CHAPTER 22

ABSOLUTISM & FRANCE

Excerpted and adapted from J. Spielvogel, *Western Civilization since 1300*, 7th edition (Belmont, 2009) pp. 451-458.

Absolute monarchy or absolutism meant that the sovereign power or ultimate authority in the state rested in the hands of a king who claimed to rule by divine right. But what did sovereignty mean? The late-sixteenth-century political theorist Jean Bodin believed that sovereign power consisted of the authority to make laws, to tax, to dispense justice, to control the state's administrative system, and to determine foreign policy. These powers made a ruler sovereign.

One of the chief theorists of divine-right monarchy in the seventeenth century was the French theologian and court preacher Bishop Jacques Bossuet (1627-1704), who expressed his ideas in a book titled *Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture*. Bossuet argued first that government was divinely ordained so that humans could live in an organized society. God established kings and through them reigned over all the peoples of the world. Since kings received their power from God, their authority was absolute. They were responsible to no one (including parliaments) except God. There was, however, a large gulf between the theory of absolutism as expressed by Bossuet and the practice of absolutism. A monarch's absolute power was often limited greatly by practical realities.

France during the reign of Louis XIV (1643-1715) has traditionally been regarded as the best example of the practice of absolute monarchy in the seventeenth century. French culture, language, and manners reached into all levels of European society. French diplomacy and wars shaped the political affairs of western and central Europe. The court of Louis XIV seemed to be imitated everywhere in Europe. Moreover, the stability of Louis's reign was magnified by the instability that had preceded it.

The fifty years of French history before Louis XIV came to power were a time in which royal and ministerial governments struggled to avoid the breakdown of the state. The line between order and anarchy was often a narrow one. The situation was especially complicated by the fact that both Louis XIII (1610-1643) and Louis XIV were only boys when they succeeded to the throne in 1610 and 1643, respectively, leaving the government dependent on royal ministers. Two especially competent ministers played crucial roles in maintaining monarchical authority.

Cardinal Richelieu, Louis XIII's chief minister from 1624 to 1642, initiated policies that eventually strengthened the power of the monarchy. By eliminating the political and military rights of the Huguenots while preserving religious toleration, Richelieu transformed the Huguenots into more docile subjects. Richelieu acted more cautiously in "humbling the pride of the great men," the important French nobility. He understood the influential role played by the nobles in the French state. The dangerous ones, from Richelieu's perspective, were those who asserted their territorial independence when they were excluded from participating in the central government. Proceeding slowly but determinedly, Richelieu developed an efficient network of spies to uncover noble plots and then crushed the conspiracies and executed the conspirators, thereby eliminating a major threat to centralized royal authority.

To reform and strengthen the central administration, initially for financial reasons, Richelieu sent out royal officials called *intendants* to the provinces to execute the orders of his government. As the functions of the *intendants* grew, they came into conflict with provincial governors and regional nobles. Since the *intendants* were victorious in most of these disputes, they further strengthened the power of the crown. Richelieu, however, proved less capable in financial matters. Not only was the basic system of state finances corrupt, but so many people benefited from the system's inefficiency and injustice that the government faced strong resistance when he tried to reform it. For example, the *taille* (an annual direct tax usually levied on land or property) was increased – in 1643 it was two and a half times what it had been in 1610 – yet crown lands still had to be mortgaged to pay off national debts. Richelieu's foreign policy goal of confronting the growing power of the Habsburgs in the Thirty Years War was

remarkably expensive and soon outstripped the additional revenues. French debt thus continued its upward spiral under Richelieu.

Richelieu died in 1642, followed five months later by King Louis XIII, who was succeeded by his son Louis XIV, then but four years old. This necessitated a regency under Anne of Austria, wife of the dead king. But she allowed Cardinal Mazarin, Richelieu's trained successor, to dominate the government. An Italian who had come to France as a papal legate and then became naturalized, Mazarin attempted to carry on Richelieu's policies until his death in 1661.

The most important event during Mazarin's rule was a revolt known as the Fronde. As a foreigner, Mazarin was greatly disliked by most strata of the French population. The nobles, who particularly resented the centralized administrative power being built up at the expense of the provincial nobility, temporarily allied with the wealthy members of the Parlement of Paris, who opposed the new taxes levied by the government to pay the costs of the Thirty Years War (Mazarin continued Richelieu's anti-Habsburg policy). Additionally, the masses of Paris were also angry at the additional taxes. The Parlement of Paris was the most important court in France, with jurisdiction over half of the kingdom, and its members formed the nobles of the robe, the service nobility of lawyers and administrators. These nobles of the robe led the first Fronde (1648-1649), which broke out in Paris and was ended by compromise. The second Fronde, begun in 1650, was led by the nobles of the sword, whose ancestors were great medieval landowners. They were interested in overthrowing Mazarin for their own purposes: to secure their positions and increase their own power at the expense of the monarchy. The second Fronde was crushed by 1652, a task made easier when the nobles began fighting each other instead of Mazarin. With the end of the Fronde, most Frenchmen concluded that the best hope for stability lay in the crown.

When Mazarin died in 1661, the greatest of the seventeenth-century monarchs, Louis XIV, took over supreme power. The day after Cardinal Mazarin's death, Louis XIV, age twenty-three, expressed his determination to be a real king and the sole ruler of France:

> Up to this moment I have been pleased to entrust the government of my affairs to the late Cardinal. It is now time that I govern them myself. You [secretaries and ministers of state] will assist me with your counsels when I ask for them. I request and order you to seal no orders except by my command. … I order you not to sign anything, not even a passport, without my command; to render account to me personally each day and to favor no one.

