

HOW FRANCE SAVED THE THIRTEEN COLONIES.



THE name of Beaumarchais is, no doubt, well-known as the author of the Barber of Seville, the Marriage of Figaro, and other dramatic works. How many know that it was chiefly to his efforts the Thirteen Colonies were indebted for the timely help they received in their darkest hour? Yet but for him the assistance given by France would probably never have been thought of, although the gratitude for such services was not strongly marked on the part of the United States, when the Colonies had gained their independence.

The son of Caron, a watchmaker in Paris, born in 1732, over a little workshop in the rue St. Denis, young Caron became a watchmaker in turn, introduced improvements in time keepers, which brought him to the notice of the King, Louis XV., obtained a small place at Court, married the widow of his predecessor in office, and took the name of de Beaumarchais, from a fief, real or imaginary (the latter apparently being the fact, as there is no evidence of its existence), and began slowly to make his way upwards, assisted by his talent for music, in which he undertook to instruct the King's daughters, who gave private concerts under his direction. These brought him into personal intercourse with the King, and with many of the higher nobility,—an opportunity of advancing himself, of which he had the talent to take full advantage. He in his lifetime played many parts. To use the words of his ablest biographer. "The astonishing variety of his aptitudes brought him into contact with the greatest variety of men and things, and urged him to play by turns, sometimes simultaneously, the most contradictory characters. Watchmaker, musician, song writer, dramatist, comic author, man-about-town, courtier, man of business, financier, manufacturer, editor, fitter-out of privateers, contractor, secret agent, negotiator, publicist, occasionally a tribune of the people, peaceful from inclination, yet always engaged in controversies, and, like his own Figaro, a jack of all trades, he was mixed up with most of the large or small events which preceded the Revolution."

A study of the life of Beaumarchais would prove that this sketch is on the whole a true summary of the man, although he was not so important as his partial biographer assumes. Much of the history of his negotiations is not of an edifying kind, being secret investigations to save the character of people, some of whose characters were not worth saving. Into these and other incidents of his life it is not, for the present purpose, necessary to inquire, but before speaking of the efforts he made to furnish the American Colonies with munitions of war, and make of this a good commercial speculation to his own profit, it may be necessary to see what training Beaumarchais had received to enable him to manage a very complicated business transaction, which was not the less so because it had far-reaching political effects.

It was whilst engaged as music master and general fetcher and carrier for the princesses, that the opportunity came and found the man ready to derive all the benefit that could be gained from it. Paris Duvernay, a rich financier and confidential agent for Madame de Pompadour, a lady of a not irreproachable character, desirous to be remembered for something useful, projected a military school, which, although strongly objected to, was, through the determination of his patroness, the King's mistress, founded by an edict of January, 1751. But the disasters of the seven years war had a serious effect on the influence of Madame de Pompadour, and before the building was ready the enterprise threatened to collapse. In vain Duvernay tried every influence to secure the royal patronage for his institution, or to obtain the favour of a visit from the King, which might be, in some sort, considered as a consecration of the work. The Dauphin, the Queen, the Princesses regarded it with hostility as being a project favoured and protected by Madame de Pompadour, and the King was too easy going to trouble himself to oppose the well understood desires of his family. Duvernay employed the young music master to effect that in which others had failed. He adroitly succeeded in getting the Princesses to visit the school, and they in turn acted as his unconscious tools, and induced the King to honour