and that Henry should succeed to the French crown. Henry entered Paris in triumph, and ruled for a short time as Regent on behalf of Charles.

But the Dauphin was very angry with this treaty because it robbed him of his birthright, his father's crown. So he and his friends kept up the war with the English, and it was going on when Henry V. died in 1422. In a short time the poor mad King of France died too, and now the country had to choose whom they would have as King.

Henry V. had left a baby son, a year old, who became Henry VI. of England. According to the Treaty of Troyes he should have been King of France as well, but many Frenchmen declared for their own Prince, the Dauphin Charles, and said he was now Charles VII. Years of fighting followed, and the state of the country became more and more miserable. Suddenly the fortunes of France were changed as if by a miracle. There came to the Court of Charles a little peasant girl, the ever-famous Joan of Arc. She told him that she had seen a vision from heaven, which bade her go and save her country. She begged Charles to give her a body of troops to lead against the English, and at last he believed her, and did all that she wished.

At that time the English were about to seize Orleans, the second town in the kingdom, and Joan marched thither. Clad in shining armour, mounted on a fine war-horse, and bearing a banner in her hand, she led her men against the foe. The French soldiers put great faith in her, and they fought so well that the English were driven away, and the town was saved. After that Joan was often called the "Maid of Orleans." Up to this moment Charles of France had not been crowned, for Rheims, the city where the French Kings were crowned, was in the hands of the enemy. Winning victories on her way, the Maid marched against Rheims, and entered it in triumph. Next day Charles was crowned in the Cathedral, and Joan of Arc stood beside the high altar, her white banner in her hand.

RAISING THE SIEGE OF ORLEANS.

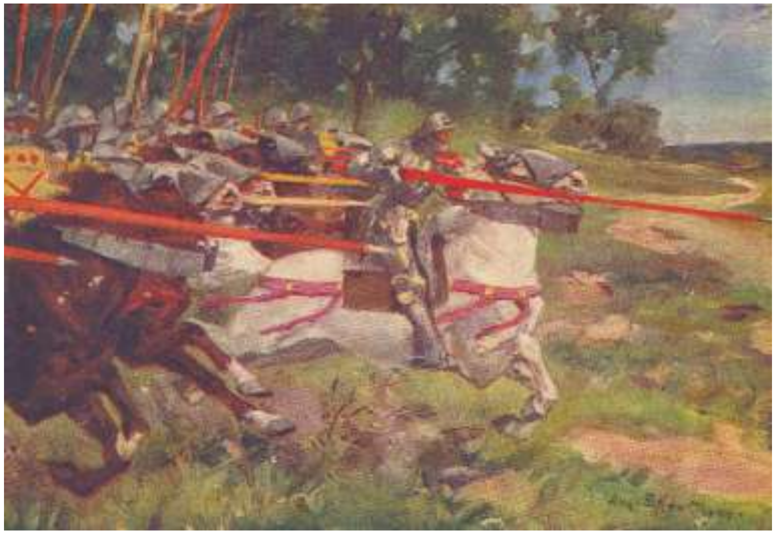
She felt now that her work was done, and she begged that the King would allow her to go home. But Charles would not grant this. He said that his soldiers would not fight so well if she were not there to lead them. From this time Joan won no great success, and before long she was taken prisoner by one of her own countrymen who was no friend to Charles. This Frenchman sold her to the English for a large sum, and she was put upon her trial as a sorceress, for it was said that she could only have won her marvellous victories by witchcraft. To the eternal disgrace of the enemies who Condemned her, and of the friends who did naught to save her, the heroic Maid of Orleans was burned alive at Rouen in 1431. Yet it was soon seen that her work was done. A new spirit had been aroused in the French, and the English seemed no longer to fight with their old stubborn endurance. Little by little the latter were driven back, until nothing remained to them of their French conquests save the town of Calais, and the Hundred Years' War was at an end.

Towards the end of his reign, Charles VII. had much trouble with his eldest son, the Dauphin Louis. Louis joined some great lords in making an attack on his father, and in the end left France and fled to the Court of Burgundy, where he was well received. Charles wished Louis to return, but the Dauphin would not come. Then the mind of Charles became filled with the idea that the friends of Louis wished to poison him. He refused to eat or drink, and in a short time he starved himself to death. He died in 1461.

Louis at once came back from Burgundy, and was crowned as Louis XI. He proved to be the slyest and craftiest King that ever ruled in France. He was cold and cunning and cruel. If he wished for a thing he never went in a straightforward way to get it; he tried always to obtain it by means of a trick. No one could believe him, and he never believed anyone. He had two great aims in ruling France—one was to lessen the power of the nobles, the other was to enlarge his borders.

When he tried to curb the power of his nobles, they rose against him, and held their own for a time. But though he was worsted in the open field, Louis gained his end at last. He had no love of war, and trusted much more to his powers of double dealing and cunning than to the sword. One by one he mastered the great nobles; some he crushed, some he won over by smooth promises, and against one great vassal all his powers were bent. This was Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy.

Burgundy was a great province in the east of France, and its lord, though in name a vassal and servant of the crown of France, was as powerful and perhaps more powerful than Louis himself. For the Duke of Burgundy ruled over the Low Countries with their busy towns, and his broad lands and wealthy cities made him the richest prince in Europe. Charles the Bold was a rash, headstrong man, never happy save when assailing his enemies, and of these enemies he accounted his crafty liege lord the chief.



CHARLES THE BOLD CHARGING AT THE HEAD OF HIS TROOPS.

There was much bickering between Louis and Charles, and now one held the upper hand, now the other. In the end Charles was killed in battle with the Swiss, and his great power fell to pieces. Louis seized upon the great province of Burgundy, and added it to France, and in other directions he became master of Provence and Anjou.

With all his cunning, his falseness, and his cruelty, Louis pretended a great love of religion. He fixed little leaden images of saints in the band of the shabby old hat he wore, for the miserly King clad himself in mean and threadbare garments. He robbed his people to make the churches fine; he went on long pilgrimages and gathered relics; he made long prayers; and was the first Monarch of France to bear the title of "Most Christian King."

As he grew older his suspicion of all around him grew stronger and stronger. He shut himself up in a gloomy old castle, and the warders were ordered to shoot down all who came near without permission. In the wood around the castle hundreds of man-traps were set to catch any trespassing near the walls, and passers-by who could not give a clear account of themselves were seized by his hangmen and strung up to the branches of the forest trees, or drowned in the moat. At last he died in the year 1483, and his son Charles VIII, came to the throne.