His mother, who was well aware of Louis's proclivity for fun and games, for dance, and for illicit romance, laughed aloud at these words. But Louis was quite serious about becoming a strong ruler – although he long succumbed to his weakness for the fairer sex. Even as a married Catholic king, Louis kept official mistresses and sired many bastard children alongside his legitimate ones. Only near the end of his life did he finally renounce this sinful attachment.

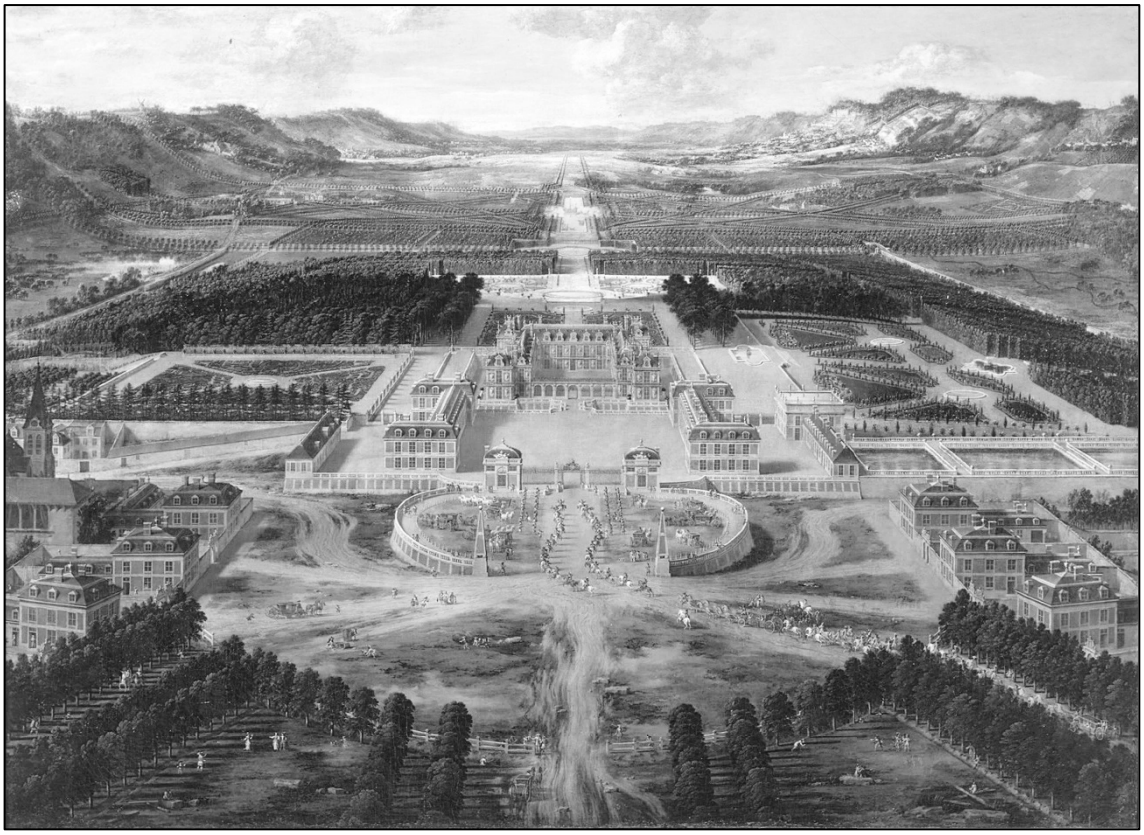
In order to solidify his authority, Louis established a conscientious routine from which he seldom deviated, but he did not look upon his duties as drudgery since he considered his royal profession "grand, noble, and delightful." Eager for glory (in the French sense of achieving what was expected of one in an important position), Louis created a grand and majestic spectacle at his new court of Versailles. Consequently, Louis and his court came to set the standard for monarchies and aristocracies all over Europe.

Although Louis may have believed in the theory of absolute monarchy and consciously fostered the myth of himself as the Sun King, the source of light for all of his people, historians are quick to point out that the realities fell far short of the aspirations. Despite the centralizing efforts of Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin, seventeenth-century France still possessed a bewildering system of overlapping authorities. Provinces had their own regional courts, their own local lords, their own sets of laws. Members of the high nobility, with their huge estates and networks of the lesser nobility, still exercised much regional control. Both towns and provinces possessed privileges and powers seemingly from time immemorial that they would not easily relinquish.

Louis XIV as a young man, dressed as Apollo, the Greek god of the sun, partaking in dance.

One of the keys to Louis's power was that he was able to restructure the central policy-making machinery of government because it was part of his own court and household. The royal court located at Versailles was an elaborate structure that served different purposes: it was the personal household of the king, the location of central governmental machinery, and the place where powerful subjects came to find favors and offices for themselves and their clients as well as the main arena where rival aristocratic factions jostled for power. The

greatest danger to Louis's personal rule came from the very high nobles and princes of the blood (or royal relatives), who considered it their natural function to serve as influential royal ministers. Louis eliminated this threat by removing them from the royal council and enticing them to his court, where he could keep them preoccupied with court life and out of politics. Instead of the high nobility and royal princes, Louis relied for his ministers on other lesser nobles. His ministers were expected to be subservient; Louis said, "I had no intention of sharing my authority with them."



