The Life And Times Of Louis Xiv Essay, Research Paper

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Louis XIV ruled France from 1651 until his death in 1715 (Bernier, Foreward). Louis XIV was on one the most well-known monarchs in France and in Europe. “When twentieth-century men speak of a king, the image that usually comes to mind is Charlemange or Louis XIV; no other rulers so completely dominated their lands both in their own times and in the memory of posterity.” (Wolf, ix). He is portrayed in The Man in the Iron Mask as a selfish and dishonest king who will do anything to get what he wants. He was the total anangoist of the musketeer saying, “All for one and one for all.” Louis learned to cover his feelings and intentions behind an austere presence, and he became a master of of secrecy and deception. Once he assumed total power, the major crime in the kingdom was anything his majesty considered to be an offense, ranging from breach of etiquette to high treason. Louis demanded total loyalty to the throne

and discretion in public and private behavior. (Dumas, Afterword). Louis was born on September 5, 1638. It was also an event that fell just short of being miraculous, for the king and queen had been married for twenty-three years and they detested each other. After all these years of unfruitful marriage, everyone had become resigned to the idea that the reigning couple, Louis XIII and Anne of Austria, would remain childless. This meant that the King’s brother, Gaston d’Orleans would eventually inherit the throne. The birth of the new king brought national rejoicing (though not Gaston’s). France finally had their longed-for “Dauphin,” as the heir to the French throne has been called since the acquisition by France, in 1349, of the province of Dauphine. (Panicucci 4). Since neither parent had any doubt that this was the work of Providence, the baby was named Louis-Dreudonne, Louis the Gift of God. (Bernier 2). Louis XIII’s hate for his brother and the battles between brothers throughout history in royal families brought about the plot in The Man in the Iron Mask where Louis XIII takes two twin brothers and separates them, one to be king and one to be in an iron mask so the royal family would not be divided.

Louis XIV knew his father, Louis XIII, for a small period. “Only a short time had they known each other, and even then there was no warmth in their relationship. The boy feared the gloomy man who, so very rarely, found a few minutes to peek into the nursery.” (Aspler 22). In a letter Louis XIII once bitterly complained to Cardinal Richelieu: “I am very dissatisfied with my little son. As soon as he sees me, he cries as if he has seen the devil. He always runs after his mother. He must be removed from the queen as soon as possible…” (Aspler 22). Louis XIV’s mother, Anne of Austria, has a major role in Louis’s life since his father died a young age. Anne of Austria, daughter of the King of Spain, Philip III, had married Louis XIII in 1615. (Panicucci 4). Her role as queen was just to produce an heir. “”I am the king’s wife,” she told herself thousands of times,” and my first duty is to produce an heir to the throne. Soon they will send me back to Spain in disgrace, and the whole world will sneer.” (Aspler 15). She was left to mold Louis into the royal king he was to become. Before Louis XIII’s death he had another son. Two years after Louis’s birth, his brother Philip came into the world. (Wolf 3). Philip was brought up to defer to his brother all things; he was dressed as a girl much of the time until he was well past adolescence, and he continued occasionally to dress in women’s clothing as an adult. His latest biographer insists that Anne’s rearing of this boy was probably responsible for his homosexual tenancies.” (Wolf 3-4). The treatment of being second rate to Louis given to Philip as a child and an adult left his life meaningless and miserable. For this Louis took advantage of Philip to assume total control of the family. Along with being raised by his mother, Anne of Austria, Louis XIV was trained by Cardinal Jules Mazarin, the prime minister, to fulfill the role of king. Jules Marazin had been a confidential assistant to Richelieu. As the old statesman neared his end, he still wielded enough influence to have Marazin installed as successor. (Aspler 25). Marazin was also the lover of Anne of Austria. When Louis became the king at the age of five, Mazarin took the opportunity to rule France in his name. He was very unpopular. The peasants hated him because they were bitterly burdened by the taxes with which he waged war. The merchants him because he did not agree with them about the virtues of feudalism. The parlements hated him because he set himself and the King above the law. (Durant 5). These corrupt values were installed by Mazarin into Louis. The mistreatment of the French people lead to two Frondes (Civil War). The Parlement of Paris launched the first Fronde (1648-49, seeking to duplicate the movement that in England had just raised Parliament above the king as the source and judge of law. (Durant 5). After this attempt failed, a second Fronde was attempted in January 18, 1650. The Fronde was not broken until 1652, when Louis and Mazarin entered Paris as victors. (Wolf, xx).