CHAPTER VII

THE HOUSE OF VALOIS *(CONTINUED)*

Under Charles VIII. another wide possession came under the dominion of France. Hitherto the great province of Brittany had been ruled by its own dukes, but the land now fell to the Duchess Anne. She was married to Charles VIII., and in this way Brittany was joined to France. The chief event in the reign of Charles VIII. is the war in Italy. Up to this time the French had not been at war with any other great nation on the Continent. There had been fighting enough and to spare between the King and the great lords, and between France and England; but now Charles marched into Italy to seize the southern province of the two Sicilies.

At first he met with much success, and took Rome, and Naples, and other great cities; but before long the Italians turned against him, and he was forced to retreat. He was attacked as he retired, but he won the battle, and returned safely to France. He left some troops to guard the places he had won, but these were soon driven out of the country, and the French had gained nothing.

Charles intended to return to Italy, but he did not live to carry out his plans. One day he went to see a game of tennis played in the moat of the castle of Amboise where he was living. He had to pass through a low doorway, and he struck his head against the crown of the passage. The blow was so severe that within a few hours Charles died. He was only twenty-eight when he died, and as he had no son, he was succeeded by his cousin Louis, the Duke of Orleans, who was crowned as Louis XII.

Louis XII. was a kind-hearted ruler, who was friendly with his subjects, and during his reign there was peace in the land. He carried on wars, but they were in Italy, for, like his cousin, he dreamed of Italian conquests. In these wars he fought a number of battles, and took a number of cities, but France gained nothing by his exploits. In the end the French soldiers were driven out of Italy, after the wars had cost great sums of money and the lives of many brave men.

Among his other enemies, Louis XII. numbered Henry VIII. of England. Henry had only just come to the English throne, and was at that time a bold, warlike young prince. The English beat the French in 1514 at the famous Battle of Spurs, so called because the French made more use of their spurs to run away than of their swords to fight. After this battle Louis made peace with England, and married Princess Mary, the sister of Henry VIII.; but the marriage was soon ended by his death. At home Louis was much beloved by the French nation, for he was eager for their welfare, and wished to rule justly. He won the name of "Father of his People," and when he died in 1515 his subjects mourned for him deeply.

Louis XII. left no son, so the throne fell to his cousin, who became Francis I. Francis was a gay, handsome young man, fond of war, and loving pleasure. His reign covers a very important time in the history not only of France, but of Europe: the time of the Reformation. This is the name given to that movement by which the authority of the Pope of Rome was set aside in many parts of Europe. Many people had begun to question the teaching of the Church of Rome, and the doings of the Pope, the head of the Church. At last they began to speak against the evils that they saw, and chief among them was the famous German monk, Martin Luther.

Luther's anger flamed up very fiercely against the sale of Indulgences. Pope Leo X. needed money, and to obtain it he sent out men who sold pardons for sins; these were called Indulgences. Each pardon was in the form of a written and sealed letter. The pardoners who sold these papers assured the purchasers that they might obtain forgiveness for any sin they pleased, on purchasing the Indulgence which dealt with that particular crime. Luther began by assailing the Indulgences; he ended by attacking many other teachings that seemed wrong in his eyes, and he was joined by many followers who agreed with him. The name Protestant was given to these people because they protested against the evils they saw, and they were also called Reformers, because they wished to reform, to make better, the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

Before long the two parties were at bitter strife, and for many years, and in many lands, Protestants and Catholics battled together fiercely in the name of religion: nor was the warfare in France less bitter and dreadful than in other countries. But in the reign of Francis there was no great strife, though there was bitter persecution; and the worst blot on his memory is the manner in which he treated the Vaudois, a simple, hardworking people who lived among some quiet Alpine heights.

The Vaudois had long held reformed opinions, for many of them were sprung from Albigenses, who had fled from Languedoc hundreds of years before into these mountain villages to hide themselves. Francis was persuaded that these heretics, as their enemies called them, would do him some harm, and he ordered that they should be driven from the province. A terrible persecution followed. Troops were sent against the Vaudois, and their country was ravaged with fire and sword. Towns, villages, farmhouses were burned to the ground. The men were strangled, the women and children were burned. The crops were destroyed and the country laid waste, and no living creature was left save a few who fled to hiding in deep caverns and solitary places far amidst the hills.

Francis himself took little interest in religious questions: the great aim of his life was to gain more power for himself, to rule wider lands, and be known as a famous warrior. In the early part of his reign he wished to be not only King of France, but Emperor of Germany, and there was a great struggle for the imperial crown between Francis and his great rival, Charles V. of Spain. Both Francis and Charles tried to win the support of Henry VIII. of England, and a meeting was arranged between Francis and Henry on French soil. They met, and such was the magnificence of the tents, the trappings, the dresses, and the armour worn by the Kings and their splendid trains, that the place became known as the Field of the Cloth of Gold. In the end Francis failed to gain the imperial crown. Charles was chosen Emperor, and for many years the quarrels between Charles and Francis led to great wars in France, Italy, and Germany.

THE FIELD OF THE CLOTH OF GOLD

Francis was a great patron of art and letters. At his splendid Court were found poets, artists, musicians, men of science, and his reign saw the Renaissance, the "New Birth," when learning and art woke from the long sleep of the Dark Ages, and the pen began once more to be mightier than the sword. He died in 1547 and with the accession of Henry II., France entered upon one of the darkest stages of her history.

During the next half-century the religious strife between Protestant and Catholic was to grow to a terrible height, to be marked by dreadful scenes of treachery, bloodshed, and cruelty, and the chief contriver of all the crime and misery which were to stain the annals of France was the new Queen, Catherine de Medici, wife of Henry II. Catherine was an Italian woman, daughter of a great Florentine family, and was one of the worst women of whom we can read in history. But while her husband lived her power was not great; it was after her sons came to the throne that her hand was felt in French affairs.

During the reign of Henry II. great numbers of French people came over to the side of the Reformers. As a rule they were followers of Calvin, a great French teacher, and they called themselves Calvinists. Henry was a Roman Catholic, and persecuted the Calvinists. Many of them were burned at the stake for their faith. An attempt was made to introduce the Inquisition into France, but it failed. Under the Inquisition, men called Familiars were sent to work their way into the confidence of the people and discover their religious beliefs. All Protestants were informed upon, and they were put to death and their goods seized. But the Parliament of France would have none of it, and France was saved from the horrors of the Inquisition, as these were known at that time in Spain and the Netherlands.

During the reign of this King the English lost their last town in France. A French commander heard that Calais was not well guarded, and he made a sudden assault on the place. He took it easily, to the great vexation of the English who had been very proud of holding a town on French soil. Queen Mary of England was so grieved at the loss that she said that when she died the name Calais would be found graven on her heart.

