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Jean-Louis Prieur (1759-1795) created this illustration of Louis-Charles, the French Dauphin, depicting his treatment in prison. The title of this 1794 work is: *Simon le cordonnier et Louis XVII au Temple* ("Simon the Shoemaker and Louis XVII at the Temple"). Once his father was executed, royalists referred to the Dauphin as King Louis XVII. The illustration is maintained at the BnF and is [online via Gallica](#) (the BnF's digitized gallery).

Louis-Charles, the orphaned son of a king and—to royalists—a king (Louis XVII) himself, would have been better off had his captors simply killed him. Instead, he endured unimaginable conditions in Temple prison, existing in a room above his sister.

When first imprisoned, he was a bright, good-looking child:

...his blue eyes, aquiline nose, elevated nostrils, well-defined mouth, pouting lips, chestnut hair parted in the middle and falling in thick curls on his shoulders, resembled his mother before her years of tears and torture. All the beauty of his race, by both descents, seemed to reappear in him.
(Campan, *Memoirs of Marie Antoinette*, [Supplement](#) to Chapter IX - scroll down 60%.)

An acquaintance of Robespierre, Antoine Simon (often called "Simon the shoemaker"), was charged with caring for the young prince.

Existing, barely, in a pest-ridden cell, the child was terrorized by his captors. Rewarding vile behavior, Simon did his best to corrupt the youngster. He called him by the surname of the Bourbon family's ancestor, Hugh Capet. Beatings were not unusual events:

On one of these occasions, when the child had fallen half stunned upon his own miserable couch, and lay there groaning and faint with pain, Simon roared out with a laugh, "Suppose you were king, Capet, what would you do to me?" The child thought of his father's dying words, and said, "I would forgive you."

When Simon left the Temple prison, to become a municipal officer, the Prince may have thought his life would improve. It did not.

As time passed, living in utterly deplorable conditions, the child would no longer speak. When a physician—Dr. Desault—came to inspect the dauphin's condition, he was appalled. Who would do such a thing to any child?

Treating him kindly, the doctor was able to gain the boy's trust. Speaking again, he looked forward to the doctor's visits—until they stopped. It would not do for anyone to show kindness to the son of a deposed, executed king. His friend, Louis-Charles was told, had died.

Gomin, one of his keepers, did his best to be kind to the child. But there was only so much he could do. The revolutionary government did not want to kill the child, but they also did not want to properly care for him.

Two years after he had entered Temple Prison, Louis-Charles was near death from tuberculosis. Doctors sent to examine him—on June 7, 1795—realized there was nothing they could for his tumor-ridden, scabies-ravaged

body. Gomin watched as the life of the suffering child neared its end:

While standing by the Prince's bed, Gomin noticed that he was quietly crying, and asked him, kindly what was the matter. "I am always alone," he said. "My dear mother remains in the other tower." Night came, "his last night," which the regulations of the prison condemned him to pass once more in solitude, with suffering, his old companion, only at his side.

The next morning, Louis-Charles told Gomin he heard voices, including his mother's:

After a few minutes of attention the child again started, and cried out, in intense rapture, "Amongst all the voices I have distinguished that of my mother!" These were almost his last words ... At a quarter past two he died ... The poor little royal corpse was carried from the room ... where he had suffered so long, - where for two years he had never ceased to suffer. From this apartment the father had gone to the scaffold, and thence the son must pass to the burial-ground.

Before he was buried, however, the prince's body was examined. One of the doctors was Pelletan, head surgeon of the Grand Hospice de l'Humanite.

It was typical, in France, to remove the heart of a royal after death. While no one was looking, Dr. Pelletan took the dauphin's heart and, after wrapping it in his handkerchief, put it in his pocket.

Later putting it into a container, at his home, Pelletan would have been shocked at how that evidence was examined, centuries later.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Louis-XVII-CHILD-PRISONER-Marie-Antoinette>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Louis-XVII-CHILD-PRISONER-Marie-Antoinette>

Media Stream



Louis-Charles

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Louis-Charles - Terrorized by his Captors

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Scabies

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