

T H E
H I S T O R Y
O F
E N G L A N D.
C H A R L E S I.

C H A P. I.

Attempt to relieve Rochelle.——Death of Buckingham.——Another attempt to relieve Rochelle.——Rochelle taken by the French king.——Peace concluded with France.——Merchants imprisoned.——Wentworth bought off from the popular party.——New sessions of parliament.——Dissolution.——Imprisonment of several members of parliament.

THE Petition of Right, though it did not produce a change in the constitution, yet it confirmed to the subject every privilege which their ancestors had, for any length of time, enjoyed, since the Norman Conquest had given the fatal blow to that enlarged system of liberty introduced by the Saxons. Notwithstanding the importance of this event, no less threatening were the symptoms at the breaking up of this parliament, than had been those that attended the preceding ones: A precipitate conclusion of the sessions ;

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Ann. 1628. anger and distrust on both sides; a remonstrance composed of disgraceful truths, that set in a full light the infamous practices, and contemptible management of the government. Had Charles given his extorted assent to the Bill of Rights with a seeming alacrity, the Commons would have been inclined to have thrown the mantle of oblivion over past offences; but his evasions and delays had not only excited a dangerous jealousy, but had taken away all pretence of merit from the forced compliance. This head-strong prince, notwithstanding he had received the greatest subsidy that was ever granted to any king of England; notwithstanding the manifest indications which the parliament had shewed that they intended to give him a legal right to the revenue arising from tonnage and poundage; concluded the sessions with indecent warmth, because the Commons had declared that he had no right to such impositions without consent of parliament. Had he squared his conduct by the rules of common policy, on the remonstrance presented to him on this subject, he would have offered to have prolonged the sessions till a bill of tonnage and poundage could have been perfected. This would have distressed the popular members, who suspecting that he would soon violate the laws he had lately confirmed, when released from the shackles of a parliament, wanted to leave him in a situation that would render another meeting of this assembly necessary; and had carefully avoided touching on this capacious subject till the Petition of Right was clearly passed. This sagacious conduct in the Commons, no doubt, arose from the impolitic arguments which had been continually urged by the courtiers to bring them to comply with

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with the demands of the crown. They endeavoured to Ann. 1628. intimidate, by representing that if ministerial measures were opposed, the king would assume every part of the legislature, and govern without parliaments. These suggestions might give warning, but could not strike terror. Such a government must ever be regarded as a tyranny, and consequently its duration be very precarious; whereas if, with a preservation of the forms of the constitution, the Commons had tamely yielded to the King the power he had assumed, Liberty would have been irrecoverably lost, and absolute monarchy established by law.

THE numberless instances in which Charles had violated the laws of the land, roused the attention of the nation to develop the real genius of the constitution; and the accuracy with which the Commons at this period examined the legal rights of the monarchy, may be attributed to an impolitic exertion of power, that crowded into one point of view all the oppressive usurpations of the crown.

THE first military exploit which the ministry engaged in after the dissolution of the parliament, was an attempt to relieve Rochelle. Attempt to relieve Rochelle. At the pressing instances of the duke de Soubise, and deputies from this town, the earl of Denbigh, with a fleet that consisted of ten ships of the line, and sixty smaller vessels, was sent to succour the besieged with a recruit of men and victuals. A complication of treachery, ignorance, and cowardice, that appeared in the conduct of this expedition, rendered it

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abortive;

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- Ann. 1628. abortive; and Charles was either apparently betrayed by his servants and creatures, or himself an accomplice in a deceit that must needs prove the shipwreck of his conscience and his honour, and the dissipation of that treasure which he had dearly purchased from the last parliament. May the first, the English fleet anchored at Charleboy, in the road of Rochelle; on the eighth day, by the means of a high tide, and a strong favourable wind, a shallop, that carried the news of their arrival, got safe into the harbour.
- Du Cheyne.

