HISTORY

OF THE

MISFORTUNES

OF

JOHN CALAS,

A VICTIM to FANATICISM.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

A LETTER from M. CALAS

TO HIS

WIFE and CHILDREN;

Written by M. DE VOLTAIRE.

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MDCCLXXII.

L I S T

OF THE

NOBILITY and GENTRY

Who have SUBSCRIBED to relieve the

FAMILY OF CALAS.

HER MAJESTY.

His Grace the ARCHBISHOP of Canterbury

Their Graces the DUCHESSES of

Norfolk
Montagu

Their Graces the DUKES of

Montagu
Newcastle
Devonshire
Marlborough
Rutland
Portland
Kingston
Gordon
Queensbury
Chandos
Manchester
Grafton
Leeds

The

Sir William Beauchamp Proctor
His Excellency Sir William Hamilton
Sir Joseph Yorke
Sir Henry Bridgeman
Hon. John Buller
Gen. Cholmondeley
Sir George Colebrooke
Mr. Crew
Hon. Mr. Damer
Hon. Sir Will. De Grey
Mr. Thomas Dundas
Hon. Mr. Dyson
Hon. Welbore Ellis
Hon. Mr. Fitz-Maurice
Mr. Fitz-Patrick
Col. Fitzroy
Mr. Foley
Mess. Charles and Stephen Fox
Gen. Gra'me
Sir John Griffin
Mr. Grosvenor
Gen. Howard
Gen. Smith
Mr. Laroche
Hon. James Stuart Mackenzie
Sir William Meredith
Sir Francis Molineux
Hon. George Onslow
Mr. George Pitt
Mr. Thomas Pitt
Mr. William Pulteney
Mr. Hewet
Mr. Stevens
Hon. Will. Tollemache
Hon. Thomas Townshend sen.
Thomas Townshend jun.
Hon. Frederick Vane
Hon. Major Vernon
Mr. Wedderburne
Sir George Yonge
Mr. Archibald Douglas
Mr. St. Leger Douglas
Mr. Roper
Mr. Bussier
Mr. Bossanquet
Mr. Townstall
Admiral Forbes

MISFORTUNES

OF THE

FAMILY OF CALAS.

JOHN CALAS was a reputable merchant at Toulouze, where he had been ſettled for the ſpace of forty years. His honeſt principles in dealing, the ſweetneſs of his temper, and the regularity of his morals, had acquired him the eſteem of the greateſt and beſt part of his countrymen. He had married a lady allied to the beſt nobility of the province of Languedoc; but who was leſs diſtinguiſhed by her high birth, than for her exemplary

virtue, and the qualifications of her heart. The only objection that could be made to their character was their being both Proteſtants; and it was a crime, and a capital one, to follow the principles of their fathers.

But if Calas, in the opinion of the Roman-Catholics, was criminal in following a religion different from theirs, they knew very well, that, far from being an enemy to their profeſſion, he had in his houſe a ſervant-maid, a Roman-Catholic of extraordinary piety, who had ſerved in the family no leſs than thirty years; that ſhe received the holy communion every week; and that ſhe had been a nurſe and governeſs to the children, who were all Proteſtants.

The number of Calas's children was ſix; viz. four ſons, Marc-Antony, John-Peter, Lewis, and Lewis-Donat; with two daughters, Anna-Roſe, and Anna.

Marc-Antony, the eldeſt of the ſons, was the only one who did not profit by an excellent education, which this

virtuous

virtuous and beſt of fathers had endeavoured to beſtow on all his children.

He poſſeſſed a great degree of underſtanding; but his fondneſs for diſſipation prevented his making that uſe of it for which Providence deſigns ſo invaluable a bleſſing. His being under the tuition of a father grew every day more irkſome to him; he ſighed for independency, but his want of fortune prevented his attaining it. The billiard-table, fencing, tennis-court, and other faſhionable amuſements, engroſſed his whole attention. Thus without fortune, deſtitute of reſource, obliged to curb his inclinations, ſo humiliating was his ſituation, that life grew burdenſome to him. Reſtraint at length became ſo intolerable, and danger ſo indifferent, that, about a month before his death, he ſaid to a friend, whoſe name was Châlié, that he was reſolved to go to Geneva, in order to be under a miniſter, and would return to preach among the Proteſtants in France. "My dear Sir, ſaid his friend, that

" trade is very bad which brings us
" to the gallows *." " Well then, re-
" plied he, I have thought on another
" ſcheme, that I will put in execution."

From this time he became thoughtful, melancholy, ſeldom read any other authors than Seneca, Montagne, Shakeſpear, &c. and would often, in a very expreſſive manner, repeat thoſe words, " To die; to die, to ſleep;" and then return to be the prey of gloomy thoughts, and appear as if oppreſſed with the heavieſt misfortunes.

On the thirteenth of October, 1761, he executed his dreadful deſign; on the very ſame day he had invited to ſupper one of his intimate friends, whoſe name was Lavayſe. As this young gentleman is involved in the preſent affair, it is indiſpenſably neceſſary to make him known.

He is ſon to one of the moſt celebrated lawyers of Toulouze, who de-

* In France, a Proteſtant miniſter is hanged, when convicted of having preached to a congregation.

ſervedly

ſervedly bears an excellent character. Nature has been pleaſed to beſtow on this youth the beſt qualifications; and has added to a good diſpoſition the moſt noble appearance, though he is but nineteen years old.