After the threat of the Fronde over, their rule was unquestioned. During this time Marazin prepared Louis for his eventual role as king in fact as well as in name, by giving him an education such as few rulers ever received. Louis learned from the council table, from warfare in the field, and from discussions with the cardinal and his “creatures”. (Wolf, xx). “But at the end of the Fronde was not the end of the was with Spain; this lasted for another seven years.” (Wolf xx). This was the first true test for Louis XIV as king was the conflict with Spain. France could not sleep quietly until the archenemy had been pushed behind defendable natural borderlines. (Aspler 41). This war with Spain impoverished France, leaving Paris and its peasants famined (Durant 43).

Nevertheless, he raised his more taxes, built a navy, and expanded his armies to 180,000 armies and in August 15, 1684, Spain had surrendered some of their provinces and Louis was declared Louis le Grand. (Durant 43,45). This victory and taken him out of Mazarin’s shadow and sullified him as the ruler of France.

Finally, Louis was the true ruler of France. He first wanted to create a new capital for his new empire. That new capital was to be Versailles. Louis says, “Paris is exactly where I do not want to be. It’s crowded and vulgar. The air is foul with disrespect and rebellion. Versailles will be something completely different, my own monument, my masterwork.” (Aspler 105). Versailles, although not the official capital of France, acted as one for most of the time of Louis XIV ’s rule. The maintenance of Versailles, the lap of luxury, cost Louis XIV a fortune, while his people starved in the streets of Paris. (Aspler 57). During Louis XIV’s rule, he had wars to increase the dominance of France during his empire. These wars he created led to the rise of France, but they led to his people’s famine. Louis did not care that his people were hungry. His main objective was to make France the supreme power and him the supreme ruler. During his rule his staff, the Cabinet, was one of the best formed in the history of the world.

“This group of ministers met daily in Louis’ private study, the cabinet. He presided sitting in the only armchair that was in the room while the ministers squatted on backless stools. When sickness or a military campaign kept him from attending, the armchair remained empty, reminding the council that, though away, the master was still in command. Nine secretaries were kept busy all day taking dictation and writing out answers to petitions. They had carefully learned to copy the king’s handwriting, but it was always His Majesty himself who affixed the signature. He alone chose all his aides, from the ministers to the lowest-ranking functionaries, and he preferred to select them from the middle class. Those sons of silversmiths and wool merchants were accustomed to hard, disciplined work. They had learned to appreciate the value of money and knew how to handle it. With their connections in the financial world they could find ways to refill a depleted treasury of which the old-style courtiers of aristocratic stock would never have

thought. (Aspler 55).

Louis was very skilled at picking his Cabinet. Louis received already a skilled Cabinet from Mazarin, among them the superintendent of finances, Nicolas Fouquet, and his assistant, Jean-Baptiste Colbert. The two hated each other with the intensity of bitter rivals, each maneuvering for the king’s favors and the other’s destruction. (Aspler 55). Louis used this hatred to his advantage. Louis had an uneasiness with the church. He disliked the power that the church had over the people. Louis believed that he should have total power in France. He did however try to restore the church to peace so the people would not riot against him. “The peace which broke out in the French Church (1668-79) was a compromise, corresponding to a high point in the reign. It could only ever be a truce, because Louis XIV could scarcely distinguish between the supporters of Port-Royal and the disciples of Calvin, judging them both equally dangerous for a “well-regulated monarchy”.” (Bluche 215). Louis also established Code Louis. The laws were revised into much order and logic as comported with aristocracy, and the Code Louis so formed (1667-73) governed France till the Code Napoleon (1804-10). The code legalized much barbarism and tyranny. A net of informers was spread through France, spying on words and actions. Arbitrary arrests could be made by- lettres de cachet- secret orders of the king or his ministers. Prisoners could be kept for years without trial, and without the cause of their arrest. It retained use of torture to elicit confessions. Sometimes prisoners were kept to their slavery for years after their sentences had expired. (Durant 16-17). Louis himself was placed above the law, free to decree any punishment for anything. Louis made sure he would have no political adversary making himself the prime minister and destroying the Parlement of Paris.