THE inhabitants, thus advertised of the approach of their allies, erected signals on the top of their towers, and discharged their cannon, to shew that they were ready to attack the enemy, and favour, by a diversion, the entry of the destined succours. After an ineffectual attempt to pass a bar which the French had made to prevent the passage of the English ships, a council of war was called. The majority of the English captains gave it as their opinion, that the Rochellers had deceived them in their account of the facility of the enterprize. The vice-admiral and another officer, named Car, exclaimed against the backwardness of the rest; and the French hugonots in the fleet, whose whole forces consisted of two or three and twenty small vessels, offered, with the assistance of four merchant-ships well armed, and three fire-ships, with a proportionable number of soldiers, to fling succours into the place: With this offer the Rochellers agreed to pay for all the English ships that might miscarry in the attempt. Denbigh excused himself on the impracticability of it, and on the words
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of his commission, which were, not to fight unless previously attacked by the enemy. He obstinately refused to give any assistance towards the relief of the distressed town; and notwithstanding the tears and prayers of the deputies from Rochelle, he set sail and returned to England. On the deposition of Andrew Le Brun, a Frenchman, concerning Denbigh's remissness, a letter was sent by the council to the lord high admiral Buckingham, signifying, that it was the king's pleasure that the earl of Denbigh, with an addition to his fleet of other ships prepared at Portsmouth and Plymouth, should return back to relieve the town of Rochelle. This mandate was disobeyed. Denbigh remained at home; and Buckingham, who entertained the project of appearing once more in a military capacity, caused ten ships to be built, with other preparations towards the fitting out a naval armament that should be equal to the dignity of the commander. The earl of Marlborough, the present treasurer, was dismissed from his office, as a man whose frugal disposition might be a bar to the destined expence of the expedition; and Sir Richard Weston, the present chancellor of the Exchequer, a notorious papist, and an approved creature of Buckingham, was promoted to the treasurer's staff, with the title of earl of Portland. On the vast preparations made for this expedition, it is reported that all the subsidies given by parliament had been expended.

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Ephem Parl.
p. 226, & seq.Guthrie, vol.
III. p. 883.

BUCKINGHAM had repaired to Portsmouth, in order to survey the preparations for the intended embarkation, when, on the twenty-third of August, whilst he was talking with warmth to the duke de Soubise, and other French officers,

Death of
Buckingham.

Ann. 1628. officers *, on his inclining his head to give directions to Sir Thomas Fryer, he received a deadly wound from an unseen hand, that struck a knife into his heart. He withdrew the fatal instrument, fell prostrate on the ground, and expired instantaneously †, to the surprize and horror of the by-standers, who looked with suspicious aspects on the French gentlemen, whose gesticulations had been very vehement in this conversation. The zeal of his attendants, who were running about with drawn swords, in quest of the assassin, might have been productive of mischief, if, in the midst of the confusion, a hat had not been found, in the inside of which was sewed a paper that contained part of that remonstrance of the Commons which declared the defunct an obstacle to the peace and safety of the kingdom, and the prime cause of all its grievances. This discovery preserved the foreigners from the danger of a massacre. It was immediately concluded that the owner of the hat must be the murderer. In the midst of the anxiety that the apprehension of not overtaking the fugitive occasioned, a man stepped forth, and presenting himself to the company, said, “ I am the person who committed the action ; let not the innocent suffer.” This assassin proved

Rushworth,
vol. I. p. 635.

* Buckingham had been communicating some advices he had received, as if a convoy had got into Rochelle. This he communicated to the duke de Soubise, and the French gentlemen in his train, who insisted with great vehemence that this advice was false, and only intended to retard the expedition.

† Clarendon, in his pompous history of the civil wars, very seriously tells a long story of the ghost of Sir George Villiers, the father of Buckingham, appearing several times, and prefaging the death of his son. *Clarendon's History of the Civil Wars*, fol. Ox. 1702, vol. I. p. 34.

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to be one John Felton, a man that was brave, honest, Ann. 1628. and conscientious ; but melancholy, revengeful *, and enthusiastical. He had served in the station of a lieutenant under Buckingham, in his expedition to the isle of Rhee, and had conceived a personal aversion to him for his having promoted an officer over his head †. The loud complaints of the nation, coinciding with his private repentment, inflamed the melancholy revengeful humours in his composition to a black phrenzy, and his enthusiasm prompted him to render himself, by an indirect means, an instrument of justice on the declared enemy of the public.

THUS, by the arm of a melancholy lunatic, fell this object of almost-universal hatred, George Villiers, duke of Buckingham : a man, who, with no other eminent qualities than what were proper to captivate the hearts of the weakest part of the female sex, had been raised by these qualities to be the scourge of three kingdoms ; and, by his pestilent intrigues, the chief cause of that distress which the French protestants at this time languished under : a man, whose extraordinary influence over two successive princes, will serve, among other examples of this kind, as an everlasting monument of the contemptible government that magnanimous nations

* Felton having received an injury, cut off a piece of his little finger, and sent it with a challenge to the gentleman who had affronted him, with this message : That he valued not the exposing his whole body to destruction, so he might have an opportunity to be revenged. *Rushworth*, vol. I. p. 638.

