



Louis XIV and the Zenith of the French Monarchy

Arthur Hassall

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Pyrrhus Press specializes in bringing books long out of date back to life, allowing today's readers access to yesterday's treasures. This is a history of France during the era of the Sun King, Louis XIV, who oversaw the construction of Versailles and the strengthening of the French state. From the prologue: "THE character and position of Louis XIV. are peculiarly difficult to estimate, partly on account of the attitude taken towards him during his lifetime by his own subjects, partly owing to the entire misapprehension under which foreign nations laboured as to his real aims. The French people during more than two-thirds of his long reign made him into a god and worshipped him, while at the time of the Spanish Succession war a generation had grown up in England which, says Mr. Wyon in his History of Great Britain during the Reign of Queen Anne, regarded "Louis XIV. as a monster of ambition with a mission from the devil to make slaves and Papists of the whole human race, a perfidious tyrant with whom it was useless to think of entering into a compact, whom it was absolutely necessary to bind with chains of iron." Again at the present day, modern historical writers, for the greater part hailing from France, are well-nigh unanimous in wholesale condemnation of the age of Louis XIV. on the ground that it was essentially the cause of the French Revolution. Even allowing that it be strictly historical to say that Louis' reign made the Revolution inevitable, it remains none the less true that the blame, if there be any, must be shared by the people with the King. The French nation made Louis, and Louis was the epitome of the French nation. It is easy to sympathise with the many hostile criticisms levelled at the King by German historians, who cannot forgive the devastation of the Palatinate or forget the loss of Strasburg. But it is peculiarly ungracious, ungrateful, and unhistorical for French writers who are well acquainted with the history of their own country, to allow themselves to be so carried away by feeble republican predilections, as to pour virulent abuse upon the most brilliant period of their history, and their most hardworking, painstaking, and on the whole successful ruler."



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