“The Parlement of Paris, temporarily subdued by the defeat of the Fronde, now received the final blow. When the king heard that the honorable magistrates were about to discuss whether or not to approve some of his recent decrees, he strode into their meeting hall, contemptuously dressed in hunting clothes, with dusty boots and with whip in hand. “I forbid you to continue this meeting.” His voice was cold and sharp, like that of a lieutenant addressing his squad. “The misfortune that your assemblies have brought about are well known. I order you to break up this assembly which has met to discuss my decrees.” Thus, the Parlement of Paris sank into oblivion. From then on nobody’s approval was needed for the king’s word.” (Aspler 54-55).

With total control and no one to challenge his orders, Louis XIV went crazy with power and abused it in every way possible. With the parlement of Paris destroyed, Louis had free reign to make any military moves he chose to make. Louis wanted to be remembered as the greatest monarch ever, not just in France, but in the world. Louis did not care that these wars were killing hundreds of thousands and starving his people, the main objective to him was to expand France’s boundary lines. “The acquisition of these distant lands, and the conquest of the neighboring provinces, which composed the pre carre, were not made without cost. Louis XIV’s wars had cost the lives of 500,000 men. They brought ten provinces and an overseas empire.” (Bluche 572). Louis’s major targets in these wars were the English, the Dutch, and the Spanish. “This is the greatest war that a king of France will ever have on his hands; affirmed the comte de Rabutin. The war was waged by Holland(26 Nov 1688), the empire (December) and Frederick III of Brandenburg (January 1689). The destruction of the Palatinate led to the adherence of the Elector of Bavaria (4 May). By mid-April, France and Spain were at war, and, on 17 May, England declared war on France. (Bluche 422). Louis waged these wars to show Europe who was in charge in the world. It was basically France versus the rest of Europe. These unholy wars enraged the Jesuits. The Jesuits were comprised of the best educated and most tightly organized segment of the Catholic clergy. (Aspler 109). Jesuits tried to cultivate persons of importance, and being clever and useful, they were often chosen as spiritual advisers to rulers and statesman. They were bound by special vows to work for the greatest possible power of an undivided church, to resist anything that would weaken its authority, and they were trained to employ subtle, as well as drastic, means to that end, never questioning the orders of their superiors. (Aspler 110). The Jesuits hated Louis’s needless bloodshed and the starvation of the people. One of the lead characters in The Man in the Iron Mask that plots to switch the two brothers is the general of the Jesuits in the book.

Louis was notourous for his mistresses and his dealings with women. He used his king’s status to get any women he wanted. Louis XIV’s first love was Maria Mancini, one of Mazarin’s nieces. Like so many first loves, it was a never-to-be-forgotten one. He had already a few light amorous adventures with ladies and damsels of the Court. His mother seemed not to be opposed to these brief attachments. She was, however, very much annoyed by his pursuit of Maria Mancini and, with the help of Marazin, she put an end to the affair. (Panicucci 48). Louis was very angry after this separation created by his mother and Mazarin and this bitterness extended into his arranged marriage with Maria Teresa. “Anne of Austria succeeded in making Louis marry the Spanish Infanta, Maria Teresa, a pretty, virtuous, stupid young woman who, unfortunately for her peace of mind, fell in love with her husband on their wedding night and remained deeply in love with him until the end of her life.” (Panicucci 48). Louis had one child with Maria. Louis never loved Maria and made no effort to hide his mistresses and his illegitimate children from her.

