

## 59 A DAY IN THE LIFE OF LOUIS XIV

*For much of his reign, Louis XIV resided at the palace of Versailles. There he established a lavish court, which the country's leading nobles were expected to attend. Life at Versailles revolved around the king, and the simplest events of his day, such as getting dressed or going to bed, were accompanied by pomp and ceremony in which the court was required to take part. In the excerpt below from The Memoirs of Saint-Simon, one of Louis' courtiers, the Duc de Saint-Simon, describes a typical day at Versailles. As you read the excerpt, consider what the day's activities tell you about the character of Louis XIV.*

**A**t eight o'clock every morning the King was awoken by his First Valet-de-Chambre, who slept in the room with him. At the same time the First Physician and First Surgeon were admitted; and as long as she lived the King's former wet-nurse also came in and would kiss him. He would then be rubbed down, because he perspired a great deal. At a quarter past eight the Great Chamberlain was admitted, together with those members of the court who had the *grandes entrées*. The Great Chamberlain then opened the curtains round the bed . . . and offered him holy water from a stoup at the head of the bed. This was the chance for any courtier who wished to ask a favor or to speak to the King, and if one did so the others withdrew to a distance.

The Chamberlain then handed the King the book of the Office of the Holy Ghost, and having done so retired to the next room with everyone else. The King said the Office . . . and then, putting on his dressing-gown, summoned them back into the room; meanwhile the second *entrée* was admitted and, a few minutes later, the body of the court. By the time they came in the King was getting into his breeches (for he put on nearly all his clothes himself), which he accomplished with considerable grace. He was shaved every other day, with the court watching; while it was being done he wore a short wig, without which he never allowed himself to be seen. . . . While his barber was at work he sometimes talked to those around him, about hunting or some other light topic. He had no dressing-table at hand, only a servant who held up a glass for him.

When he had finished dressing he knelt down at the side of his bed and said his prayers. . . . Next the King went into his study, followed by those permitted to do so—which, as a number of appointments carried this privilege, amounted to quite a gathering. He then announced his appointments for the day, so that everyone knew what he would be doing every quarter of an hour. Then the room was cleared. . . .

The courtiers waited in the Gallery until the king was ready to go to Mass, at which the choir always sang a motet. The Ministers were told as soon as he had gone to the chapel, and they then gathered in the King's study. . . . As soon as Mass was over the Council met, and that was

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