



Advancements and Reformations of Louis XIV and Henry VIII

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The world history holds glory and fate of many great figures who have left their imprint on the history of their countries, and these people are famous for their deeds. Whether they are good or bad, some people are never meant to be forgotten for what they've done to gain their glory. These two men are famous for advancements they brought to the societies of their kingdoms, and they reigned countries so great that there was no other choice, but to expand and multiply greatness of these countries for all the people to acknowledge them as great kings of their epoch.

This paper aims to discuss some of the advancements and reformations of two great Kings - the Sun King and the Tyrant King - Louis XIV and Henry VIII.

It is quite easy to judge and criticize these two men for their deeds and faults, but it is undoubted that they made many great things, sometimes bloodcurdling things, and they brought many advancements and reformations that are seen as roots of a new, a more progressive society. They are so different, but yet so alike at the same time.

Louis XIV was born to be a king; his father King Louis XIII dreamed of the male successor that would rule France after him. He became the king at the age of four, but the real power was given to him when Cardinal Jules Mazarin died in 1661. And since then, the style of the reign of the French kingdom has changed forever. According to Rule and Trotter (2014), past and modern historians had many debates and discussion about the style of his reign and consequences it had on France in general, as the style of reign combined war, diplomacy, and what would be called later on a bureaucratic fashion. The fact that he took the helm of the state solely, pointing out that those who have looked for Mazarin guidance before should follow him unquestionably in future, only proves his position as a sole leader of the State. And by doing so, Louis XIV led the kingdom to the age of the absolute monarchy in which he, as the king, would be the supreme and the only great power.

Campbell (2013) in his book "Louis XIV" points out that modern illustrations of Louis XIV's figure is rather complex than those described in the past works, and many factors should be taken into account when judging deeds of this King. Louis XIV was bound by certain factors and resources that cannot be ignored when portraying the King, considering the wars he fought against other European countries. However, it is evident that foreign policy was of primary importance to King Louis, but even this factor cannot be evaluated properly without his internal policy (Campbell, 2013).

One of the most important traits of the young King Louis XIV was that he had no intention to share his power with anyone, and it led him to the decision to choose ministers-servants rather than first-ministers; that was one of the main reasons for choosing such servants among the middle class and gentry who would serve the kingdom diligently without asserting to become the next Mazarin or Richelieu.

The story of Henry VIII's ascent to the throne is quite the opposite. Being the second son and the third child of King Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, young Henry was not destined to be a king. He received a strictly religious education that would later influence his manner of ruling the kingdom greatly, and Henry remained a full-blooded religious man until his dying day. He became a king right after his father's death, at the age of seventeen, and the next day proclaimed his will to marry Catherine of Aragon, as the last will of his dying father, King Henry VII. Henry VIII was seen as a new hope for England during his early years of reign; he was seen as a vigorous young man, full of new and bright ideas. However, Henry had a huge ego and a mind full of thoughts different from the ones of his advisors and ministers, and no person could feel safe near Henry.

Alison Weir (2008) describes Henry in his fifties as an enormous mass that occupied the large chair and resembled a pile of purple-clad flesh. Weir also states that his mind was full of dark and serious thoughts, and his black heart was filled with bloodlust and cruelty. Indeed, at the end of his life, he was huge with all the physical mass fastened to the chair. He never really rested, like a bird of prey, he was ready to spring into action and scourge an innocent soul, as he kept a wary eye on all his court. He is known as the Tyrant King of England, the great reformist of his age, and the paranoid king, obsessed with treason and conspiracy among his court.

Both Louis XIV and Henry VIII were great fans of hunting, a fancy hobby that caused their death. Both Kings were hunting to distance themselves from annoying things to ponder on events that preoccupied their minds.