In order to explain, in few words, by what fatality he became entangled in the misfortunes of Calas, the reader muſt be informed, that his father, who had ſettled him with one of the moſt reputable merchants of Bourdeaux, had juſt ſent for him home; and that, on his arrival at Toulouze, he heard his father was at his country-houſe at Caraman. In his way, he paid a viſit to Marc-Antony, who invited him to ſtay to ſupper; and John Calas, the father, did every thing in his power to induce him to do ſo. It was but five o'clock; the young Lavayſe promiſed to return; and then went to hire a horſe, in order to proceed on his journey to his father's the next morning. About ſeven o'clock he came again, and was introduced into Madame

Calass

Calas's apartment. She was there, with her huſband and her ſon Marc-Antony. This unhappy ſon ſaw his friend enter, without even riſing from the elbow-chair in which he ſat, or ſpeaking a word; having his hand upon his forehead, looking very wild, and ſeeming abſorbed in thought. But as for ſome time he had been very melancholy, his relations did not take notice of his preſent dullneſs; and in a few minutes they all went into another room, where ſupper was ſerved up.

Calas the father, his lady, the two brothers, Marc-Antony and Peter, with the young Lavayſe, compoſed the company; Lavayſe being the only ſtranger among them. Marc-Antony eat very little, roſe from the table before any other perſon, and left the room. He went into the kitchen: "Are you cold, "Mr. Calas, ſaid the cook to him?" "On the contrary, ſaid he, I am on "fire;" and directly went away.

The ſupper over, Mr. and Mrs. Calas, their ſon Peter, with the young Lavayſe, went

went again into Mrs. Calas's apartment, without taking any notice of Marc-Antony's abſence; ſuppoſing he was, according to cuſtom, gone to ſome billiard-table. Without apprehending any danger, they began a converſation, which laſted till young Lavayſe deſired leave to retire; when Peter Calas attended him down ſtairs, with a light. But going through the paſſage which led to the ſtreet-door, they obſerved the ſhop-door to be open; and going in to ſee the cauſe, what conſternation! what a dreadful ſight! they ſaw the body of Marc-Antony hanging up, between the two openings of the door which communicated from the ſhop to the warehouſe.

Seized with horror, their piercing cries frighten the father Calas, who haſtily comes to them. What does he behold? It is out of human power to deſcribe the ſituation in which he finds himſelf! He cannot but lament with them, and join their mournful concert.

concert. His wife, who hears him, comes down; wants to follow him; Lavayſe flies to prevent her, and intreats her to return up ſtairs; hoping to conceal from her ſo terrible a ſcene. While he is buſied to hinder her entrance, the father, and the brother Peter, take down the corpſe, and lay it on the floor. Hope inſpires Lavayſe to ſeek a ſurgeon, and Peter to do the ſame. They bring him. In the mean while, the mother being free, trembling ſeeks the cauſe of ſuch diſtreſs. What a ſource of ſorrow to a mother! She ſees her ſon breathleſs upon the floor! Her ſwelling grief muſt ſurely burſt her heart, without relief from tears! She throws herſelf upon her ſon, and with theſe friendly tears ſhe bathes his lifeleſs body. She takes him up, and endeavours to renew his life, but in vain. In vain would ſhe doubt of her misfortune; the ſurgeon with great care examines the corpſe; finds it cold, and judges that Marc-Antony has been dead two hours.

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The cries of this diſtreſſed family ſoon reached beyond their walls; and the populace, hearing Marc-Antony had died ſuddenly, gathered round the houſe, but without knowing the fatal cauſe of his cataſtrophe.

When the relations of this unhappy youth recovered the powers of recollection, and reflected on this event, they reſolved, that, in order to preſerve this unfortunate ſuicide from an ignominious ſentence *, they ſhould not publiſh the manner of his death, but keep it a profound ſecret; and therefore, when the father Calas requeſted young Lavayſe to wait on the juſtices for leave to bury the body of his ſon, "I beg, ſaid he to that young "man, you will take particular care, "for the honour of our unhappy fa-"mily, not to let any perſon know "my ſon deſtroyed himſelf."

* In France, the corpſe of a perſon who deſtroys himſelf is condemned to be drawn on a ſledge; which puniſhment reflects as much on the family, as on the memory of the dead.

The capitouls *, David and Brieve, came to the place, and were eye-witneſſes of the inexpreſſible grief of the whole family; but while they expected the arrival of ſome reputable perſons of the faculty, in order to give an account of the cauſe of this melancholy event, which had given ſuch an alarm to every-body, the mob, who beſieged the door; the mob, enemies to the Proteſtants; the mob, who are fond of unlucky and extraordinary events, began upon this to make ſuch conjectures as their malice dictated; and one of them began to ſay loudly, that Marc-Antony Calas was a martyr; and that his father had killed him becauſe he would have turned a Roman-Catholic.

This report coming to the ears of Mr. David, the capitoul, he took it for granted; and the execution of his office, as a juſtice and a judge, having made him familiar with the wickedneſs of men, he found nothing extraordinary

* A capitoul is the chief magiſtrate in Toulouze.

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in this crime; the atrocious crime, however improbable, imputed to that innocent, worthy, and unhappy family ſeemed to him very poſſible, and, as I ſaid before, he took it for granted.

From that moment he became inexorable; he ſaid nothing but vindicating offended Heaven, and avowed his hopes of overturning and extirpating very ſoon all the Proteſtant families in the country.

He ordered into cuſtody the family of Calas, with young Lavayſe, and even the ſervant. It was in vain that his colleague, wiſer than himſelf, deſired him to conſider well upon an affair of ſuch conſequence: In vain he repreſented to him the diſtreſs and grief of the family; their laudable endeavours to bring again that unhappy ſon to life; the diſpoſition, place, hour, and other circumſtances of the ſuppoſed crime; ſince it was in the evening; in one of the moſt frequented ſtreets, that Mark-Antony was found dead. But above all he repreſented, that the

ſacred connection of father, mother, and ſon, rejected ſuch a cruel ſuſpicion; and, among thoſe who had ſpread ſuch an abominable apparent lye, not one was bold enough to avow himſelf the author of it; and concluded with ſaying, that the commitment of thoſe innocent and unhappy perſons would give credit and conſiſtence to this vague and improbable ſtory: "Well, it "does not ſignify, replied David, vio-"lently; I will take upon me the "conſequence of it; they ſhall all be "put in irons, and ſent to gaol."