“Louis did however fall in love with Louise de la Valliere. La Valliere fell deeply in love, genuinely in love with the king. Touched by her fragile beauty, Louis returned her passion and made her his mistress. This fact was tacitly announced by a series of splendid fetes given at Versailles in July 1661. For Louise it was to be a tender, disinterested love, whose only lasting reward perhaps has been the kindly verdict of history. Louise de La Valliere never capitalized on her position; she neither asked nor gave favors, she refused expensive presents, avoided cliques and intrigues. Faithful and modest in bearing, she never stopped loving Louis, even after she had been ruthlessly supplanted. She had four children by him, the first two of whom died soon after birth. Louise de La Valliere and the king lived happily and contentedly until 1667, when the scheming and unscrupulous Marquise de Montespan brought their idyll to an end”. (Pancucci 48).

The king loved Louise’s children more than his own. The king, in fact, sought to explain to his son how he came to decide the title of duchess for his mistress, Louise de la Valliere, and legitimize their child, Mlle de Blois. (Bluche 265). Throughout The Man in the Iron Mask, it depicts the love of Louis and La Valliere. With Louis’s third mistress, Louis was not only satisfied with one mistress but officially sinned with another. “Although there can be no doubt that the marquise had been the King’s mistress for a while, the relationship changed dramatically as a result of the Queen’s death on July 30, 1683: although a simple adultery was better than a double, still the King was unquestionably sinning with Mme de Maintenon.” Louis’s third mistress was one of the most treachous of all. In the end Mme de Montespan got her punishment.

“Mme de Montespan was not alone in feeling racked by remorse ‘Her sense of sin’, according to Saint-Simon, ‘never left her in peace. She often went form the king to pray in her study; nothing would make break a fast or a day of abstinence.’ When she left the court, she spent her days in the Saint-Joseph mission which she directed. She gave ‘almost all she had to the poor. She worked several hours each day on their behalf, doing the daily round of common tasks… her mortifications were unceasing.’ (Bluche 272).

Louis actually married Mlle de Montespan after the death of his wife, Maria Theresa. Louis’s fifth affair is the most despictable act of them all. Louis had a brief affair with his cousin, Henrietta of England. (Dumas, Afterword). To make it worse, Henrietta of England was his brother’s, Philip, wife. This was just another instance of Louis taking abusing his power and humiliating his brother in the process.

Louis XIV was very egotistical. He let no one challenge his power. The only person who was foolish enough to challenge his power was Nicolas Fouquet and he fell the victim to the full wrath of the King. Fouquet also had a flirtation with Louise de La Valliere as demonstrated in The Man in the Iron Mask. Louis was looking for a reason to destroy Fouquet and one day he got his chance. “Louis could have overlooked the falsified reports and juggled accounts, but, very unwisely, Fouquet let it be understood that he was really made for greater things. Obviously he dreamed of being another Mazarin. That did not sit well at all with the king, who was determined to remain his own prime minister. Outwardly he acted as politely as ever toward the Superintendent of Finance, but he was waiting for the right moment to put him in his place.” (Aspler 58). Louis used this chance to lock Fouquet up in the Bastille. This opened up the job of Superintendent of Finance for Colbert, the archrival of Fouquet and the lackey of Louis. Colbert was an integral part of Fouquet’s destruction. Colbert, as drab and deferential as Fouquet was colorful, carefully fed his master’s fear of a subordinate who was getting to big. (Aspler 58). Colbert financed all of Louis’s wars and turned out to be a decent superintendent.

Towards the end of his life Louis expressed some courage. The moral courage with Louis saw the end draw near was free of the ostentation of the rest of his life. He died on September 1, at 8:15 A.M., aged seventy-seven minus three days, after having reigned for seventy-two years, three months and eighteen days. (Panicucci 74). Through seventy-two of his seventy-seven years of life, Louis had occupied the throne of France, he had presided over the most illustrious period in French history, the Age of Louis XIV. Under his sway, he had created the modern state, centrally organized, bureaucratically administered, concerned mostly with conquest but also with economic and cultural progress. From that background arouse the national governments of our own time.