The royal palace complex at Versailles, constructed by command of Louis XIV

Louis's domination of his ministers and secretaries gave him control of the central policy-making machinery of government and thus authority over the traditional areas of monarchical power: the formulation of foreign policy, the making of war and peace, the privilege to appoint key bishops and cardinals in the French church, and the ability to levy taxes. Louis had considerably less

success with the internal administration of the kingdom, however. The traditional groups and institutions of French society – the nobles, officials, town councils, guilds, and other traditional regional authorities – were simply unwilling to surrender their long-held power to the king. Clearly a so-called absolute monarch was not always absolute, although Louis was able at times to exercise both political and economic control over some provincial law courts.

The reestablishment of national religious unity was another of Louis XIV's ambitious goals. As a devoted Catholic, Louis did not want to allow Protestants to practice their dissenting faith in his Catholic France. France, according to Louis XIV, should have "one king, one law, one faith" – *un roi, une loi, une foi*. In 1685, Louis issued the Edict of Fontainebleau. In addition to revoking the Edict of Nantes, the new edict provided for the destruction of Huguenot churches and the closing of Protestant schools. It is estimated that 200,000 Huguenots fled France and sought asylum in England, the Dutch Republic, and the German states. Many of them were skilled artisans and merchants, and their exodus weakened the French economy.

The cost of building Versailles and other palaces, maintaining his court, patronizing the arts and sciences, and pursuing his wars made finances a crucial issue for Louis XIV. He was fortunate in having the services of Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-1683) as controller general of finances. Colbert sought to increase the wealth and power of France through general adherence to mercantilism, an economic system which stressed government regulation of trade and manufacture to benefit the state. To decrease the need for imports and increase exports, Colbert attempted to expand the quantity and improve the quality of French manufactured goods. He founded new luxury industries, such as the royal tapestry works at Beauvais; invited Venetian glassmakers and Flemish clothmakers to France; drew up instructions regulating the quality of goods produced; oversaw the training of workers; and granted special privileges, including tax exemptions, loans, and subsidies, to individuals who established new industries. To improve communications and the transportation of goods internally, he built roads and canals. To decrease imports directly, he raised tariffs on foreign manufactured goods, especially English and Dutch cloth, and created a merchant marine to facilitate the conveyance of French products.

Although Colbert's policies fostered the development of manufacturing and the growth of the French economy, they came at a cost. Ultimately, the more revenue Colbert collected simply enabled the king to continue pursuing his costly European wars for glory. The faster money came into the royal coffers, the faster it was spent. Additionally, in order to avoid upsetting the French nobility, the burden of taxes fell increasingly on the peasants, who still constituted the overwhelming majority of the French population.

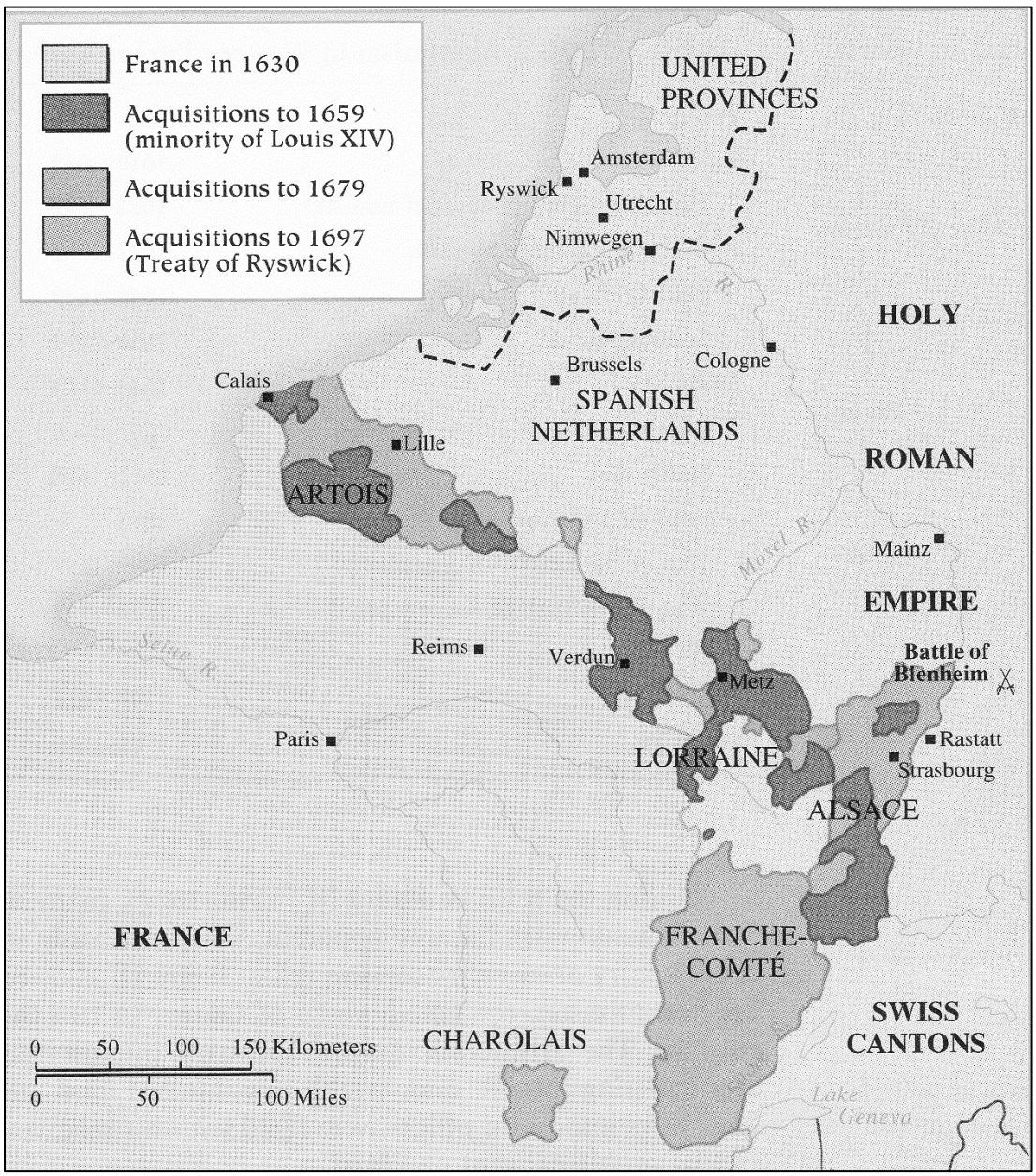
Both the increase in royal power that Louis achieved and his desire for military glory led the king to wage war constantly. France at this time developed a professional army numbering 100,000 men in peacetime and 400,000 in time of war, the largest in Europe. Louis made war an almost incessant activity of his reign. To achieve the prestige and military glory befitting the Sun King as well as to ensure the domination of his Bourbon dynasty over European affairs, Louis waged four wars between 1667 and 1713.