Every thing that the colleague of the capitoul had foretold proved to be true: The ſight of the priſoners gave to the lower ſort of people an idea of their guilt; and afterwards a common report ran in Toulouze, that David certainly had made ſome important and intereſting diſcoveries in this affair, otherwiſe he would not have proceeded to ſuch extremity againſt people of their reputation; who, by the character they bore, were above all ſuſ-

picion;

picion; and that very probably they had been diſcovered even in the action of ſtrangling their ſon Marc-Antony themſelves.

As for the poor unhappy, innocent priſoners, overwhelmed with grief, they were following the corpſe of their unhappy ſon under a ſtrong guard, little ſuppoſing what would be the conſequence of their commitment. They imagined they were carried away only to juſtify the cauſe of the event, according to the proofs which they were able to give, and which were ſtrong enough to prove the ſuicide of their ſon.

When they were aſked how Marc-Antony died, they gave ſuch an anſwer as they had before agreed on; parental affection only being capable of dictating to them a falſhood: They ſaid, that "they had found Marc-Antony dead "upon the floor;" far from even fearing that ſuch a falſe report of the ſuicide would bring upon them a ſuſpicion of murder. Upon this declaration, they were decreed and ordered

to

to be all put into confinement, and ſeparately. It was at this time they were informed, that they were ſuſpected of having murdered their ſon. What a dreadful addition was this to miſeries, already great beyond expreſſion! This new, this more than ignominious miſfortune, entirely overwhelmed them! At the charge, they became motionleſs, penetrated with extreme grief, for this cruel imputation, together with the loſs of a beloved ſon.

It was only at the town-hall that Mr. David, the capitoul, ſtated the fact in writing, and put a date from the houſe where the ſuppoſed treſpaſs had been committed; wherefore the priſoners proteſted againſt it: But the capitoul was ſo inveterate, that he not only prevented this proteſt from being ſerviceable to them, but even the attorney whom they employed was interdicted for three months.

Nevertheleſs, the ſuppoſed parricide was the ſubject of converſation to the whole city; every one agreed, that

Calas

Calas the father had, with his wife, made their ſon Marc-Antony a victim to their hatred for the Roman-Catholic religion: And though there was the higheſt improbability and even incredibility in this ſtory, yet a miſtaken fondneſs for the religion of the country, together with bigotry and fanaticiſm, gave a ſanction to it. Whether from ſimplicity, compaſſion, exceſs of piety, or of malice, every Roman-Catholic uſed all his endeavours to add ſomething to the calumny: "It was "tomorrow, ſaid one, that Marc-An-"tony was to have renounced the "errors of Proteſtantiſm." "The rite "of the Proteſtants, ſaid another, "orders fathers in ſuch a caſe to kill "their children." "You ſpeak ſo "true, ſaid a third, that in their laſt "meeting they appointed an execu-"tioner of the ſect."

As for thoſe who had heard the cries of the father Calas at the ſight of the corpſe of his ſon, they did not fail to aſſert that they were the cries of the

martyr,

martyr, when he was ſtruggling againſt the homicide. Thus the moſt ſenſible perſons were drawn into error by the torrent of popular clamour, and the whole city was ſoon poiſoned by fanaticiſm.

At Toulouze there is a celebration of the anniverſary of the maſſacre of the Proteſtants; and that day of cruel memory being near at hand, the people, who were ready to dreſs the ſcaffold, and ſet fire to the wood-pile which was to reduce the guilty to aſhes, aſked loudly to have the victims reſerved for that day, in order to make ſolemnly a burnt-offering of the blood of a whole family.

The capitoul was highly pleaſed to ſee this temper in the people, which ſeemed to juſtify what he had done, and encouraged his proceeding in this cruel buſineſs: Nor did he fail to compliment himſelf for having been the firebrand in this cauſe, or to feel the heart-felt pleaſure of ſelf-applauſe, for this inſtance of horrid malice.

According

According to the dictates of the law in ſuch caſes, the inexorable David took his colleague to the houſe of Calas, to qualify themſelves to make a report of the place, and to examine the papers of the deceaſed. And altho' he found nothing, either in that youth's papers, or his books, which could give the ſlighteſt intimation, much leſs proof, of his pretended abjuration, yet he, the ſame day, iſſued an order for the inhumation of the corpſe among the Roman Catholics.

What a triumph was it for the populace, who ever rejoice in parade, to behold ſuch funeral pomp, paſſing from the town-hall to the cathedral church. Fifty clergymen, with one hundred of the White Penitents *, formed the proceſſion, which was followed by twenty thouſand enthuſiaſts. Who would credit it? It was to a Proteſtant that this high honour, this honour which is denied to all, was

* A congregation for religious and charitable purpoſes.

granted. In vain the rector of the parish, a very worthy man, refused to lend the use of the church for such a strange ceremony; in vain did he remonstrate, that Marc-Antony Calas had left nothing which could prove his having made an abjuration of the Protestant faith; David was deaf to every argument; for arguments must prove, that he had acted contrary to reason, as well as to humanity.

