

was utterly void of sincerity or principle, as the poet Dryden aptly describes him, "*stiff in opinion, always in the wrong, was everything by starts, but nothing long.*" Ashley, afterwards Lord Shaftesbury, was by far the most able of the five. He had deserted Charles I., and supported Cromwell, but being disgusted with the whims and caprices of the "Rump" and the Army, assisted Monk in bringing about the Restoration. He was an ardent supporter of Parliamentary government and toleration, and the best speaker of his time, but he was factious, greedy, and unscrupulous. Lauderdale was an ambitious Scottish peer, who was busily engaged in establishing the King's power in Scotland. They were an unscrupulous, corrupt, and self-seeking set of men, differing in many points of policy, *but agreed in favouring toleration and reversing Clarendon's line of foreign policy.*

NOTE.—By a singular coincidence, the initial letters of the names of these ministers spelt the word "*cabal*," which originally meant nothing more than "*a club*." They were, however, so odious to the nation, that ever since an evil meaning has been attached to the word.

2. **Ambitious designs of Louis XIV. and the Triple Alliance, 1668.** Louis XIV. was one of the most able and at the same time most ambitious kings, that ever sat on the French throne. The one great aim of his life was to conquer the Spanish Netherlands—the modern Belgium—and so make the Rhine the natural boundary of the North of France. Men saw that if he carried out his great scheme successfully, it would greatly endanger the general peace of Europe. Accordingly, Sir William Temple, the English ambassador at the Hague, a man of high culture and great diplomatic skill, arranged the famous "Triple Alliance" between England, Holland and Sweden, by which these three countries bound themselves to check the aggressive policy of France. Louis soon found that he could not withstand so formidable an alliance, and so he concluded the **Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle** with Spain, by which it was agreed that he should hold some very important frontier towns, including Lille, Tournay and Courtrai, but desist from making any further conquests. So popular was the Triple Alliance, that people said it was "*the only good thing that had been done since Charles came into*