Henry II. came by his death in a strange manner. He was holding a great festival in honour of the marriage of his two daughters, and all kinds of sports were going on. Henry asked a Scottish gentleman to tilt with him. By an accident the Scottish knight drove his spear into the King's face, and the point entered Henry's eye. The wound was mortal, and in ten days he died.

CHAPTER VIII

HOUSE OF VALOIS *(CONT)*

CATHERINE AND HER SONS

Four sons of Catherine de Medici now came to the throne in turn, and their mother was the evil genius of every reign. She was a Roman Catholic, and hated Protestants. But she loved power far more than her religion, and she stood at nothing if she could only see her way to rule the country through one or other of her sons. The first of these to reign was Frances II., a weak, sickly boy of sixteen. He was ruler in name only, for all authority lay in the hands of Catherine and a powerful French family, whose head was the Duke of Guise. Francis married a young Princess whose name is famous in our own history, Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. Mary was the daughter of James V. of Scotland, and her mother had belonged to the House of Guise. She was brought up at the French Court, and married Francis II. when she was only fifteen. The marriage did not last long, for Francis died within a year, and Mary returned to Scotland, where she met the sea of troubles which were only to end when she laid her head on the block in Fotheringay Castle.

During this reign, short as it was, the enmity between the Catholic party and the Huguenots, as the French Protestants were called, grew to a great height. Catherine and the Guises acted with savage cruelty towards the Reformers, and burned numbers of them at the stake. This angered the Huguenots, and many Catholics were just as angry with the government, for the Queen and her friends refused to pay the just debts of those to whom the King owed money. In fact, a gallows was set up at the palace gates, and a notice placed thereon, stating that those who came to ask for money owing to them would be hanged there at once if they did not go away.

A great plot was formed to break the power of the Guises, and many Huguenots were concerned in it. But one of the plotters betrayed his friends, and great numbers of the conspirators were seized and put to death.

CATHERINE DE MEDICI, QUEEN OF HENRY II.

The next reign saw this bitter feud of Catholic and Huguenot break out in civil war. Charles X., who followed Francis II., was only ten years old, and the power of his mother and the Guises was more complete than ever. The Huguenots rose under Admiral Coligny and a great nobleman, the Prince of Condé. Both were men of splendid and fearless character, men who loved order and good government, and only rose against the rule of Catherine and the Guises when it became too harsh and unjust to be borne.

The wars which followed are known as the Wars of the League, because the Catholics declared that they were formed into a Holy League to defend their religion. The strife began in 1562, and raged with intervals of peace for some thirty years, till it ended with the close of the House of Valois. The unhappy country was almost destroyed in the dreadful struggle. Catholic and Protestant alike slew their foes with merciless ferocity. The bitterness when Frenchmen fought Frenchmen seemed ten times greater than if the enemies had been of opposing nations. Prisoners were put to death in cold blood, and, in a hostile district, the victorious army hung every inhabitant they could seize on the trees by the roadside.

In 1569 the brave and generous Prince of Condé was basely shot after he had surrendered himself a prisoner. His place was taken by a young Protestant Prince, Henry of Navarre, who, with the help of Admiral Coligny, commanded the Huguenot forces.

The Protestant army now marched upon Paris, and its strength was such that Charles was forced to make peace and to surrender a number of towns to the Huguenots. Among these towns was Rochelle, which became the great Huguenot stronghold. Henry of Navarre was now married to Charles's sister Margaret, and the Huguenot cause appeared triumphant. For a year or two there was peace on the surface, but beneath the surface Catherine de Medici was at work, plotting and planning to destroy her Protestant foes and crush those whom she and the Guises hated.

The outcome of these schemes was the dreadful massacre of St. Bartholomew in August, 1572. Catherine persuaded her son that the Huguenots must be destroyed, or their power would grow too strong, and the feeble young man was overborne by her fierce will, and gave orders that a sudden attack should be made on the Huguenots in Paris, and that all men, women, and children, should be put to the sword.

This cruel and dreadful plan was carried out. One of the first victims was the noble old Admiral Coligny, for whom of late the King had pretended a friendship. The massacre began at dead of night. The Admiral was in bed and still suffering from a wound which an assassin had dealt him a short time before. The murderers burst into his room, and for a moment were checked by the stately appearance of the venerable Huguenot leader. Then they attacked him, slew him with many wounds, and hurled his body through the window into the courtyard. The Duke of Guise himself was waiting below to make sure that his enemy was despatched. "It is he," said the Duke joyfully, then hurried away to urge his men to their dreadful work.

The streets were now filled with bands of the assassins, and lest they should strike each other in the darkness and confusion, each wore a white scarf tied about his arm, and a white cross on his cap. The houses of the Protestants had been marked, and into them the murderers burst, and slew all they found wherever they found them, many being seized and killed in their beds. Great numbers of the slaughtered Huguenots were flung into the Seine, till the river was stained with blood.

King Charles himself was seen at a window of the Louvre, the royal palace, shooting with a gun upon the unhappy Huguenots as they fled. In the palace was Henry of Navarre also, but he was locked in a room and could do nothing to save or help his poor followers, thousands of whom perished during this awful night and the day which followed.

Yet the Huguenots were not cowed by this dreadful massacre. They were roused, rather, to avenge their murdered friends, and they were joined by many Catholics who hated Catherine and the Guises, and looked with horror on the doings of St. Bartholomew's Day. There was another fierce war, and the Huguenots bore themselves so well that at the end they had won for themselves much freedom. Charles IX. died soon after peace was concluded. He had been failing in health since the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Night and day he brooded on the frightful scenes he had witnessed, and on the cruelties done in his name. He died in great misery, repenting bitterly of the evil-doing into which his mother's advice had drawn him, and leaving the throne to his brother Henry.

THE ENGLISH EMBASSY IN PARIS ON THE DAY OF THE MASSACRE OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW. PROTESTANTS WATCHING THE SLAUGHTER IN THE STREET.

Henry III. came to the throne in 1574. He was a young man of feeble health and of nature so weak, vain, and frivolous, that all sensible people looked upon him with contempt. He was the favourite son of his grim old mother, and Catherine watched affairs very closely on his behalf. She had now to fear a family which had once been her closest friends, the House of Guise. The head of the house was at this time a clever, powerful young man, Henry, Duke of Guise. The Duke held King Henry in contempt, and aimed at grasping the chief power in the country, and even dreamed of coming to the throne if the King should die without a son.

The Duke and his friends formed a powerful party called the "Holy League," and they asked all Roman Catholics to join it in defense of their religion. Great numbers took the oath of the League, and by this oath they were bound always to obey its head. The Duke of Guise was placed at the head of the League, and thus he had a great body of followers ready at any moment to aid him in his designs on the Crown. The League at once went to war with the Huguenots, and the latter were now led by Henry of Navarre. Some time after the massacre of St. Bartholomew, Henry of Navarre managed to escape from the royal palace, and he at once joined his Huguenot friends and put himself at their head, and proved a brave, noble, and faithful leader. Once more civil war raged in France.