In 1667, Louis began his first war by invading the Spanish Netherlands to his north and Franche-Comte to the east. But the Triple Alliance of the Dutch, English, and Swedes forced Louis to sue for peace in 1668 and accept a few towns in the Spanish Netherlands for his efforts. He never forgave the Dutch for arranging the Triple Alliance, and in 1672, after isolating the Dutch, France invaded the United Provinces with some initial success. But the French victories led Brandenburg, Spain, and the Holy Roman Empire to form a new coalition that forced Louis to end the Dutch War by making peace at Nimwegen in 1678. While Dutch territory remained intact, France received Franche-Comte from Spain, which served merely to stimulate Louis's appetite for even more land.

This time, Louis moved eastward against the Holy Roman Empire, which he perceived from his previous war as feeble and unable to resist. The gradual annexation of the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine was followed by the occupation of the city of Strasbourg, a move that led to widespread protest and the formation of a new coalition. The creation of this League of Augsburg, consisting of Spain, the Holy Roman Empire, the United Provinces, Sweden, and England, led to Louis's third war, the War of the League of Augsburg (1689-1697). This bitterly contested eight-year struggle brought economic

depression and famine to France. The Treaty of Ryswick ending the war forced Louis to give up most of his conquests in the empire, although he was allowed to keep Strasbourg and part of Alsace. The gains were hardly worth the bloodshed and the misery he had caused the French people.

Portrait of Louis XIV on campaign by Hyacinthe Rigaud, 1694



Louis's fourth war, the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1713), was over bigger stakes, the succession to the Spanish throne. Charles II, the sickly and childless Habsburg ruler, left the throne of Spain in his will to a grandson of Louis XIV. When that grandson became King Philip V of Spain after Charles's death, the suspicion that Spain and France would eventually be united under the same dynastic family caused the formation of a new coalition, determined to prevent a Bourbon hegemony that would mean the certain destruction of the European balance of power. This coalition of England, the United Provinces,

Habsburg Austria, and the German states opposed France and Spain in a war that dragged on in Europe and the colonial empires in North America for eleven years. In a number of battles, including the memorable defeat of the French forces at Blenheim in 1704 by allied troops, the coalition wore down Louis's forces. An end to the war finally came with the Peace of Utrecht in 1713 and of Rastatt in 1714. Although these peace treaties confirmed Philip V as the Spanish ruler initiating a Spanish Bourbon dynasty that would last into the twentieth century, they also affirmed that the thrones of Spain and France must remain separated. The Spanish Netherlands, Milan, and Naples were given to Austria, and the emerging state of Brandenburg-Prussia gained additional territories. The real winner at Utrecht, however, was England, which received Gibraltar as well as the French possessions in America of Newfoundland, Hudson's Bay Territory, and Nova Scotia. Though France, by its sheer size and position, remained a great power, England had emerged as a formidable naval force.

Only two years after this treaty, the Sun King was dead, leaving France impoverished and surrounded by enemies. On his deathbed, Louis, seventy-six years old and the longest reigning European monarch of all time, remorsefully told his successor:

> Soon you will be King of a great kingdom. I urge you not to forget your duty to God; remember that you owe everything to Him. Try to remain at peace with your neighbors. I loved war too much. Do not follow me in that or in overspending. Take advice in everything; try to find the best course and follow it. Lighten your people's burden as soon as possible, and do what I have had the misfortune not to do myself.

In the end, it seems that Louis repented of his many vain struggles for earthly glory. The successor to whom these words were addressed was Louis's great-grandson, a child of five at the time. He and his successors would face the great challenge of coping with Louis XIV's problematic legacy – one of royal splendor, centralized power, cultural glory, constant warfare, high taxes, and massive debt.

HOMEWORK QUESTIONS:

1.) In what ways is it accurate to call Louis XIV the "Sun King?"

