***Life at Versailles***

*Adapted from Memoirs, the writings of Louis de Rouvroy, Duke of Saint-Simon*

“At eight o’clock the chief valet de chamber *(servant)* on

duty, who alone had slept in the royal chamber… awoke

the King. The chief physician, the chief surgeon, and the

nurse entered at the same time. …. At the quarter *(8:15),*

the grand chamberlain was called … and those who had

what was called the grandes entrees *(greatest access).* The

chamberlain 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 … Then all passed into the cabinet of the council. A very short religious

service being over, the King called *(and)* they re-entered. The same officer gave him

his dressing-gown; immediately after, other privileged courtiers *(nobles)* entered,

and then everybody, 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…

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 *(banister)* 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…

All the Court meantime waited for the King in the gallery… During this pause

the King gave audiences when he wished to accord any, spoke with whoever he

might wish to speak secretly to, and gave secret interviews to foreign ministers…

The King went to mass, where his musicians always sang an anthem … 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 council of state; on Saturday a finance council.

Rarely were two held in one day or any on Thursday or Friday … Often on the days

when there was no council, the dinner hour was advanced more or less for the

chase *(hunt)* or promenade *(walk).* The ordinary hour was one o’clock; if the council

still lasted, then the dinner waited and nothing was said to the King.

The dinner was always au petit couvert *(solitary),* 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 … there were always many dishes and three courses without

counting the fruit…

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 anyone follow him, never without asking

permission to do so; and for this few had the courage.

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 gentlemen of the chamber to admit there, and

immediately went out by the back stairs into the court of marble to get into his

coach…

He went out for three objects: stag-hunting once or more each week, shooting in

his parks once or twice a week; and walking in his gardens for exercise and to see

his workmen. Sometimes he made picnics with ladies … and … promenades with

all the Court around the canal, which was a magnificent spectacle …

At ten o’clock his supper was served … This supper always on a grand scale, the

royal household of France at table, and a large number of courtiers and ladies

present, sitting or standing…

He availed himself of the frequent festivities at Versailles, and his excursions to

other places, as a means of making the courtiers diligent in their attendance and

anxious to please him; for he nominated beforehand those who were to take part

… and could thus *(please)* some and … snub others. He was conscious of the

substantial favors he had to bestow were not nearly sufficient to produce a

continual effect; he had therefore to invent imaginary ones … It was a distinction

to hold his candlestick at his bedtime; as soon as he had finished his prayers he

used to name the courtier to whom it was to be handed, always choosing one of

the highest rank among those present.

Not only did he expect all persons of distinction to be in continual attendance at

Court, but he was quick to notice the absence of those of inferior degree: at his

bedtime, his meals, in the gardens of Versailles, he used to cast his eyes to right

and left; nothing escaped him, he saw everybody. If anyone usually living at Court

absented himself, he insisted on knowing the reason; those who came there only

for flying visits had to give a satisfactory explanation; anyone who seldom or never

appeared there was certain to incur his displeasure. If asked to bestow a favor on

such persons he would reply haughtily: “I do not know him”; of such as rarely

presented themselves he would say, “He is a man I never see”’ and from these

judgments there was no appeal.

He loved splendor, magnificence, and abundance in all things and encouraged

similar tastes in his Court; to spend money freely on furnishings and buildings, on

feasting and at cards, was a sure way to gain his favor, perhaps to obtain the honor

of a word from him. Motives of policy had something to do with this; by making

expensive habits the fashion and, for people in a certain position, a necessity; he

compelled his courtiers to live beyond their income and gradually reduced them to

depend upon his bounty for the means of subsistence…

**DIRECTIONS:** Use evidence from the primary source document to support your

answers to the following questions.

What do you think life was like for a noble at Versailles?

How would you describe Louis XIV?

Why do you think that Louis acted as he did?

In what way(s) did his actions strengthen his power?

In what way(s) did his actions weaken his power?

What part of the King’s routine do you think was the most interesting? Why?