In 1584 the only brother of Henry III. died, and as the latter had no son, it was clear that the House of Valois was coming to an end. The crown would now fall to the House of Bourbon, of which Henry of Navarre was the head, so that a Huguenot would be King of France. The bare idea of such a thing lashed every Leaguer to fury; the power of the Duke of Guise grew swiftly. Great numbers of Roman Catholics preferred that he should take the throne rather than it should fall to Henry of Navarre, and they joined the League of which Guise was the head.

A war at once broke out which is known as the "War of the Three Henries"—Henry III., and Henry, Duke of Guise, and Henry of Navarre. The League and the Huguenots fought bitterly, but Henry of France seemed on the side of neither. Paris was on the side of the League and the Duke of Guise, and the latter now resolved to visit the capital and see how the people would receive him. They welcomed him as a hero and a conqueror. They pressed round him to touch his garments and to kiss his cloak. They strewed flowers in his way, and their shouts of joy rang from street to street. This caused much uneasiness to Catherine and the King, and the latter feared that Guise had come to thrust him from the throne.

On the next day the King called into the city a body of Swiss troops in his pay. The people of Paris thought these troops were to be used against Guise, and they became furious. They barred every street so that soldiers could not march through them. They threw up barricades, piling beams, paving stones and furniture across the way, and lashing all firm with heavy chains. Behind these barriers stood armed men and women, ready to fire upon the King's soldiers. This rising is called the "Day of the Barricades." In the end Henry III. left Paris without doing harm to Guise, but from that time the weak and foolish King hated the Duke bitterly, and resolved to murder him.

Guise was warned of the King's purpose, but he was so proud and haughty, and had such a contempt for Henry III., that he laughed scornfully at the idea of such a thing. One day he found in his table-napkin a note which a secret friend had put there. It told him that the King meant to destroy him. "He dare not," scribbled Guise across the paper, and threw it with a gesture of contempt under the table. But the next day he was called to a council with the King, and was summoned to Henry's private room. As he was about to enter, he was attacked by a band of assassins, and fell under many wounds. When he was assured that his enemy was dead, Henry came, full of glee, to see the body of the murdered man. Then he hurried to tell his mother that the "King of Paris" was dead. This was the nickname he had for Guise, because the people of Paris had been so fond of the Duke.

Catherine was ill in bed, but she received the news with joy. She praised her son for this wicked deed, but the end of her long and evil career was at hand: she died within a few days. The Catholics of the League were full of anger when they heard of the murder of their leader, and King Henry turned for help to Henry of Navarre. The royal troops and the Huguenot army joined forces to march on Paris and enter the capital. They arrived before the city, and here Henry III. fell by the very means which he had used against others, the knife of the assassin. A monk came to the camp, and said that he had a letter for the King. He was admitted to the royal presence and, when the King was reading the paper, the monk drew out a dagger, and plunged it up to the hilt in Henry's body. He was at once slain by the King's attendants, but he had delivered a fatal blow, and Henry III. died within a few hours.

Before his death he called his chief nobles together, and bade them take Henry of Navarre as their next King, and Henry of Navarre was at his bedside when he died. So the House of Valois came to an end in the year 1589.

CHAPTER IX

THE HOUSE OF BOURBON

Henry of Navarre, Henry IV., the first King of the House of Bourbon, had a dismal prospect before him when he came to the throne. The hosts of the League were, of course, his bitter enemies, and great numbers of nobles who had followed the late King refused to acknowledge a Huguenot sovereign. Paris, his capital, refused to receive him, and he was compelled to retire to the North of France with the small army which remained faithful to him. The first years of his reign were filled with battle against the troops of opponents who joined to assail him, until at Ivry, in 1590, he dashed the army of the League to pieces.

Henry now laid siege to Paris, whose citizens suffered the most dreadful agonies of famine rather than surrender to their Huguenot King. Nor did the city fall, for a strong army of Leaguers and Spanish troops came to assail Henry, and he was compelled to march away. For another year Henry IV. moved to and fro in his country, fighting with its people here and there, more like an invader than the rightful King of the land, and then he came to a most important decision. He saw that the French people would never accept a Huguenot King, so he became a Roman Catholic. Some people think he made this change carelessly, saying "Paris is worth a mass"; others say that he really had the good of his country at heart, and wished to put an end to the miserable civil wars. Be that as it may, it is certain that the mass of the people accepted him as King without more ado, and France enjoyed a settled peace after many years of murderous strife.

Henry IV. used his power as King to help his Huguenot friends, though he was no longer a Huguenot himself. He made an edict—that is, a royal command—called the "Edict of Nantes." This decree gave the Huguenots the right to worship in their own way, and forbade anyone to disturb their meetings; it also said that they might have schools and colleges of their own, and that they might hold offices of State. Now the Huguenots could settle down in peace, and as they were some of the most industrious and skilful people in France, they became prosperous, and by them the state of the country was improved in many ways.

Henry reigned for some twelve years after the Edict of Nantes was issued, and in that time he did much for the welfare of his people. He was a very kind, generous, and lovable man, and before his reign was over, those who had been his enemies were as deeply attached to him as his oldest friends. Henry busied himself in seeing that the land was improved, and bridges built, so that people might go easily about their business. He took great interest in the mulberry which some Frenchmen had brought into France to feed the silkworm. As the mulberry-trees throve, silkworms were reared in large numbers, and silk-weaving became an important industry. In all these matters he was greatly helped by an able statesman, who was his chief Minister and friend, the Duke of Sully.

Towards the end of his reign, Henry IV. resolved to make war on Spain and Austria, and he was about to set out on a great campaign when his life came to an end. He was driving through the streets of Paris when his carriage was checked for a moment by a block in the street. Suddenly a man sprang on the wheel and struck the King twice with a dagger, and the good and brave Henry IV. was killed on the spot. The man was named Ravaillac, and proved to be a Catholic who felt sure that the King was still at heart a Huguenot, and could not bear that he should rule over France. Ravaillac was put to death with fearful torture, and the people mourned for their King, crying: "We have lost our father." And to this day there is no French King held in such fond memory as the generous and noble Henry the IV.

He was followed in 1610 by his son Louis XIII., but Louis was only eight years old, and the government was in the hands of his mother, Mary de Medici, another Italian Princess of the great Florentine family. Mary was by no means so wicked a woman as Catherine de Medici, but she ruled badly and wasted the treasure which Henry IV. had gathered. In 1614 there was a meeting of the States-General. It is memorable as being the last meeting for nearly two hundred years; when it came together again the temper of France had altered in a wonderful manner.