2.) How did Louis's reign strengthen France, and how did it weaken it?

** PRIMARY SOURCE **

Le Duc de Saint-Simon, *Memoirs*

Excerpted from The Duke of Saint-Simon, *Memoirs of Louis XIV and His Court and of the Regency*, trans. Bayle St. John, 3 vols. (New York, 1910) pp. 933-943, 437-439 and 480-483.

*** Louis de Rouvoy, le Duc de Saint-Simon (1675-1755) was born into the great nobility of France. He initially served as a soldier, but resigned his commission as an officer when it appeared that he would not be promoted any higher. He then took up residence at the grand court of Louis XIV, and these memoirs are his recollections of the 20 years he spent there. They provide precious, detailed, and at times brutally realistic insights into the life and court of the Sun King. ***

After having thus described with truth and the most exact fidelity all that has come to my knowledge through my own experience, or others qualified to speak of Louis XIV during the last twenty-two years of his life, and after having shown him such as he was, without prejudice, nothing remains but to describe the exterior life of this monarch during my residence at the Court.

However insipid and perhaps superfluous details so well-known may appear after what has been already said, nevertheless lessons will be found therein for kings who may wish to make themselves respected, and who may wish to respect themselves. What determines me still more is that details wearying, nay annoying, to instructed readers who had been witnesses of what I relate soon escape the knowledge of posterity; and that experience shows us how much we regret that no one takes upon himself a labor – in its own time so ungrateful, but in future years so interesting – by which princes, who have made quite as much stir as the one in question, are characterized.

I will not speak much of the King's manner of living when with the army. His hours were determined by what was to be done, though he held his councils regularly; I will simply say that morning and evening he ate with people privileged to have that honor. When anyone wished to claim it, the first

gentleman of the chamber on duty was appealed to. He gave the answer, and if favorable you presented yourself the next day to the King, who said to you, "Monsieur, seat yourself at table." That being done, all was done. Ever afterwards you were at liberty to take a place at the King's table, but with discretion. The number of the persons from whom a choice was made was, however, very limited. Even very high military rank did not suffice. Monsieur de Vauban, at the siege of Namur, was overwhelmed by the distinction. The King did the same honor at Namur to the Abbé de Grancey, who exposed himself to danger everywhere in order to confess the wounded and encourage the troops. No other Abbé was ever so distinguished. All the clergy were excluded save the cardinals, bishops, peers, or the ecclesiastics who held the rank of foreign princes.

At these repasts everybody was covered; it would have been a want of respect, of which you would have been immediately informed, if you had not kept your hat on your head. The King alone was uncovered. When the King wished to speak to you, or you had occasion to speak to him, you uncovered. You uncovered, also, when Monseigneur [the King's eldest son] or Monsieur [the King's brother] spoke to you, or you to them. For Princes of the blood you merely put your hand to your hat. The King alone had an armchair. All the rest of the company, Monseigneur included, had seats, with backs of black morocco leather, which could be folded up to be carried, and which were called "parrots." Except at the army, the King never ate with any man, under whatever circumstances; not even with the Princes of the blood, save sometimes at their wedding feasts.

Let us return now to the Court. At eight o'clock the chief *valet de chambre* on duty, who alone had slept in the royal chamber, and who had dressed himself, awoke the King. The chief physician, the chief surgeon, and the nurse (as long as she lived), entered at the same time. The latter kissed the King; the others rubbed and often changed his shirt, because he was in the habit of sweating a great deal. At the quarter-hour, the grand chamberlain was called (or, in his absence, the first gentleman of the chamber), along with those who had what was called the *grandes entrées*. The chamberlain (or chief gentleman) drew back the curtains which had been closed again, and presented the holy-water from the vase at the head of the bed. These gentlemen stayed but a moment, and that was the time to speak to the King, if anyone had anything to ask of him, in which case the rest

stood aside. When, contrary to custom, nobody had aught to say, they were there but for a few moments. He who had opened the curtains and presented the holy-water presented also a prayer-book. Then all passed into the cabinet of the council. A very short religious service being over, the King called and they reentered. The same officer gave him his dressing-gown; immediately after, other privileged courtiers entered, and then everybody else, in time to find the King putting on his shoes and stockings, for he did almost everything himself and with address and grace. Every other day we saw him shave himself; and he had a little short wig in which he always appeared, even in bed, and on medicine days. He often spoke of the chase, and sometimes said a word to somebody. No toilette table was near him; he had simply a mirror held before him.

As soon as he was dressed, he prayed to God, at the side of his bed, where all the clergy present knelt, the cardinals without cushions, all the laity remaining standing; and the captain of the guards came to the balustrade during the prayer, after which the King passed into his cabinet.

He found there, or was followed by all who had the *entrée*, a very numerous company, for it included everybody in any office. He gave orders to each for the day; thus within a half a quarter of an hour it was known what he meant to do; and then all this crowd left directly. It was then a good opportunity for talking with the King; for example, about plans of gardens and buildings; and conversation lasted more or less according to the person engaged in it.

All the Court meantime waited for the King in the gallery, the captain of the guard being alone in the chamber seated at the door of the cabinet. At morning the Court awaited in the saloon; at Trianon in the front rooms as at Meudon; at Fontainebleau in the chamber and ante-chamber. During this pause the King gave audiences when he wished to accord any, spoke with whomever he might wish to speak with secretly, and gave private interviews to foreign ministers in the presence of Torcy. These meetings were called "secret" simply to distinguish them from the uncommon ones by the bedside.