Hassall (2014) describes Louis XIV as the person who had the greatest court in the world, and affairs he directed in France and Europe cannot be underestimated, even given all the aftereffects that went after his successor after King Louis' death. He cut the deficit of France and promoted the industrial growth, as well as reformed the disorganized taxation system. He required order not only in his kingdom, but also in his court, having developed his own etiquette and style in Louvre and Versailles later on, and the whole court followed his rules unanimously. Louis XIV led many devastating wars that emptied kingdom's treasury and caused public hostility among the French nation during the last years of his reign. But long before that he brought medicine, and military surgery to a brand-new level of quality, as he established the Academy of Surgery, thus giving military surgeons, and surgeons in general, more importance than average doctors of his time had. He was a real connoisseur of art, literature, music, theater and sports (as well as Henry VIII), and established diverse musical, artistic, and literature institutions to develop art and science in France. He surrounded himself with the most well-known musicians, actors, authors, and architects of his epoch, and he chose the image of Sun to be associated with him as the sole ruler of State.

As much as Louis XIV, Henry VIII is also well-known for his reformations of that time, as he caused a separation of Church of England by his desire to annul the first marriage with Catherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn without the approval of papal Rome. He brought the Protestant Reformation to the English nation that resulted in many executions of those resisting his will. He hanged, beheaded, or starved to death many monks, priests, and protagonists of the old religion. According to Bernard (2007), Henry VIII was very careful but yet precise at pursuing what he wanted, whether his aim was a separation from Rome, or foreign affairs and wars with bordering countries. He sent many men to their doom for just not wishing to accept his supremacy as the king. Being a highly educated person, the one who should be following a church career, he knew several foreign languages, such as French, Latin, Italian, Spanish, was fond of arts, music and literature, and his love for all kinds of art resulted in a great upswing of literature and music during his reign. Henry composed and music, and played songs on his own. Nonetheless, his greatest wish was to have a healthy male heir, the successor to his throne. This thrive for a male successor resulted in many subsequent marriages to get what he craved for so long. He had six wives, two of whom were beheaded for treason and adultery and two died from natural causes, and he divorced other two. However, only one of his wives was lucky enough to have a boy, future Edward IV, while all others alive descendants of the king were female, and two of them ascended the throne of England.

Louis XIV had also led a religious battle in France. Being baptized as Catholic, the devoutly religious king abolished the Edict of Nantes that gave a certain worship freedom and rights to Protestants in France and destroyed Protestant churches by the Edict of Fontainebleau. This resulted in termination of Protestant schools and religious persecution of many people. Louis' contemporaries acknowledged that many people from the working middle class fled into neighbor countries, such as England, Germany, Switzerland, and American colonies to hide from this persecution (biography.com, 2016).

The Sun King was also a very popular man among the female part of his court. It is also a well-known fact that the Sun King had many official and unofficial mistresses, apart from one official and one unofficial wife - Marie-Thérèse and Marquise de Maintenon, these two marriages and many unofficial affairs gave birth to many children. So, the Sun King didn't experience cravings due to the absence of male successors of his throne. Subsequently, Louis XV had become the next king, once the Sun King faded away in 1715 because of gangrene.

The death of both kings may be called agonizing, as Henry VIII and Louis XIV were in a great pain despite their supreme right to rule in the name of God. Henry VIII died because of the illness that aggravated due to obesity, paranoia, obsession with treason, and old leg injury, and Louis XIV died due to gangrene caused by the leg injury that he got when hunting. He refused from amputation, saying that this is not a fit for the king.

To summarize everything said above, it is necessary to add that despite differences of these men in how they perceived the world, the way they treated people and shaped future of their kingdoms, they came to be seen as kings who helped their countries become great powers of Europe, kings who led the most severe foreign and inner policy, kings who were great reformists of their time. They were born, lived and died at different times, and they are so different, but yet they are similar in their beliefs, religious and personal views, as well as ambitions and demons dwelling their minds. To my opinion, it is rather complicated to decide who deserves the right to be called the best reformist and a great man of the epoch, as each of them deserves such a title.