The States-General put forward complaints, but, as usual, little attention was paid to them. The deputies said of the peasants: "Your poor people are but skin and bone, worn out, beaten down, more dead than alive; we beseech you to do something to settle the disorders of the taxes." But nothing was done. The people were forced, as they had always been forced, to find all the money required to carry on the services of government, and the members of the States-General were soon sent away. The authority of the Kings of France had been growing steadily for many reigns, but in the time of Louis XIII. and his son it became very great.

This great power was not gained by Louis XIII. himself, for he was a weak and rather foolish man, but it was won for him by his great Minister, Cardinal Richelieu. This famous Churchman was not only a great ruler of men, but himself a man of the most undaunted resolution. He feared no one, and once he had made up his mind he drove through all things to his end. Richelieu was the real ruler of France. The Cardinal had no easy path to follow. He was ringed about by enemies, and scores of plots were formed against him. Nor could he depend upon the master whom he served so faithfully. Time and again the weak Louis was persuaded by the enemies of Richelieu to destroy the Minister's power, and time and again the resolute Cardinal overthrew his foes of the Court and won back the favour of his King.

One great aim of Richelieu was to destroy the power of the nobles, for they only could stand against the King. The people could do nothing against their sovereign and his army, and as there was no meeting of the States-General, they had no chance of making complaints and seeking redress. But the nobles gathered their retainers together and rose in revolt, and in this way could threaten the King's authority.

CARDINAL, DUC DE RICHELIEU

In the early days of his power, Richelieu was not severe against the Huguenots; but when the Huguenots became so dissatisfied with the Government that they broke into rebellion, he determined to seize their great stronghold of La Rochelle, on the west coast of France. He marched there with a great army, and a long and cruel siege followed. The French Protestants looked for help from England, and the Duke of Buckingham, the favourite of Charles I., came with an English fleet to bring supplies. But Richelieu caused a great mole, a barrier, to be thrown out into the sea, so that no ships could gain the harbour, and the English had to go away and leave La Rochelle to its fate. The Huguenots made a splendid defense, and endured the worst miseries of famine before they gave up their town. But in the end they surrendered, and the town fell into the hands of the King. With the loss of Rochelle the Huguenots lost their power in France, and were no more a great party in the State.

Many discontented French nobles had joined the Huguenots, and these fell with their Protestant allies, and were ruined. The fall of these powerful men left fewer to cope with the King and the Cardinal, and thus the royal power was increased. The last years of both Richelieu and Louis were filled with a great war against Spain. This war went in favour of France, so well did the great Cardinal manage affairs, but before the end of it both Louis and Richelieu were dead. The Cardinal died in 1642, and Louis in 1643. The next King was a child, five years old. Like his father, he was named Louis, and was crowned as Louis XIV. This little King grew up to be so powerful a ruler that the French remember him to this day as Le Grand Monarque, the "Great Monarch," and he reigned for seventy-two years.

CHAPTER X

THE HOUSE OF BOURBON *(CONTINUED)*

While Louis XIV. was growing up, the land was ruled by his mother and a strong Minister, Cardinal Mazarin. At this time France was much disturbed by civil wars, which broke out on the always vexed question of taxation. They were known as the "Wars of the Fronde"—that is, the wars of the sling. They took this joking name because some witty people compared the complaining party to the naughty boys of Paris, who were fond of slinging stones and then running away when a watchman appeared. The Frondeurs said that Mazarin and the Queen-Mother laid too heavy taxes on the people, and after a good deal of fighting Mazarin was banished, but he soon returned and regained power. When Mazarin died Louis XIV. was twenty years old. He at once took affairs into his own hands, and for the next fifty years he ruled France alone, and ruled it absolutely at his own pleasure.

His power was unchecked, for the nobles who could have stood against him had been crushed, and the people who paid the taxes had no chance to ask for reforms, since Louis never called a meeting of the States-General. As a child the King had shown a proud and haughty temper; when he grew up his pride was boundless, and he brooked no opposition to his slightest fancy. All were to bend before him; everything must depend upon his will. "The State! I am the State!" he used to say, and he ruled France in that spirit.

This long reign is famous in French history for a number of reasons. Not only did Louis wage so many wars and win so many battles that he became the most powerful ruler in Europe, but numbers of very famous people lived in his time: great artists, painters, architects, and engineers. Louis was the patron of all these clever men and women, and treated them kindly, so that they praised him and worked for him, and helped to spread his fame as the ruler of France in a most glorious age for art and letters.

Louis the Great meddled with the affairs of almost every country of Europe, in the hope that he could make himself as powerful among his neighbours as he was at home; with England he had a great deal to do. He was a firm friend of Charles II., who took money from Louis, and was a pensioner of France. James II., when driven from his throne, fled to France and received aid from Louis, who tried to set James on his throne again, but failed. And with the next King of England, William III., Louis fought long and bitterly. William and Louis were already old enemies. William had been ruler of Holland before he came to the English throne, and Louis had tried to conquer William and his people, the sturdy Dutch.

But the Dutch remained unconquered. When Louis beat their armies and seemed to have the land at his feet, the Dutch opened the sluices in their dykes, allowed the sea to flow over their land, and saw their farms, houses, orchards and gardens sink beneath the waves rather than own the French King as their lord. In this way the attack of Louis was foiled. William of Orange never forgot the French assault, and his whole life was devoted to breaking down the power of the French King.

In many of these wars and quarrels of Louis XIV. religious feeling had a share, as well as ambition and love of power. Louis was a strict Roman Catholic, and had a great dislike of Protestants. This led to trouble between him and his Huguenot subjects, and in 168 5 he did a very wrong and foolish thing: he revoked, or called back, the Edict of Nantes. Under this famous Edict of Henry IV., the Huguenots had lived in quietness and contentment. Since the days of Richelieu no one had meddled with them, and they had settled down in peaceable communities, the best of all French subjects, for they were famous for their honesty, their industry, and their ability. Now Louis stripped them of all the protection which Henry of Navarre had provided. They were forbidden to meet for worship in their own fashion; their children must be brought up as Roman Catholics; their pastors and clergymen were ordered to leave France at once; but any other Huguenot was forbidden to leave the country under pain of the most severe punishment.

In spite of every threat, thousands and thousands of Huguenots fled from France. Soldiers were watching at every frontier, royal ships were watching at every port. Many Huguenots, trying to escape, were seized and sent to prison, to the galleys, to cruel punishment, but still they fled. Nothing could prevent them seeking in other countries the religious liberty denied to them in their own land. In this way Louis lost a great number of his best and cleverest citizens, and the country which gave them a home had a rich reward in securing these industrious and skilful people.