The King then went to Mass, where his musicians always sang an anthem. While he was going to and returning from Mass, anyone spoke to him who wished, after apprising the captain of the guard if they were not distinguished;

and he came and went by the door of the cabinet into the gallery. During the Mass the ministers assembled in the King's chamber, where distinguished people could go and speak or chat with them. The King amused himself a little upon returning from Mass and asked almost immediately for the council. Then the morning was finished.

On Sunday, and often on Monday, there was a council of state; on Tuesday a finance council; on Wednesday a council of state; on Saturday another finance council. Rarely were two councils held in one day, or any on Thursday or Friday. Once or twice a month there was a council of dispatches on Monday morning; but the order that the Secretaries of State took every morning between the King's rising and his Mass much abridged this kind of business. All the ministers were seated accordingly to rank, except at the council of dispatches, where all stood except the sons of France, the Chancellor, and the Duc de Beauvilliers.

Thursday morning was almost always blank. It was the day for audiences that the King wished to give – often unknown to any – back-stair audiences. On Friday after the Mass the King was with his confessor, and the length of their audiences was limited by nothing, and might last until lunch. At Fontainebleau on the mornings when there was no council, the King usually passed from Mass to Madame de Maintenon's chamber [the King's wife, but not called "Queen" because of her inferior social rank], and so at Trianon and Marly. It was the time for their *tête-à-tête* without interruption. Often on the days when there was no council the dinner hour was advanced, more or less for the chase or the promenade. The ordinary hour was one o'clock; if the council still lasted, then the lunch waited and nothing was said to the King.

The lunch was always *au petit convert*, that is, the King ate by himself in his chamber upon a square table in front of the middle window. It was more or less abundant, for he ordered in the morning whether it was to be "a little" or "very little" service. But even at this last, there were always many dishes, and three courses without counting the fruit. The lunch being ready, the principal courtiers entered; then all who were known; and the gentleman of the chamber on duty informed the King.

I have seen, but very rarely, Monseigneur [the King's eldest son] and his sons standing at their dinners, the King not offering them a seat. I have

continually seen there the Princes of the blood and the cardinals. I have often seen there also Monsieur [the King's brother], either on arriving from Saint-Cloud to see the King, or arriving from the council of dispatches (the only one he entered), give the King his napkin and remain standing. A little while afterwards, the King, seeing that he did not go away, asked him if he would not sit down; he bowed, and the King ordered a seat to be brought for him. A stool was put behind him. Some moments after the King said, "Nay then, sit down my brother." Monsieur bowed and seated himself until the end of the dinner, when he presented the napkin.

At other times when he came from Saint-Cloud, the King, on arriving at the table, asked for a plate for Monsieur, or asked him if he would dine. If he refused, he went away a moment after, and there was no mention of a seat; if he accepted, the King asked for a plate for him. The table was square, he placed himself at one end, his back to the cabinet. Then the grand chamberlain (or the first gentleman of the chamber) gave him drink and plates, taking them from him as he finished with them, exactly as he served the King; but Monsieur received all this attention with strongly marked politeness. When he dined thus with the King he much enlivened the conversation. The King ordinarily spoke little at table unless some familiar favorite was near. Ladies scarcely ever were seen at these little dinners.

I have, however, seen the Marechale de la Mothe, who came in because she had been used to do so as governess to the children of France, and she received a seat because she was a Duchess. Grand lunches were very rare, and only took place on grand occasions, and then ladies were present.

Upon leaving the table the King immediately entered his cabinet. That was the time for distinguished people to speak to him. He stopped at the door a moment to listen, then entered; very rarely did any one follow him, never without asking him for permission to do so; and for this few had the courage. It followed that he placed himself in the embrasure of the window nearest to the door of the cabinet, which immediately closed of itself, and which you were obliged to open yourself on quitting the King.

The King amused himself by feeding his dogs, and remained with them more or less time, then asked for his wardrobe, changed before the very few distinguished people it pleased the first gentleman of the chamber to admit there, and immediately went out by the back stairs into the court of marble to get into his coach. From the bottom of that staircase to the coach, anyone spoke to him who wished.

The King was fond of air, and when deprived of it his health suffered; he had headaches caused by the undue use he had formerly made of perfumes, so that for many years he could not endure any, except the odor of orange flowers; therefore if you had to approach anywhere near him you did well not to wear perfumes.

As he was but little sensitive to heat or cold, or even to rain, the weather was seldom sufficiently bad to prevent his going abroad. He went out for three objects: stag-hunting, once or more each week; shooting in his parks (and no man handled a gun with more grace or skill), once or twice each week; and walking in his gardens for exercise, and to see his workmen. Sometimes he made picnics with ladies, in the forest at Marly or at Fontainebleau, and in this last place, promenades with all the Court around the canal, which was a magnificent spectacle. Nobody followed him in his other promenades but those who held principal offices, except at Versailles or in the gardens of Trianon. Marly had a privilege unknown to the other places. On going out from the chateau, the King said aloud, "Your hats, gentlemen," and immediately courtiers, officers of the guard, everybody, in fact, covered their heads, as he would have been much displeased had they not done so; and this lasted all the promenade, that is four or five hours in summer, or in other seasons when he dined early at Versailles to go and walk at Marly, and not sleep there.