As the capitouls had ordered, that the corpse should be buried according to the Roman rite, every proof of the suicide was buried with it; since it was only by the strictest examination of the corpse, that that fact could be ascertained. Nor was this incident singular in effecting the ruin of this unfortunate family; to promote which, the malice of the capitouls was carried to such prodigious extent, that they even refused to receive the evidence of several witnesses: Some of whom could have proved, that, but a short time before Marc-Antony's death, they had

seen

ſeen him at the baptiſm of a Proteſtant, to whom he ſtood godfather. Others were ready to affirm, that he was, not many weeks then paſt, attending the meetings of the Huguenots; and that he ſpoke, with the greateſt energy, before the congregation, in defence of the excellent principles of the Proteſtant religion. Mr. Le Beau jun. could have declared, that when he was received into the ſociety of the ſtudents at law, he aſked Marc-Antony if he would not do the ſame? and was anſwered by him, that it was an impoſſibility, as, having been born in the city, he was known to be a Proteſtant, and was determined not to abjure his faith.

Theſe are juſtifying facts, which the family could have proved; but it was reſolved to impoſe ſilence upon all perſons who would have ſpoken in their behalf.

How many different impreſſions did this funeral pomp, to which all the religious orders ſent their deputies,

make on the public credulity! There was nothing to be ſeen but the greateſt extravagancies. The multitude did not pray for the dead, but invoked him as a ſaint. Some proſtrated themſelves upon the coffin of this mob-elected martyr; ſome ſought the humbler honour of only touching it; while others with enthuſiaſtic zeal cut the fringes from the pall. Nor were reports of miracles forgot to be circulated, to irritate more the deluded Romaniſts, and confirm them in their prejudices againſt this wretched family. The day after the funeral, the White Penitents celebrated a pompous ſervice for him; in the middle whereof was elevated a magnificent and noble cataſalque, upon which was an human ſkeleton, repreſenting Marc-Antony, holding in one hand a pen, the emblem of his abjuration; in the other a palm, the ſymbol of his martyrdom. Animated by the moſt indecent zeal, the Grey Friars made another monumentum, no

leſs

leſs ſcandalous; while each religious order aſpired to the pious honour of being the executioner of the priſoners.

What hope of juſtice could theſe unfortunate victims entertain, from ſuch partial, ſuch prejudiced judges; who, againſt the law, by their own private authority, had ordered this funeral pomp? Was it not an omen of their perdition? But what an hardened cruelty muſt thoſe men poſſeſs, who could not be inſenſible to their own prejudices, and yet, contrary to the laws of God and man, kept their ſeats as judges?

On the eighteenth of November following, the court of the capitouls met, in order to give their opinions, and pronounce ſentence upon the priſoners. David, that enraged perſecutor, who certainly was liable to exception, took his ſeat among his colleagues; and it has been aſſerted, that, before their meeting, he took the common hangman with him to the houſe of Calas, and then propagated a report through the

the city, that, after an impartial examination of the place, the executioner had delivered his opinion, that it was impoſſible ſuicide ſhould have been there committed.

Contrary to the eſtabliſhed cuſtom of judging criminals in the morning, when the ſenſes are ſuppoſed to be moſt cool, the capitouls pronounced ſentence at five o'clock in the afternoon. Calas the father, his wife, and Peter their ſon, were condemned firſt to the ordinary and extraordinary rack; Lavayſe and the ſervant-maid to be preſented to it only.

The priſoners immediately made an appeal from this ſentence to the parliament; and altho' in ſuch caſes appellants are thereby removed from the juriſdiction of the capitouls, yet theſe cruel and enthuſiaſtic judges inſiſted on their being loaded with the heavieſt irons, like the moſt notorious convicts.

On the ninth of March, thirteen judges of the parliament met at the chambers of Tournelle; where having agreed,

agreed, *nem. con.* to judge the father firſt; the unfortunate old man was taken from his dungeon, and brought before them.

But, as if Providence thought the meaſure of the miſery of this poor family was not yet full, as Calas was croſſing the palace-yard, in order to be examined by his judges for the laſt time, there happened at the inſtant to be a wood-pile in flames. The executioner, with guards and attendants, was burning a writing againſt Popery *. The ſight of the hangman, the archers, and the vaſt number of ſpectators, together with the flames, worked ſo forcibly on the imagination of Calas, that his reaſon was affected, and he ſuppoſed this to be the apparatus of his death.---His ſenſes were ſo much diſturbed by this incident, and his agitation at the idea of his unmerited execution ſo great, that, when brought be-

* It was a Letter from a Proteſtant miniſter, in defence of that unhappy family.

fore

fore the judges, he could not give proper anſwers to their interrogatories, nor ſay any thing in his defence, though he had ſo much to oppoſe to his enemies; but only, with a dying voice, the venerable good old man proteſted, that he had not killed his ſon, but dearly loved him: And this embarraſſment the judges, ignorant of its real ſource, imputed to the conſcioüſneſs of guilt.

As the very particular and intereſting nature of this affair has cauſed the curtain to be drawn which commonly ſecretes the proceedings of the courts of juſtice in France, it has appeared, that only ſeven judges of the thirteen approved the condemnation of Calas; which majority of one not being ſufficient, according to the rules of the court, to convict him, means were found to prevail on one of the diſſentients (a perſon ſo well convinced of Calas's innocence, that he had ſpoken two hours in his behalf) to join the other party; on which unhappy junction, the old gentleman received the following

following ſentence: To be put to the ordinary and extraordinary rack, to be broke alive, to expire upon a wheel, after having been upon it two hours, and to be reduced to aſhes in a wood-pile.

This unhappy parent firſt underwent the rack, which he bore with that heroic ſpirit peculiar to the injured innocent. Being preſſed, by the moſt extraordinary tortures, to declare his accomplices, he exclaimed, "Where "there is no guilt, how can there be "accomplices?"---He declared himſelf ready, in atonement for the faults he had in his life-time committed, to offer the ſacrifice of his reputation and his life; but ſtill averred his innocence of the horrid crime for which he ſtood condemned. The majeſtic firmneſs of the old man, when arrived at the place of execution, began at length to convince the ſpectators of his innocence, and to raiſe in their hearts confuſed ſenſations of commiſeration and repentance.