The Protestants who remained in France were treated in the most cruel manner, and in the Cevennes they rose and fought with the King's troops. This was the war of the Camisards, as the Protestants were called, and many were slain on both sides before the rising was put down. All these cruelties made Louis hated by every Protestant in Europe, and there were many who were not Protestants who feared his power, and wished to see it broken down. These enemies joined against him, and there were great wars in which the French army fought so well that Louis won victory after victory. But while he won glory on the field of battle, France was sinking into a state of dreadful misery. Louis was so powerful that there was no one in his kingdom who dared to tell him that he was ruining his country. He had driven away many of the best of its citizens, and on the rest of the people he laid a crushing burden of taxation.

He needed vast sums of money for his wars, for his palaces, for the great expenses of his Court, for his friends and favourites. He never summoned a meeting of the States-General, so that no deputies could lay before him the state of the country, but this is clearly shown by many books written at that time. One famous writer put down his thoughts in the form of a letter addressed to the King. He says: "The whole of France is one great hospital, with no food in it. The people who once loved you so well are now losing their trust in you, their friendship, and even their respect for you. You are obliged either to leave their rebellions alone or to massacre people whom you have driven to despair, and who are dying every day of diseases brought on by famine. The land is almost uncultivated, the cities and the country have lost their inhabitants, commerce has come to an end, and trade brings in no riches."

Towards the end of his long reign, the glory faded from the arms of Louis the Great. His old enemy, William III. of England and Holland, was dead, and Queen Anne was on the British throne. Her great general, Marlborough, beat the French again and again, until Louis was glad to make peace, and, after many years, Europe was free from strife. Peace was made in 1713, and two years later the Grand Monarch died. His son and his grandson died shortly before him, and the crown fell to his great grandson, a little boy who was crowned as Louis XV.

CHAPTER XI

THE HOUSE OF BOURBON *(CONTINUED)*

Once more the King of France was a child of five years old, and once more a long reign was seen, for Louis XV. sat on the throne for fifty-nine years, from 1715 to 1774. He was a very bad King, and matters went worse and worse throughout France under his rule. He spent the money of the State upon his own idle pleasures, at a time when many of his people were starving. One day as he drove into Paris, the crowds who had gathered to see him pass did not cry as usual: "Long live the King!" They yelled out savagely: "Misery, Famine, Blood!" At his council table a Minister tossed on the board a morsel of bread made from fern or bracken, and remarked: "See, Sire, this is your subjects' food."

Yet Louis never abated a jot of the taxes which the wretched starving people were called upon to pay. He even added a fresh burden, which became the most bitterly disliked of all, the hated *corvée*. Under the *corvée*, the peasants who lived near a spot where a new road was being made, were called to work upon it. Not only were they to make the road, but they were to keep it in order, and they were compelled to lend their horses and carts to fetch and carry all that was needed. For this work they were not given a single penny; the whole of it was forced labour.

There were several great wars in this reign, and much fighting with the English in India and Canada. In India the French made great headway for a time, but the English, under Clive, drove the French back, and after the Battle of Plassey in 1757, it was certain that the English would become masters of India. In 1759, James Wolfe defeated the French on the Plain of Abraham near Quebec, and thus the French power was broken in Canada. These battles took place during the great struggle known as the Seven Years' War, when Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, won much renown in battling against the armies of Louis. The war closed in 1763, and there were eleven years of peace before Louis died. But neither in war nor peace was there anything good to be said of this King, and he was lucky to die before the storm of revolution burst over his country.

CHAPTER XII

FRANCE BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

We have now come to the period which saw the greatest event in French history, the French Revolution. It is also one of the greatest events in the history of Europe, for the whole Continent from north to south, east to west, was drawn into the wild hurly-burly of fierce warfare and uproar which followed upon the rising of the French people against their rulers.

What is a revolution? It is an upsetting of the old order of things; it is a time when the man turns against his master, and snatches authority from the master's hand. Then the latter has either to beat down his former servant, or to fly to save his life.

The masters in France before the Revolution were, first of all, the King; after him, the nobles and clergy. From the King at the head to the poorest noble, they used their power badly. The rulers treated the ruled, the vast mass of the nation, as people created for their convenience, to supply them with money and to serve them. The King demanded great sums to provide armies for his wars, to surround himself with a brilliant and luxurious Court, to defray the expenses of government. The money was raised by laying heavy taxes on the people, and on the people alone; the upper classes paid nothing. The peasant, the farmer, the townsman, from their scanty purses were drawn the large sums required. Here was a very great injustice which was plain to all men. But the royal taxes were not all; after the King, the nobles.

In the hundred years before the Revolution, the French nobility had deserted their country homes for the Court, and their days were spent at Paris, Versailles, or Fontainebleau. Their castles stood empty, their faces were no more seen among their tenants, but their calls for money were unceasing. They wished to shine at Court, and this demanded a heavy outlay, and the last farthing was wrung from the peasant's little hoard. The power of feudal days still existed in the hands of a French noble, though the conditions of feudal life had long since gone.

The noble used these powers to lay very heavy conditions on his tenants. The small farmer had to pay rent for his land in three ways: in coin, in kind, and in labour. Very often the money-rent was an ample sum to cover the value of the holding, but he was far from being quits with his master. He had next to pay the rent in kind: so much corn, so much butter, so many cheeses, so many fowls, to be sent to the big house. Then came the rent in labour: he had to mend the roads of his master, help to till the fields, and to find horse and cart whenever there were loads to carry. He had to pay dues to his lord at times of marriage or of death; he was bound to grind his corn at his lord's mill, to press his grapes, his olives, and his walnuts at his lord's press, to bake his bread at his lord's oven—and for all these he must pay.

Nor was he yet at the end of his burdens; there were still the terrible *corvées*. We have spoken of the *corvee* of forced labour to make and repair roads, but the lord of an estate himself had the right to make a *corvee* by decree, and the wretched tenants knew not from day to day when a fresh burden might be laid upon them. Sometimes the decree was of a most unreasonable nature, such as that which forced peasants to beat the water in a moat all night lest the frogs by their croaking should disturb the sleep of the lord in his chateau.

But no matter how unjust or how foolish the demands made upon the peasant, he had to submit. If he refused to pay, or perform a task, heavy fines were laid on him, and the officers of the law were soon at the door of his house to seize all that he owned, to hale him off to prison, to flogging, and, very often, to torture. The result of this grinding oppression was to take all heart out of the people. Of what use was it to work and be thrifty when your hard-earned gain would be torn from you to be wasted in Paris? It was of no use, and in many places the peasants sank into despair, and allowed their corn-fields and pastures to become overgrown with rushes and brambles, to return to bog or marsh or forest, as it once had been.

