

under the masterly manipulation of Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin, the government of France had become a most perfectly organized machine, all-pervading in its touch, and reaching more intimately into the affairs of the individual and of private life than the world has ever seen elsewhere. The old, oppressive feudal relations, like iron chains, still bound the people. A man was not of nearly so much consequence as the lapdog of some lady of the court. It was the grand Louis who said, "*L'état, c'est moi*," "The State—it is I." And he had no more liberal thought than that every person, and thing, and right in the land should be subservient to his personal pleasure. If the people were worse than slaves, that was to his thought their providential destiny. The people, the toiling masses, had no influence whatever in the affairs of the nation; but they paid all the taxes.

When the premonitory thunders of the coming revolution began to be heard in the distance, when the only history of the period was continual deficits in the revenue, Turgot, the brave and trusted minister of finance, proposed to tax the nobility and clergy the same as other ranks, in order to raise a revenue. But a great tempest of indignation and astonishment arose, and when it had passed, Turgot no longer had control of the finances. Why, these grand people asked, what was the use of being noble if they must pay taxes like other men? Life would not be worth having. These classes wished, as had been the habit in the past, to be maintained in luxury and idleness by the toil, and sweat, and tears, and hunger, and blood, of the despised millions. He would be in sympathy with all tyrannies who could not sympathize with Voltaire's abhor-

rence of the French Government, and even with the polished shafts his wit hurled against it.

Then there was the Church, degraded and demoralized beyond what is credible to men who live to-day. It was bankrupt in religious principle and conviction; its chief guides were so vicious in life that no statement of their sins could be a slander; it was the nurse of the rankest superstitions; it ruled by judgments formed never in reason, but always in prejudice; it held over the minds of all men the darkening terrors of unspeakable torment, "burning ever, consuming never," for every act of disobedience to its authority. Within its pale, or without, individual thought was infidelity, and manly, independent action was a crime!

Of the religious ignorance of the day one instance will furnish a striking illustration. The Baron de Breteuil was the reader—the literary man—the learned member of the court of Louis XIV. At dinner one day a gay lady ventured a wager that he could not tell who was the author of the Lord's prayer. Now, as he did not go to dinners prepared to pass an examination, his answer was not ready; but pretty soon a lawyer sitting near him whispered in his ear, and then the learned Baron brought up the subject again, and said with becoming dignity that he supposed every one knew that Moses was the author of the Lord's Prayer!

Now, in another condition of things, would France have given to the world just the same Voltaire it did give? Did not the abuses of the age both merit and inspire the pitiless hailstorm of mockery and satire poured indiscriminately against Government, and Church, and society? Here, then, we must find one factor of great importance