

peculiar solemnity attached to an oath, which they intended should be binding on them. Very frequently it consisted in laying their hand, as they swore, on their own drawn dirk; which dagger, becoming a party to the transaction, was invoked to punish any breach of faith. But by whatever ritual the oath was sanctioned, the party was extremely desirous to keep secret what the especial oath was, which he considered as irrevocable. This was a matter of great convenience, as he felt no scruple in breaking his asseveration, when made in any other form than that which he accounted as peculiarly solemn, and therefore readily granted any engagement which bound him no longer than he inclined. Whereas, if the oath which he accounted inviolable was once publicly known, no party with whom he might have occasion to contract, would have rested satisfied with any other. Louis XI. of France practised the same sophistry, for he also had a peculiar species of oath, the only one which he was ever known to respect, and which, therefore, he was very unwilling to pledge. The only engagement which that wily tyrant accounted binding upon him, was an oath by the Holy Cross of Saint Lo d'Angers, which contained a portion of the True Cross. If he prevaricated after taking this oath, Louis believed he should die within the year. The Constable Saint Paul, being invited to a personal conference with Louis, refused to meet the king unless he would agree to ensure him safe conduct under sanction of this oath. But, says Comines, the king replied, he would never again pledge that engagement to mortal man, though he was willing to take any other oath which could be devised. The treaty broke off, therefore, after much chaffering concerning the nature of the vow which Louis was to take. Such is the difference between the dictates of superstition and those of conscience.

THE END