SPLENDOUR AND GAIETY AMONG THE RICH AND GREAT.
THE GREAT STAIRCASE AT VERSAILLES BEFORE THE REVOLUTION.

Thoughtful men in France saw these evils, and warned those in power that such cruel treatment would end in dreadful troubles. One great writer, speaking from the depths of his heart in fierce pity, thus describes the French peasants:

"There be certain savage and shy wild animals, male and female, which are scattered up and down our countryside. They are sunburned to a sort of dull black, and walk bent towards the earth they dig; on straightening themselves they show, it is true, a human face, and, in fact, they are men and women. They withdraw from the fields at nightfall to their dens, where they sup on black bread, roots and water. They spare their fellow-men the labours of seed-time and harvest, and do not deserve to lack the bread they sow."

This, then, was the state of France before the Revolution—splendour and gaiety among the rich and great; black, grinding misery among the toiling masses.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

The grandson of Louis XV. came to the throne in 1774 as Louis XVI. He was an honest, well-meaning young man, but far from being clever or strong, and by no means the kind of King required in the dreadful times which were near at hand. For at last there was growing up in the minds of the French people a resolve that they would endure their miseries in patience no longer. They had long groaned in secret; now their cries of complaint began to turn to angry mutterings, their sufferings made them desperate, and many of them began to say that if the King and his ministers could do nothing for them, it was time for them to do something for themselves.

One of the King's ministers did try to do something: he proposed that the nobles and gentry should take a share of the grievous load of taxation. A meeting of Notables, the chief men in the kingdom, was called to consider this proposal; it was put aside, and the upper classes refused to lighten in any degree the burden laid upon their poorer fellow-citizens. Louis himself was of no service in these difficulties. He spent his time in making locks, for that was his great hobby, and he seemed to have no idea of the way in which to govern a kingdom. His wife, Marie Antoinette, was a gay, lively woman, very fond of amusements, kind-hearted and good-natured, but occupied with her own concerns, and not thinking about the state of her people.

In 1789 a most important step was taken: a meeting was called of the States-General. Nearly two hundred years had passed since the assembly had gathered last, and in that long interval misgovernment, waste, and oppression had thrown the affairs of France into the utmost confusion and disorder. But from this moment things began to move rapidly towards the more terrible confusion of that frightful outbreak which was the French Revolution.

The deputies of the Third Estate came to Versailles, the meeting-place, full of the wrongs of those who had sent them there, the common people. They broke away from the First and Second Estates, the clergy and the nobles, and formed themselves into a National Assembly. They took a solemn oath that they would not separate until they had put right the evils which were crushing the people of France.

Next the people of Paris rose in fierce revolt and attacked the Bastille, a great fortress prison. It was hated because so many victims of State tyranny and unjust laws had been shut up there. The mob seized arms wherever they could find them, and put on ribbons of red, white, and blue, the tricolour of the Revolution and the Republic. They stormed the Bastille, set its prisoners free, and destroyed it: the Revolution had begun. When the news of this rising spread through the country there were wild doings in many places. The angry peasants flew upon the castles and manor-houses of their lords, plundered and burned them, and often slew without mercy every living creature they found there.

Great numbers of nobles fled from the country, and it would have been well for Louis XVI. if he had done the same. But he remained at his palace of Versailles until he was fetched by the people to Paris. Here the royal family were little better than prisoners in the palace of the Tuileries, and in 1791 they also made an attempt to escape and leave France. In the dead of night they stole away in a coach, and set off on the road to Germany. But the plan of escape was clumsy, and so slowly did the party travel, that when the postmaster of a village suspected them and stayed their flight, messengers from Paris were soon on the spot to take them back.

From this time Louis XVI. was a prisoner, and his reign was at an end. France now fell into the greatest disorder, for there were many parties among the revolutionists, and they could not agree and came to strife, when the most violent had their own way. In August, 1792, the revolutionists attacked the royal palace of the Tuileries, and slew the Swiss guards who remained faithful to the King. Next, Louis and his family were shut up in the Temple, a gloomy old fortress, and great numbers of his friends were thrown into the prisons of Paris. A foolish rumour arose that these prisoners were forming a plot against the people of Paris, and the jails were attacked by the mob. The prisoners were driven out among crowds of armed people, who hacked and tore them to pieces.

Later in the same year, France was proclaimed a republic, and Louis XVI. was put on his trial as an enemy of the people. He was Condemned to death, and in January, 1793, his head was struck off by the guillotine. He died calmly and bravely. He attempted to address the vast crowd which had gathered to watch his head fall. But his voice was drowned by the rolling of drums, and with the last words of an attendant priest in his ears: "Son of St. Louis, ascend to heaven!" he submitted himself to his fate.

CHAPTER XIV

REIGN OF TERROR AND RISE OF NAPOLEON

After the death of the King, there was less peace in France than ever. The country was ruled by a Convention, and in this assembly one party struggled with another, and the fate of the members of the beaten party was always the same: they were hurried to the guillotine, and their heads fell beneath the great knife. The prisons were crammed with hosts of people, often quite innocent, who were supposed to be enemies of the Republic. These unhappy victims were sent to death in large batches, and the guillotine was kept in constant employment.

The most powerful party in the Convention was that of the Jacobins, wild, fierce, slovenly people, who loved to go dirty and ragged to show that they belonged to, or were in sympathy with, the lowest orders. They were never satisfied with aught save the death of those whom they disliked, and under their great leaders Marat and Robespierre, the Reign of Terror was begun. This was a time when no man's head was safe on his shoulders. It was enough if a Jacobin pointed to him as an enemy of the people. He was seized, sent before a court called the "Revolutionary Tribunal," and thence to the guillotine. This fury for blood raged throughout the land. In many cities the guillotine was set up, yet it did not work quickly enough to destroy those who were seized. Men, women, and children were shot down, were drowned, were torn to pieces by howling mobs.

Marat did not live long to enjoy his dreadful power. A young woman named Charlotte Corday was so stirred by his cruel treatment of some of her friends that she resolved to destroy him. She gained admittance to his room, and, while talking to him, seized the chance to plunge a dagger to the hilt in his heart. She was sentenced to die, and went calmly and bravely to the guillotine. This was in July, 1793, and a few months later Marie Antoinette herself was brought to the scaffold.

France was now in a state of the greatest turmoil and confusion. There was war in the land, for in the western province of La Vendee the people rose and fought with the Republic. There was war along the frontier, for almost every nation in Europe was against the revolutionists. Party fought with party in city and village, and everywhere the winners in the strife slew their enemies and spared not. All the troubles of all the centuries had come to a head at once, and France in 1793 was like a huge, seething cauldron.