Before the executioner began his buſineſs, Father Bourges, a prieſt of the Dominican order, drew near, took the victim in his arms, and with great tenderneſs embraced him: "My dear bro-
"ther," ſaid this reſpectable conſolator to him, "you are going to leave this
"world: By the God whom you love,
"in whom are your only hopes, and
"who has died for you, I conjure
"you to tell the truth." "I have ſaid
"nothing but the truth," anſwered he, lifting his hands and eyes towards Heaven. Then looking on the religious man with aſtoniſhment and tenderneſs, he ſaid to him, "Would you believe
"too, my dear friend, that a father
"would have killed his ſon?"

The executioner now began to make uſe of the redoubtable iron bar, and broke both the legs and arms of that unfortunate and venerable old gentleman. Every ſtroke was felt by the ſpectators, and drew tears from their eyes; but it was too late.

On

On the firſt ſtroke the ſufferer cried moderately, and received the others without complaining. Being put afterwards upon the wheel, he implored the mercy of Heaven; and had the Chriſtian fortitude to avoid reproaching his judges, or any other perſons, as the authors of his death. While every one preſent was lamenting his fate, and crying for his ſufferings, he addreſſed theſe moving words to Father Bourges, his conſolator: "I die innocent. Jeſus Chriſt, who was innocency itſelf, has been willing to ſuffer a more cruel death. God puniſhes in me, my wife, and children, the ſin of that unhappy ſon who has deſtroyed himſelf. He is juſt, and I adore his decrees. As for that young ſtranger whom I invited home, the ſon of Mr. Lavayſe, the Almighty beſt knows why he was involved in my misfortune." He was ſpeaking thus when David the capitoul, jealous of the commiſeration and tears of the ſpectators, came near

the ſcaffold, and, in order to crown his proceedings with dignity, he ſaid to him, "Wretch, doſt thou ſee the wood-"pile which is to reduce thy body to "aſhes? Speak the truth, and confeſs "thy guilt." Calas, as a mark of contempt for his cruel perſecutor, turned his head, and looked on the executioner, who gave him the laſt dying ſtroke, and the innocent expired.

His heroiſm and firmneſs touched his judges, who began to dread they had been wrong; but nevertheleſs, according to their adjournment, proceeded on the trial of the other priſoners. They were not a little embarraſſed, having nothing to bring any of them to conviction. Thoſe unfortunate perſons all inſiſted on their being as innocent as the victim who had juſt been ſacrificed to fanaticiſm; that they had not left him one minute alone; and that, if there had been any proofs of his being guilty of the crime for which he had ſuffered, the ſame would ſerve for their conviction, or elſe they were all innocent. On this ſecond

trial,

trial, the judges acquitted the unfortunate and virtuous widow Mrs. Calas, the young ſtranger Mr. Lavayſe, and the ſervant-maid, there being not the leaſt ſhadow of proofs of any kind againſt them. As for Peter Calas their ſon, they baniſhed him from the country, on account of an irreligious converſation that was imputed to him.

Such is the deplorable account of one of the moſt tragical events on record. Who would think that ſuch an horrible ſcene was tranſacted in one of the moſt civilized province of France. Our ſenſations will commiſerate, our tears will flow, but they can never reſtore the honeſt Calas to his inconſolable widow and proſcribed children.

M. De Voltaire, on hearing of this event, collected all the information he could upon the proceedings, both of the capitouls and the parliament: He ſaw with horror the force of fanaticiſm, and the impoſſibility of the crime imputed to that innocent old man; and

reſolved

resolved to do every thing in his power to have those proceedings revised by the king's privy-council. With his advice, his credit, and money, which he did not spare, Mrs. Calas and her children came to Versailles: They threw themselves at the feet of his majesty, to whom they were presented by one of the lords in waiting. He received their humble petition, promised, with his usual goodness, to do them justice, and immediately ordered a privy-council to be held, at which himself presided. The lord-high-chancellor, all the great officers of state, both civil and military, were present, to the number of one hundred and ten privy-councellors, who unanimously received the petition.

The king first, with the advice of his council, invalidated the sentence of the capitouls, together with the judgment given by the parliament of Toulouze; and ordered all the proceedings to be laid before the sovereign judges of his hôtel, in order to try again such an important affair. He accordingly

ingly nominated commiſſioners to make proper enquiries. The petitioners then ſurrendered themſelves to impriſonment, in order to be tried by the peers of the realm.

The moſt celebrated counſellors offered themſelves, and undertook to defend the oppreſſed relicts of that once-reputable and now-diſtreſſed family. Meſſ. Elie de Baumont and Loiſeau de Moleon, the two moſt eminent counſel in France, were their defenſors, and Mr. Dupleix de Bacquin-court * was the judge appointed to report the cauſe. The trial laſted three ſittings, and there were five and forty judges preſent. The priſoners, who were Mrs. Calas, her two daughters and three ſons, the young Mr. Lavayſe, and the ſervant-maid, were brought before that auguſt aſſem-

* Altho' this nobleman is famed for the rigor of his proceedings in criminal caſes, and was therefore, by the influence of the principal judges of the parliament, at this time appointed, the innocence of the priſoners prevailed over all other conſiderations, and he gave his opinion in their behalf.

bly,

bly, and a great number of ſpectators of the firſt diſtinction, who crowded the hall.