The stag-hunting parties were on an extensive scale. At Fontainebleau everyone went who wished; elsewhere only those were allowed to go who had obtained the permission once for all, and those who had obtained leave to wear the *justau-corps*, which was a blue uniform with silver and gold lace, lined with red. The King did not like too many people at these parties. He did not care for you to go if you were not fond of the chase. He thought that ridiculous, and never bore ill-will to those who stayed away altogether.

It was the same with the play-table, which he liked to see always well frequented – with high stakes – in the saloon at Marly, for *lansquenet* and other games. He amused himself at Fontainebleau during bad weather by seeing good players at tennis, in which he had formerly excelled. Sometimes when there was no council, he would make presents of stuff, or of silverware, or jewels, to the ladies, by means of a lottery, for the tickets of which they paid nothing. Madame de Maintenon drew lots with the others, and almost always gave at once what she gained. The King took no ticket.

Upon returning home from walks or drives, anybody, as I have said, might speak to the King from the moment he left his coach till he reached the foot of his staircase. He changed his dress again, and rested in his cabinet an hour or more, then went to Madame de Maintenon's, and on the way anyone who wished might speak to him.

At ten o'clock his supper was served. The captain of the guard announced this to him. A quarter of an hour after the King came to supper, and from the antechamber of Madame de Maintenon to the table again, any one spoke to him who wished. This supper was always on a grand scale, the royal household (that is, the sons and daughters of France) at table, and a large number of courtiers and ladies present, sitting or standing, and on the evening before the journey to Marly all those ladies who wished to take part in it. That was called presenting yourself for Marly. Men asked in the morning, simply saying to the King, "Sire, Marly." In later years the King grew tired of this, and a valet wrote up in the gallery the names of those who asked. The ladies continued to present themselves.

After supper the King stood some moments, his back to the balustrade of the foot of his bed, encircled by all his Court; then, with bows to the ladies, passed into his cabinet, where, on arriving, he gave his orders. He passed a little less than an hour there, seated in an armchair, with his legitimate children and bastards, his grandchildren, legitimate and otherwise, and their husbands or wives. Monsieur in another armchair; the Princesses upon stools, Monseigneur and all the other Princes standing.

The King, wishing to retire, went and fed his dogs; then said good night, passed into his chamber to his bed, where he said his prayers, as in the morning,

then undressed. He said good night with an inclination of the head, and while everybody was leaving the room stood at the corner of the mantelpiece, where he gave the order to the colonel of the guards alone. Then commenced what was called the *petit coucher*, at which only the specially privileged remained. That was short. They did not leave until he got into bed. It was a moment to speak to him. Then all left if they saw any one bow to the King. For ten or twelve years before he died the petit coucher ceased, in consequence of a long attack of gout he had had, so that the Court was finished at the rising from supper.

On medicine days, which occurred about once a month, the King remained in bed, then heard Mass. The royal household came to see him for a moment, and Madame de Maintenon seated herself in the armchair at the head of his bed. The King dined in bed about three o'clock, everybody being allowed to enter the room, then rose, and the privileged alone remained. He passed afterwards into his cabinet, where he held a council, and afterwards went, as usual, to Madame de Maintenon's and supped at ten o'clock, according to custom.

During all his life, the King failed only once in his attendance at Mass. It was with the army, during a forced march; he missed no fast day, unless really indisposed. Some days before Lent, he publicly declared that he should be very much displeased if any one ate meat or gave it to others, under any pretext. He ordered the grand prévot to look to this, and report all cases of disobedience. But no one dared to disobey his commands, for they would soon have found out the cost. They extended even to Paris, where the lieutenant of police kept watch and reported. However, for twelve or fifteen years he had himself not observed Lent. At church he was very respectful. During his Mass everybody was obliged to kneel at the *Sanctus*, and to remain so until after the communion of the priest; and if he heard the least noise, or saw anybody talking during the Mass, he was much displeased. He took communion five times a year. On Holy Thursday he served the poor at dinner. During Mass he said his rosary (he knew no more), always kneeling, except at the Gospel.

He was always clad in gowns more or less brown, lightly embroidered, but never at the edges, sometimes with nothing but a gold button, sometimes black velvet. He wore always a vest of cloth, or of red, blue, or green satin, much

embroidered. He used no ring; and no jewels, except in the buckles of his shoes, garters, and hat, the latter always trimmed with Spanish point, with a white feather. He always wore the *cordon bleu* outdoors [the emblem of the most prestigious French military order, hung on a luxurious blue ribbon], except on *fêtes* when he wore it indoors, with many precious stones attached.

* * *

Such was our military history of the year 1706 – a history of losses and dishonor. It may be imagined in what condition was the exchequer with so many demands upon its treasures. For the last two or three years the King had been obliged, on account of the expenses of the war and the losses we had sustained, to cut down the presents that he made at the commencement of the year. Thirty-five thousand gold coins was the sum he ordinarily spent in this manner. This year, 1707, he diminished it by ten thousand. It was upon Madame de Montespan that the blow fell. Since she had quitted the Court, the King gave her twelve thousand gold coins each year. This year he sent word to her that he could only give her eight thousand. Madame de Montespan testified not the least surprise. She replied that she was only sorry for the poor, to whom indeed she gave with profusion. A short time after the King had made this reduction – that is, on the 8th of January – Madame la Duchesse de Bourgogne gave birth to a son. The joy was great, but the King prohibited all those expenses which had been made at the birth of the first-born of Madame de Bourgogne, and which had amounted to a large sum. The want of money indeed made itself felt so much at this time that the King was obliged to seek for resources as a private person might have done. A mining speculator, named Rodes, having pretended that he had discovered many veins of gold in the Pyrenees, was given support by the King in order that he might bring these treasures to light.