The Reign of Terror was ended by the death of the man who had a great share in setting it afoot—Robespierre himself. He had sent numbers to the guillotine, and many who sat with him in the Convention began to suspect they would be his next victims.

A party was formed against him, and suddenly the very accusation that he had made against many others was made against him: he was denounced as an enemy of the Republic. He tried to commit suicide by shooting himself; but failed. He was brought before the Revolutionary Tribunal, sentenced to death, and sent to the guillotine. With the fall of his head, the Reign of Terror was ended. Executions now stopped, and order slowly came back to Paris.

In the government of the country, the Convention was followed by a Directory, a body of five men chosen to rule France. The Directory lasted about four years, and during this time a great soldier was steadily winning the heart of France: this was the famous Napoleon Bonaparte. Napoleon was a native of Corsica, and when the Revolution broke out he was a young officer in the French army. He became famous when he took the town of Toulon from the English, who had seized it, and soon Napoleon was made a General. He became one of the greatest commanders the world has ever known, and led the French army to victory after victory in Italy

In 1799 the Directory was overturned, and Bonaparte became the chief man in France, under the title of First Consul. At first it was agreed that he should hold this power for ten years, but in 1802 the nation resolved that he should be Consul for life. Napoleon was powerful in France because he was the idol of the army, and because of his great victories, which filled the French people with pride and delight. He overcame almost every nation in Europe but Britain, and in 1804 he prepared a great army to cross the English Channel. But the British fleet watched every movement so closely that he did not dare to embark his troops, and he marched away to overthrow the Emperors of Austria and Russia at the great battle of Austerlitz. This battle is sometimes called the "Battle of the Three Emperors," for by this time Napoleon had become Emperor of the French, and France was thus ruled by an Emperor instead of a King.

Napoleon now seemed to be master of the Continent. He carved the map almost as he pleased, made his brothers kings, and his power in France was as great as that of any of her former rulers. By sea he was not so fortunate as by land, for the British fleet beat his ships time and again; the greatest British victory was won at Trafalgar in 1805, where Nelson fell.

In 1812, Napoleon's power received a great blow. He invaded Russia with a vast army and seized Moscow. The Russians set the city on fire, and the French were compelled to retreat. It was winter, and the French troops fell fast from hunger and cold. Of the splendid army which had entered Russia, only a wretched remnant recrossed the frontier. Now his enemies gathered against him, and he was beaten at the great battle of Leipzig in 1814. The Austrians, Prussians, and Russians, marched into France, and the allied forces entered Paris. Napoleon was forced to resign his crown, and was sent as an exile to the island of Elba.

The brother of Louis XVI. was now made King under the title of Louis XVIII., and there was peace for a short time. But in 1815 Napoleon escaped from Elba, landed in France, and marched on Paris. He had trusted to the magic of his name, and he did not trust in vain. His old soldiers flocked to rejoin him in their thousands, and the French welcomed him with joy, for they did not like Louis XVIII.

NAPOLEON'S RETREAT FROM RUSSIA—THE PASSAGE OF THE BERESINA.

The Allies quickly gathered their forces to assail Napoleon once more, and an English army was sent to Belgium under the Duke of Wellington. Here the French met the English and Germans at the great battle of Waterloo, which ended in the utter overthrow of Napoleon. Now it was resolved to shut him up securely, and he was sent to the little island of St. Helena in the Atlantic. Five years later he died, and was buried there, but some time afterwards his body was taken to France and laid in a splendid tomb in a church in Paris.

CHAPTER XV

LATER DAYS

After Napoleon had been sent to St. Helena, Louis XVIII. was brought back to Paris, and the Allies set up the House of Bourbon once more. This King was known as Louis XVIII., because Louis XVI. left a son who died a year or two after his father. The Royalist party looked upon this boy as Louis XVII., and so the new King was called Louis XVIII. The latter ruled nine years, and was followed by his brother, Charles X., who held the throne from 1824 to 1830. In the latter year he quarrelled with his subjects, and the people of Paris threw up barricades in the streets and prepared to fight for their rights. Upon this, Charles gave up the crown and retired from France, and his cousin, the Duke of Orleans, became King under the name of Louis Philippe.

This King reigned eighteen years, and was known as King of the French, not King of France. His title showed that he had been chosen King by the French people, and that he had not come to the throne by right of birth as a King of France. Louis Philippe was, on the whole, a well-meaning but not at all an able ruler, and very often the acts of his ministers gave much offence to the people. In 1848 the discontent rose to such a height that a sudden revolution broke out in Paris, and again the barricades were flung up in the streets and there was sharp fighting. The mob attacked the Royal Palace, and the King and his family were compelled to fly from Paris. With the flight of Louis Philippe the rule of the House of Bourbon came to an end, and a second Republic was set up in France.

NAPOLEON AT FONTAINEBLEAU, 1914

This Republic only lasted four years. Its President was Louis Napoleon, nephew of the great Napoleon, a man who wished to follow in his uncle's footsteps. His aim was to make himself Emperor, and he succeeded. He won over the army to his side, and in 1852 he overturned the Republic and seized the throne. He was crowned Emperor of the French under the title of Napoleon III. He was a friend of Queen Victoria, and in 1855 the English and the French were allies against Russia in the war fought in the Crimea. Later on, the French grew very dissatisfied with their Emperor. He ruled badly and he was no longer popular, as he once had been.

In 1870, Napoleon went to war with Germany. He thought the French would be sure to beat the Germans, and that the war would draw the attention of the French people from his failure to govern well. But things turned out quite otherwise. The French armies suffered most terrible defeats at the hands of the Germans, and the latter marched across France and laid siege to Paris. They had already taken Napoleon prisoner, and the French people turned against their Emperor, took his throne from him, and declared for a Republic, the Third Republic, which still exists.

The Germans seized Paris, and a treaty of peace was made. By this treaty France gave up the province of Alsace-Lorraine to the victors, and agreed to pay an immense sum of money for the expenses of the war. Napoleon, with his wife and son, retired to England. Within two years Napoleon died, his son was killed fighting with the English army in Africa, and his wife, the Empress Eugenie, still lives among us.

More than forty years have passed since the Third Republic was set up, and it seems to-day to be more firmly fixed than ever in the hearts of the French people. It has been a time of peace, and France has prospered greatly under the rule of the Presidents, who hold office for a term of seven years. Best of all, in these latter days we have seen a strong and warm friendship grow up between France and England. The English Channel unites, and no more divides, the two nations, and the French and English are, as neighbours ought to be, good friends and comrades, linked closely together in a bond of friendly understanding.