After an hearing of three days, and when the report was made upon the whole, the judges without diviſion, not one diſſentient, found, That John Calas and the reſt of the family were innocent, and that he had ſuffered unjuſtly; they annulled all the proceedings of the capitouls, together with the judgment of the parliament of Toulouze; ordered, 1ſt. That the priſoners ſhould be releaſed from their confinement, their names eraſed from the ſeveral books of the gaols where they had been detained, and be moſt honourably acquitted: 2d. That the unhappy John Calas ſhould be deemed innocent of the crimes which had been imputed to him; his commitment and his name ſhou[illegible]likewiſe be eraſed from the book of t[illegible]ail where he had been detained; a[illegible]e margin of which the preſent ſ[illegible]reign judgment ſhould be written, and kept in record, for the

honour

honour of his memory; that the clerk of the court, the keepers, or their deputy, ſhould be compelled to do it at the ſuit of his majeſty's attorney-general, on the pain of impriſonment of their perſons: 3d. As to the demand of the petitioners for the recovery of damages, they ordered, that they ſhould bring actions againſt the capitouls and the judges of the parliament of Toulouze who voted for the condemnation, as they ſhould think fit; and laſtly, That, at the ſuit and expence of his majeſty's attorney-general, the preſent judgment ſhould be publiſhed and poſted up in all ordinary places, and where it ſhould be found neceſſary.

There were in the palace-yard no leſs than four or five thouſand perſons, waiting for the event of ſuch an important trial, which was received with the greateſt proofs of approbation, every where but at Toulouz

LETTRE

DE

JEAN CALAS,

A

Sa FEMME et à ses ENFANS.

O Chere & tendre epouse, ô moitié de moy-même;
Reponds moy: sens tu bien cette force suprême
Qui nous fait, sans fremir, envisager la mort?
Si tu la sens, ecoute, & vois quel est mon sort.
Ce sénat éclairé *, dont l'équité sévére
Resista si long temps aux erreurs du vulgaire,
Que du glaive des loix le Ciel voulut armer
Pour venger l'innocent & non pour l'opprimer:
Ce senat, dont cent fois j'admirai la justice,
Vient de me condamner—& je marche au suplice.
Eh quoi! ces magistrats, faits pour vaincre l'erreur,
Ont ils pû, d'un vil peuple, adopter la fureur?
Ont ils cru qu'un vieillard, appésenti par l'âge,
Pour un crime inoui ranimant son courage
Brâvant ce que jamais l'homme eut de plus sacré,
Ait porté sur son fils un bras dénaturé?
Mais, supposant qu'en moy la nature bizarre
Ait placé, pour ce crime, un cœur assés barbare.

* Le Parlement de Toulouze.

Ont ils cru qu'une mere avec tranquillité
Ait vû verſé le ſang que ſes flancs ont porté ;
Et qu'en nous uniſſant l'Hymen triſte et ſauvage
De deux monſtres ſanglants ait formé l'aſſemblage ?
Helas ils ont cru tout—& mon ſupplice eſt prêt.
Il eſt donc prononcé ce redoutable arrêt
Quoi ? pendant ſoixante ans ma gloire fut entiere,
Et l'oprobre m'attend au bout de ma carriere !
Quoi ! la vie et l'honneur vont donc m'être ravis :
N'etait ce pas aſſés d'avoir perdu mon fils ?
Déplorables humains, malheureux que nous ſommes,
Notre honneur depend donc du caprice des hommes.
Chere epouſe, dis moi ! quand propice à nos feux,
L'Hymen nous enchaîna par le plux doux des nœuds :
Quand le Ciel béniſſant, cette union ſi chere,
Augmentait les enfans dont il me rendit pere :
Quànd je louais ce Dieu dont les ſoins bienfaiſants
Et ſur eux et ſur nous repandaient ſes preſents,
Quand pour eux J'implorais la puiſſance celeſte,
Aurais tu cru qu'un deux nous devint ſi funeſte,
Et qu'un jour au ſuplice injuſtement livrés,
Par la main d'un bourreau nous fuſſions ſéparés ?
Mais dans le même ſort, toi-même envelopée,
Chere epouſe avec moi te verrais tu frapée ?
Si je ſuis criminel, il faut que tu le ſois ;
On doit ou nous abſoudre, ou nous perdre à la fois.
Ah ! cruels, ſi vos traits font expirer le pére,
Du moins à des enfans conſervés une mère,
D'une epouſe ſi tendre épargnés les douleurs :
N'augmentés point ſes maux, et reſpectés ſes pleurs ;
Si la mort eſt pour vous une ſi douce image
Frapés et que mon ſang ſuffiſe à vôtre rage.
O toi, le premier né de mes triſtes enfans,
Toi ſur qui je fondais l'eſpoir de mes vieux ans,

Toi

Toi que j'ay tant aimé, toi dont la mort ſanglante
A mes ſens déſolés ſemble toujours preſente,
O mon fils, mon cher fils, dans quel abime affreux
As tu précipité tes parens malheureux?
Va, mon cœur te pardonne: ah! s'il étoit poſſible
Qu'à mes triſtes deſtins ton ombre fut ſenſible,
Bientôt ſortant pour moi du gouffre des enfers,
Tu me rendrais l'honneur et tu romprais mes fers:
Mais helas! inſenſible à mes plaintes funebres,
Tu dors proffondément dans le ſein des tenebres,
Et dans ce doux repos, tu ne t'imforme pas
Si ta mort aujourd'hui va cauſer mon trepas.
Ah! s'ils nous avoient vûs dans ce moment terrible,
Ou la mort ſe montrant ſous un aſpect horrible,
Vint offrir à nos yeux efraïés et ſurpris
Le corps pâle et glacé de ce malheureux fils;
Ou le cœur déchiré des plus vives allarmes,
J'eclatais en ſanglots et je fondais en l'armes;
Ou, l'appelant cent fois, tu ſerrais dans tes bras
Ce fils, ce triſte fils qui ne repondoit pas,
Nous auraient-ils jamais ſoupçonnés d'impoſture?
Se feraient ils mépris au cri de la nature?
Ce deſordre touchant pour nous aurait parlé;
Leurs cœurs auraient fremi; leurs pleurs auraient coulé.
Helas! nôtre douleur ne fut que trop ſinçere!
Parmi ces ſénateurs, ah! s'il était un père,
Dans l'horreur d'un cachot je ne gémirais pas,
Et ces indignes fers tomberaient de mes bras.
Mais que m'importe à moy, que m'importe une vie,
Qui bientôt par les ans pourait m'être ravie?
C'eſt à vous ſeuls à craindre, ô, juges, tremblés tous
Le ſang que vous verſez, peut rejaillir ſur vous;
Du fonds de mon tombeau ma cendre peut renaître;
Oui vous verrez un jour, qui n'eſt pas loin peut-être,