He declared that with eighteen hundred workmen he would furnish a million francs' worth of gold each week. Fifty-two million per year would have been a fine increase of revenue. However, after waiting some little time, no gold was forthcoming, and the money that had been spent to assist this enterprise was found to be pure loss.

The difficulty of finding money to carry on the affairs of the nation continued to grow so irksome that Chamillart, who had both the finance and the war departments under his control, was unable to stand against the increased trouble and vexation which this state of things brought him. More than once he had stated that this double work was too much for him. But the King had in former times expressed so much annoyance from the troubles that arose between the finance and war departments that he would not separate them, after having once joined them together. At last, Chamillart could bear up against his heavy load no longer. He had attacks of giddiness in the head; his digestion was obstructed; he grew thin as a lath. He wrote again to the King, begging to be released from his duties, and frankly stated that, in the state he was, if some relief was not afforded him, everything would go wrong and perish. He always left a large margin to his letters, and upon this the King generally wrote his reply. Chamillart showed me this letter when it came back to him, and I saw upon it, with great surprise, in the handwriting of the King, this short note: "Well, let us perish together!"

The necessity for money had now become so great that all sorts of means were adopted to obtain it. Amongst other things, a tax was established upon baptisms and marriages. This tax was extremely onerous and odious. The result of it was a strange confusion. Poor people, and many of humble means, baptized their children themselves, without carrying them to the church, and were married at home by reciprocal consent before witnesses, when they could find no priest who would marry them without formality. In consequence of this there were no longer accurate baptismal records; no longer any certainty as to baptisms or births; and the children of the marriages solemnized in this way were illegitimate in the eyes of the law. Efforts were then redoubled by the royal officials for the purpose of collecting the tax.

From public cries and murmurs the people in some places passed to sedition. Matters went so far at Cahors that two battalions which were there had great difficulty in holding the town against the armed peasants, and troops intended for Spain were obliged to be sent there. It was found necessary to suspend the operation of the tax, but it was with great trouble that the movement of Quercy was put down, and the peasants, who had armed and collected

together, were finally induced to retire to their villages. In Perigord they rose, pillaged the *bureaux*, and rendered themselves masters of a little town and some castles, and forced some gentlemen to put themselves at their head. They declared publicly that they would pay the old taxes to King, curate, and lord, but that they would pay no more, nor hear a word of any other taxes or vexation. In the end it was found necessary to drop this tax upon baptism and marriages, to the great regret of the tax-gatherers, who, by all manner of vexations and rogueries, had enriched themselves cruelly.

* * *

An incident then occurred at Marly which made much stir. The ladies who were invited to Marly had the privilege of dining with the King. Tables were placed for them, and they took up positions according to their rank. The non-titled ladies had also their special place. It so happened one day, that Madame de Torcy (an untitled lady) placed herself above the Duchesse de Duras, who arrived at table a moment after her. Madame de Torcy offered to give up her place, but it was a little late, and the offer passed away in compliments. The King entered, and put himself at table. As soon as he sat down, he saw the place Madame de Torcy had taken, and fixed such a serious and surprised look upon her that she again offered to give up her place to the Duchesse de Duras; but the offer was again declined. All throughout the dinner the King scarcely ever took his eyes off Madame de Torcy, said hardly a word, and bore a look of anger that rendered everybody very attentive, and even troubled the Duchesse de Duras.

Upon rising from the table, the King passed, according to custom, into the apartments of Madame de Maintenon, followed by the Princesses of the blood, who grouped themselves around him upon stools; the others who entered kept at a distance. Almost before he had seated himself in his chair, he said to Madame de Maintenon that he had just been witness of an act of "incredible insolence" (that was the term he used) which had thrown him into such a rage that he had been unable to eat; that such an enterprise would have been insupportable in a woman of the highest quality; but coming, as it did, from a mere bourgeoise, had so affected him that ten times he had been upon the point of making her leave

the table, and that he was only restrained by consideration for her husband. After this outbreak he made a long discourse upon the genealogy of Madame de Torcy's family and other matters; and then, to the astonishment of all present, grew as angry as ever against Madame de Torcy. He went off then into a discourse upon the dignity of the Dukes, and in conclusion, he charged the Princesses to tell Madame de Torcy to what extent he had found her conduct impertinent. The Princesses looked at each other, and not one seemed to like this commission; whereupon the King, growing more angry, said that nevertheless it must be undertaken, and he left the room.

The news of what had taken place, and of the King's anger, soon spread all over the Court. It was believed, however, that all was over, and that nothing more would be heard of the matter. Yet the very same evening the King broke out again with even more bitterness than before. On the morrow, too, surprise was great indeed when it was found that the King, immediately after dinner could talk of nothing but this subject, and that, too, without any softening of tone. At last he was assured that Madame de Torcy had been spoken to, and this appeased him a little. Her husband was obliged to write him a letter, apologizing for the fault of Madame de Torcy, and the King at this grew content. It may be imagined what a sensation this adventure produced all through the Court.

HOMEWORK QUESTIONS:

1.) In what light does Saint-Simon present Louis XIV?

2.) What are the advantages of having such an elaborate royal court, and what are the disadvantages?