† Besides this injury, he had long waited in vain for his arrears of pay. *Complete Hist. of England*, vol. III. p. 45.

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Ann. 1628. must submit to, who groan under the mean, though oppressive yoke of an arbitrary sway, entrusted to the caprice of individuals.

THE expensive parade of the courtiers in these times, and the glitter that surrounded the minions of royalty, can be by no single example so fully illustrated as by the account of Buckingham's body-ornaments: The jewels he left behind him were estimated at three hundred thousand pounds; a sum which, at the interest that money then bore, would have brought in an income of twenty thousand pounds a-year. Charles was performing a public act of devotion when the death of his favourite was made known to him: The composure that appeared in his countenance on the recital of this assassination, gave the bystanders a notion that he was not displeased with an incident that rid him of the man who effectually deprived him of the love and good opinion of his subjects. His after-deportment convinced the public that he retained the same fond affection to his memory that he had shewn to his person. He not only continued to heap favours on his whole tribe of kindred, but on all those dependants which had attached themselves to his fortune; and paid a vast debt which he had contracted *. Felton was carried to London,

* Charles was within four miles of Portsmouth when the account of his favourite's death was made known to him. He was on his knees at prayers; no discomposure appeared in his actions, nor alteration in his countenance, till the service was over, when he retired to his chamber, and threw himself on his bed; where he gave vent to his sorrow in a flood of tears, and passionate expressions of regard to the memory of the deceased. *Clarend. Hist.* vol. I. p. 25.

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where he underwent several examinations before the council. Laud, who had been lately promoted to the bishoprick of London, suggested a suspicion that the Puritans were at the bottom of the mischief, and threatened the delinquent with the rack *. Felton told them that if that was to be his case, he did not know whom he might name in the extremity of torture; and if what he should then say was to go for truth, he could not tell whether his lordship the bishop of London, or which of the lords at the council-board, he might accuse; for torture would draw unexpected things from him. By a resolution of the King and council, the judges were consulted on the question, whether Felton might legally be put to the torture? The judges determined in the negative; and the King graciously declared, that since it could not be done by law, he would not, in this point, use his prerogative. On Thursday, the twenty-seventh of November, Felton was brought to his trial. The unhappy enthusiast felt so exquisite a remorse for the crime he had committed, that on the court's pass-

Ann. 1628.

Rushworth,
vol. I. p. 640.
Whitlock,
fol. ed. 1682,
p. 11.

It was reported that Charles, to shew his affection for his departed favourite, gave a command for a magnificent funeral. The treasurer diverted the project by telling him, that the testimony of his favour would be more lasting, if, instead of that transitory pomp, he was to erect a stately monument to his memory. Charles assented to this proposition; but when he renewed the subject of the monument, the treasurer evaded the King's intention by the following speech: "Sir, I am loath to tell your majesty what the world will say, both at home and abroad, if you should raise a monument for the duke before you erect one for your father." *The Reign of Charles*, by H. L. fol. ed. 1665, p. 91, & seq.

* He had been frequently examined concerning this question, and constantly denied that he had any prompters to this action. *Rushworth*, vol. I. p. 638.

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Ann. 1628. ing sentence of death upon him, he offered that hand to be cut off which did the fact. Though the court disclaimed this request, as not within the compass of the law, and out of their power to grant, Charles sent to the judges to intimate his desire that Felton's hand might be cut off before execution of the sentence of death. The judges returned answer, that the king's will could not be complied with ; for in all murders the judgment was the same, unless when the statute of the 25 E. III. altered the nature of the offence.

Rymer's Fœ-
dera, vol.
XVIII. p.
1043.

ON the death of Buckingham, the command of the fleet destined to the relief of Rochelle was given to the earl of Lindsey. Notwithstanding the money that had been already expended, when the ships stores came to be inspected, they were found deficient both in quantity and quality ; and the preparations were not ready till the eighth of September, when the French had finished a mole across the harbour, which rendered the relief of the town very difficult, if not impossible. When the fleet came before Rochelle, they made several vain attempts on the mole ; two days were spent in cannonading the works, without damage on either side ; and the duke de Soubise began to suspect that the English commander, who had sent several private messages into the French camp, was treating separately with the enemy. On receiving intelligence that the town could not hold out above two days, he offered, with the French ships, to attempt the mole, if the English would promise to follow him. The count of Laval proposed, with artificial mines, contrived in three ships lined with bricks, to attempt to blow it up. Both these proposals were rejected in