La verité terrible éclater à vos yeux ;
Le temps déchirera le voile injurieux
Qui cachoit dans la nuit ma timide innocence :
Alors vous frémiréz d'une injuſte ſentence :
Par des larmes de ſang vous pleurerés ma mort ;
Vous ſerés déchirés par les traits du remord.
Dieu, qui vois leur erreur, pardonne à leur foibleſſe ;
Et détourne loin d'eux ta fureur vengereſſe.
Lâches perſecuteurs, c'eſt vous ſeuls, oui c'eſt vous
Qui trompés le ſénat, et conduiſés ſes coups ;
Cruels, vous triomphés ; nous ſommes vos victimes,
Et pour mieux me noircir vous me pretés vos crimes.
De ma triſte maiſon cet ardent oppreſſeur*,
Qui de la loi des Cieux ſe croit le deffenſeur,
Luy, qui ſur mon fils mort a vu couler nos larmes,
A perdre un innocent trouve donc bien des charmes !
La mort eſt mon ſuplice, et la vie eſt le ſien ;
Dans mes injuſtes maux, Dieu ſera mon ſoutien :
Mais, lui, de ſes enfans la plus tendre caréſſe
A ſon cœur déchiré reprochera ſans ceſſe
Ses cruelles fureurs, mes tourments et ma mort.
Dieu, ne le livrez point aux horreurs du remord !
Si, contraire à ſa loi, la loi qui nous enchaine
Dans ſon ame inflexible a fait naitre la haine,
Que du moins ſur moi ſeul il cherche à ſe venger :
Mais comment ſe peut-il que ce jeune etranger,
Dont le cœur eſt ſi noble & le front ſi modeſte ?
Se trouve énvelopé dans mon malheur funeſte.
Ah ! j'ay prévu le coup dont je me ſens frappé,
Quand ſur de faux raports tout un peuple trompé
Imputait à mon bras cette mort ſi cruelle ;
Quand ſa crédulité qu'enflammait un faux zêle,
Plaçait au rang des ſaints cet enfant malheureux,
Que peut-être autrement Dieu jugait dans les Cieux.

Ce

* M. David le Capitoul.

Ce qui ſur le danger m'éclaira d'avantage,
Ce fut l'inſtant funeſte ou ranimant ſa rage,
Touloufe avec tranſport célébrait le retour
De ce maſſacre affreux, de cet horrible jour
Qui dut être des pleurs une ſourçe éternelle ;
Quand de mes ennemis la foule criminelle
Des feux du fanatiſme embraſait les eſprits ;
Quand ce peuple cruel demandait à grand cris
Que pour ce jour ſanglant on gardât la victime ;
Alors je vis ſous moy s'approfondir l'âbime :
Alors m'abandonant aux horreurs de mon ſort,
J'offris ma vie au Ciel & j'attendis la mort.
Cependant (des humains tu connais la faibleſſe)
Juſqu' au dernier moment je me flattais ſans ceſſe :
Oui, quoi que tout un peuple, avec acharnement,
D'un pere infortuné pourſuivit le tourment,
Je croyais qu'éfraïé des aprêts du ſuplice,
Il ouvrirait les yeux & me rendrait juſtice :
Mais le Ciel ſans pitié ſe rit de mon erreur.
Un ſonge cette nuit, pour mieux tromper mon cœur
Me faiſait concevoir le plus heureux augure.
Un ſpectre, à la lueür d'une lumiere obſcure,
S'offre à moi : de fraïeur tous mes ſens ſont ſaiſis,
" Raſſure toi, dit-il ; que crains tu de ton fils ?
" Mon pere de tes maux c'eſt moi qui ſuis la cauſe ;
" J'en gémis ; mais ſur Dieu que ton cœur ſe repoſe :
" Il ne ſouffrira point qu'un injuſte ſoupçon
" Flétriſſe pour jamais ta gloire & nôtre nom ;
" Par luy, par ſon ſecours l'innocence vengée
" Voit, d'un piege trompeur, ſa marche degagée.
" Sans doute un jour viendra"—que veux tu m'annoncer,
M'écrai-je, ô mon fils ? je cours pour l'embraſſer :
Mais je ne trouve plus qu'une vapeur horrible :
Alors mon cachot s'ouvre avec un bruit terrible ;

