

## HORACE WALPOLE'S CORRESPONDENCE

To MANN, Sunday 15 May 1774

Strawberry Hill, May 15, 1774.

THIS is a great morsel of news, indeed—nay, not that we know actually yet that Louis Quinze is dead; but we conclude so.<sup>1</sup> Lord Stormont's courier<sup>2</sup> arrived on Wednesday, and had left Paris on Sunday night at eleven,<sup>3</sup> when the hiccup was begun. He said he might not be able to write again soon, as all horses would be stopped.<sup>4</sup> Some pretend to say the King died on Tuesday, others conclude he is recovered—but horses would not be stopped on that account—on the contrary. Many foretell war—not on knowledge. The Dauphin is little known—the first acts of a new King are seldom the expression of his meaning. There is a notion he likes the Chancellor.<sup>5</sup> If Monsieur de Choiseul<sup>6</sup> returns to power, it will want no prophet to announce war. Two<sup>7</sup> of the King's daughters, though they never had the small-

1. 'The French King lies at the point of death. The accounts we receive do not tell the whole truth, but I know from but too good authority that there is no shadow of hope' (Stormont to Rochford 8 May, S.P. 78/292 f. 39). He died Tuesday, 10 May in the afternoon, 'between two and three o'clock' (Stormont to Rochford 11 May, *ibid.* f. 45).

2. Andrew Staley (ca 1733–1813), King's messenger (GM 1813, lxxxiii pt ii. 406; V. Wheeler-Holohan, *History of the King's Messengers*, 1935, p. 283). Stormont's dispatch to Rochford of 8 May is endorsed, 'R[ecieved] 11 May by Staley' (S.P. 78/292 f. 40).

3. Stormont to Rochford, 'Paris, Sunday night at eleven o'clock. May 8, 1774' (*ibid.* f. 39).

4. 'I . . . dispatch this messenger without waiting for the melancholy news of his [Louis XV's] death, as it will then be impossible to get horses for several days' (*ibid.*). Stormont sent three separate dispatches to Rochford on 11 May and one on the 12th.

5. Maupeou. 'There is every reason to believe that the present King [Louis XVI] highly applauded the suppression of the old Parliament, and looked upon the Chancellor as the great support of the royal authority. Those who pretend to

know the present King's temper, think that he carries his notions of that authority as far as any of his predecessors' (Stormont to Rochford 11 May, *ibid.* ff. 54–5).

6. 'The Duke of Choiseul's party certainly look upon the King's death as a fortunate event. The most sanguine expect his return to favour and all the fullness of his former power. But this does not seem probable . . . as the present King has a sort of hereditary dislike to Monsieur de Choiseul, whom the late Dauphin detested; and as it is not imagined that the Queen, knowing her husband's aversion to him, will endeavour to conquer that aversion, and support a man whose return to power the Court of Vienna, it is imagined, would no longer wish to see, as the plan that Court has followed of late with regard to Poland, is directly opposite to that concerted with M. de Choiseul' (*ibid.* f. 51).

7. 'Mesdames, the two of them have not had the smallpox, never leave the King their father. The Dauphin and the rest of the royal family are shut up in their own apartments' (Stormont to Rochford, 4 May, *ibid.* f. 22). Mmes Adélaïde, Sophie, and Victoire all caught smallpox from their father (DU DEFFAND iv. 55, 57).