

The king then asked him several questions, which had not the least connection with each other. A trial of wit, which in those days was much used at the courts of sovereign princes. And this is the substance of the discourse, as it is preserved in the ancient records of the country.—What thing is that which flies the swiftest? cried the monarch.—Thought, answered Bertholde.—What is the gulf that is never filled?—The avarice of the miser.—What is most hateful in young people?—Self-conceit, because it makes them incorrigible.—What is most ridiculous in the old?—Love.—Who are most lavish of their caresses?—Those who intend to deceive us, and those who have already done it.—What are the things most dangerous in a house?—A wicked wife, and the tongue of a servant.—What is the husband's most incurable disease?—The infidelity of his wife.—What way will you take to bring water in a sieve?—I'll stay till it is frozen.—How will you catch a hare without running?—I will wait till I find her on the spit.

The king was astonished at the readiness with which he answered these questions; and to let him see his satisfaction, promised to give him any thing he could desire. I defy you, replied Bertholde, bluntly.—How so, replied his majesty? Do you doubt my good will? No; but I aspire after what you do not possess, and consequently cannot give to me.—And what is this precious thing that I do not possess? Felicity, which was never in the power of kings, who enjoy less of it than the rest of mankind.—How! am I not happy on so elevated a throne?—Yes, if the happiness of a man consists in the height of his seat.—Do you see these lords and gentlemen that are continually about me, would they be always ready to obey me, if they were not convinced of my power?—And do you not see in your turn, that there are as many crows, waiting to devour a carcase, and who, to prevent its seeing their designs, begin by picking out its eyes.—Well, said, but all this does not hinder me from shining in the midst of them, as the sun amongst the stars. True, but tell me shining sun, how many eclipses you are obliged to suffer in a year? Why do you put this question? Because the continual flattery of these gentlemen will raise a cloud that must darken your understanding. On this foot then, you would not be a courtier? Miserable as I am, I should be sorry to be placed in the rank of slaves: Besides, I am neither a knave, traitor, nor liar, and consequently have not the necessary qualities for succeeding in this fine

employment. What are you then to seek for at my court? What I have not been able to find there; for I had imagined a king to be as much above other men, as a steeple is above common houses; but I have soon found, that I have honoured them more than they deserve.

Of all the virtues, those of frankness and sincerity have been in every age least recompensed in a court. This Bertholde experienced; for the king shocked at the little regard he expressed for his person, told him, that if he was unwilling to be turned out in an ignominious manner, he must leave the palace immediately. He obeyed; but as he was going, he said with an air of gaiety, that he was of the nature of flies, which the more you attempt to drive away, the more obstinately they are bent on their return. I permit you to return like them, cried the monarch, provided you bring them along with you; but if you appear without them, you shall forfeit your head. Agreed, replied the peasant; to do this, I will only take a step to our village. The king gave his consent, and Bertholde hastened away. The monarch did not doubt his keeping his word; but had a great curiosity to see in what manner he would perform it, and the clown soon satisfied him; for he had no sooner reached the village, than running to a stable, belonging to one of his brothers, he took out an old ass, whose back and buttocks had lost the friendly covering of a sound skin, and mounting on his back, turned again to Verona, accompanied by an infinite number of flies riding behind him, and in this equipage arrived at the palace; when commending the fidelity with which they had stuck to his back, and attended him all the way, he told the king, that he had kept his promise; and Alboin, pleased with the stratagem, soon conceived such an idea of his abilities that he imagined he might be useful to him, in helping him to disentangle the intricacies of government, and administration of affairs.

I shall omit the various contests between Bertholde and the king, on the virtues and vices of the ladies, in which the king did justice to their merit, while our hero endeavoured to bring them into contempt. But I cannot avoid taking notice of a petition of the ladies of the court, to obtain a share in the government, and administration of affairs.

The king having read their long request, which the queen had engaged the chancellor to deliver to him, replied, that this affair being of very great importance, required his serious consideration; that he would weigh the matter, and give the