Je

Je m'éveille ; je crois qu'on va changer mon ſort :
Mais que vois-je—un bourreau vient m'annoncer la mort,
Noir tombeau des vivans, triſte et lugubre enceinte,
Ou prés du crime aſſis l'innocent vit ſans crainte,
Ou le coupable aux fers, de remords combatu,
Oſe eſperer le prix qu'on doit à la vertu,
Parmi ſes malheureux que ton ombre renferme,
En verras tu jamais qui, d'un œil auſſi ferme
Porte au ſuplice afreux, ou je ſuis condamné
Un cœur plus innocent & plus infortuné?
Ou ſont ils ces amis dont la flateuſe adréſſe
Avaient trompé mon cœur et ſurpris ma tendreſſe
Qui me cheriſſaient tant dans mes proſperités ?
Le malheur loin de moi les a tous écartés ;
Cette amitié ſi vive, en projets conſumée,
Au milieu des ſermens s'evapore en fumée.
Qu'ils viennent ces temoins de mon integrité
A mes juges ſeduits montrer la verité !
Quoi ! lorſque de mon cœur connoiſſant la droiture,
Ils peuvent d'un ſeul mot démentir l'impoſture,
Ils gardent lâchement un ſilence profond !
Dans ces momens affreux tant d'horreur me confond !
Tout fuit, quand j'ay beſoin d'une ûtile defenſe.
N'eſt il donc plus de cœur ſenſible à l'innocence;
O Ciel ! tout contre moi parait ſe réunir,
Mon culte eſt tout mon crime, & l'on veut m'en punir.
Helas ! ſerions nous donc dans ces tems déplorables,
Où l'erreur fit verſer le ſang de nos ſemblables ?
Quoi ! lorſqu'éclairant tout de ſon flambeau divin,
La raiſon veut enſemble unir Rome et Calvin,
Que, ſans approfondir tant de ſectes contraires,
Elle veut des humains faire un peuple de freres,
C'eſt le fer à la main qu'on veut nous convertir !
Barbares, de l'erreur il eſt temps de ſortir ;

Repon-

Repondés : eſt ce ainſi que ces premiers apôtres,
Ces heureux fondateurs de vos loix & des nôtres,
A leur culte enchainaient la foule des mortels?
Ont ils du ſang humain arroſé les autels ?
La paix et la douceur étaient leur ſeules armes ;
D'une famille en deuil ils eſſuïaient les larmes ;
Ils pardonaient à ceux qui les ont accablés ;
Eſt-ce en nous maſſacrant que vous leur reſſemblez ?
Jeſus dont nous ſuivons la morale divine,
A-t'-il fait par le glaive adopter ſa doctrine ?
A-t'-il du fanatiſme enſeigné les chemins?
Vous a-t'-il ordonné d'égorger les humains?
Dans ſes livres ſacrés l'humanité reſpire,
Ce n'eſt que ſur la paix qu'eſt fondé ſon empire ;
Et de la foudre enfin il ne s'arma jamais
Que pour venger le juſte et punir vos forfaits.
O toi dont l'univers adore la puiſſance,
Toi qui lis dans mon cœur, qui vois mon innocence
Dieu que j'implore, entens ma voix du haut des Cieux ;
Ce jour eſt le dernier qui va luire à mes yeux ;
Daigne éclaircir le doute ou cet inſtant me plonge :
Si je ſuis egaré dans la nuit du menſonge,
Si jamais loin de toi mon cœur s'eſt écarté ;
Et que j'aie coulé mes jours dans l'obſcurité.
J'embraſſe des Romains le culte et les miſtéres :
Mais ſi ſuivant en paix la trace de mes péres,
Je marche au vrai chemin qui conduit juſqu'à toi,
Dans ces heureux ſentiers, mon Dieu, raffermis moi,
Tu vois comme en ce jour l'erreur me perſécute ;
Tu ſais ſi j'ay commis le forfait qu'on m'impute ;
Helas ! je voudrais bien, dans ces momens d'éfroi,
N'avoir point d'autre crime à porter devant toi,
En permetant l'erreur que le ſenat écoute,
Du crime de mon fils tu me punis ſans doute ;

Calas,

Calas, qui de ta main reçoit ces chatimens,
Se livre ſans murmure, aux plus cruels tourmens;
Mon Dieu, de tes élus ſouffrir eſt le partage;
Je t'offre mes douleurs; que cet afreux trepas,
Trouve grace à tes yeux & deſarme ton bras:
Et que mon ame enfin de mes fautes lavées,
Jouiſſe de la gloire à tes ſaints reſervée.

De ma triſte innocence infortunées temoins
Vous dont les premiers ans mont couté tant de ſoins,
Dont les charmes naiſſans font aimer la ſageſſe,
Mes filles, autres fois je flattais ma tendréſſe
De vous laiſſer un jour dans les bras d'un époux:
Quel mortel courageux, helas voudrait pour vous
Braver ce prejugé, peut-être trop ſévére,
Qui fletrit les enfans du crime de leur pére?
Et toi, dont le bonheur me fut ſi precieux,
Chere epouſe, reçois mes plus tendres adieux.
Vivés, mes chers enfans, conſoléz vôtre mére;
Et, ſi de nôtre nom la gloire vous eſt chére,
Alléz, couréz, voléz, tombéz aux pieds du roi:
Demandéz luy l'honneur que vous perdéz en moi:
Vous verrez qu'en ces lieux qu'on peint inacceſſibles,
Tous les cœurs mes enfans ne ſont point inſenſibles
Ce prince bienfaiſant, touché de vos malheurs,
De ſon bandeau ſacré peut eſſuïer vos pleurs;
De vos vils ennemis démêlant l'artifice,
Il confondra leur brigue et vous rendra juſtice.
Mais rentrés dans vos droits, devenéz généreux;
Et ne vous en vengés qu'en les rendant heureux.
Ce n'eſt qu'en pardonant qu'un grand cœur ſe ſignale.

A Dieu, j'entens deja ſonner l'heure fatale,
Helas! fut-il jamais un plus funeſte ſort;
Ou ouvre—c'en eſt fait—ah! vôtre père eſt mort.