

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-66439-5 - The French Monarchy (1483–1789): Volume I

A. J. Grant

Frontmatter

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Cambridge Historical Series

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HONORARY FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, AND
LATE PROFESSOR OF HISTORY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH.

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107664395

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First published 1900
First paperback edition 2013

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-66439-5 Paperback

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FRENCH MONARCHY

(1483—1789)

BY

A. J. GRANT, M.A.

OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, PROFESSOR OF HISTORY IN THE
YORKSHIRE COLLEGE (LEEDS), VICTORIA UNIVERSITY.

VOLUME I.

CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS

1900

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GENERAL PREFACE.

The aim of this series is to sketch the history of Modern Europe, with that of its chief colonies and conquests, from about the end of the fifteenth century down to the present time. In one or two cases the story will commence at an earlier date: in the case of the colonies it will usually begin later. The histories of the different countries will be described, as a general rule, separately, for it is believed that, except in epochs like that of the French Revolution and Napoleon I, the connection of events will thus be better understood and the continuity of historical development more clearly displayed.

The series is intended for the use of all persons anxious to understand the nature of existing political conditions. "The roots of the present lie deep in the past," and the real significance of contemporary events cannot be grasped unless the historical causes which have led to them are known. The plan adopted makes it possible to treat the history of the last four centuries in considerable detail, and to embody the most important results of modern research. It is hoped therefore that the series will be useful not only to beginners but to students who have already acquired some general knowledge of European History. For those who wish to carry their studies further, the bibliography appended to each volume will act as a guide to original sources of information and works more detailed and authoritative.

Considerable attention will be paid to political geography, and each volume will be furnished with such maps and plans as may be requisite for the illustration of the text.

G. W. PROTHERO.

PREFACE.

IT was my original intention to compress the history of France from 1483 to 1789 within the compass of one volume that should not exceed four hundred pages; but the part played by France during these centuries was so far-reaching and her internal development so full of important and interesting matter that I was glad to accept the suggestion of the Editor that I should allow the subject to fill two volumes of about the ordinary size of the series.

I have attempted to give a fair and impartial account of the chief events of French history, both domestic and foreign, during the period covered by these volumes. But I have always had before me a desire to represent in its proper light the growth and influence of the Monarchy and of the institutions developed by it. The French Revolution is often represented as being an attempt on the part of France to sever her connection with the past, and, in spirit and policy and ideas, a violent reaction against all that the Monarchy had done. I have tried to follow in the steps of de Tocqueville and others, and to show that the Revolution did not cause so complete a breach with the past as many of the actors in it imagined; and that the Absolute Monarchy, in spite of its dismal corruption under Louis XV and its catastrophe under Louis XVI, rendered nevertheless great services to France, anticipating in many points the beneficent work of the Revolution and in many others preparing the way for it. I have tried to show that the Monarchy was, at its best, the maintainer of order, the promoter

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Preface.

of national unity and the protector of the commons against the nobles. But it is written also very plainly on the page of history that by the beginning of the eighteenth century it had outlived the circumstances which justified its power; and, having no longer useful functions to perform, it fell into hopeless corruption and disorder. The rise, the greatness and the decline of this great monarchy form an unsurpassed object-lesson in the laws that govern the life and health of institutions and societies; and one great advantage of the study of foreign history is that, while it enforces the solidarity of the civilised nations, it allows also the various political and social problems to be studied, without the distortions and exaggerations often produced by national egotism.

My debt in the following pages to the historians of France is great and constant, but the character of the series has not allowed me to load my pages with references to them or to other writers whose names and works are mentioned in the bibliographical Note at the end of the second volume. But I must here express my deep obligations to many who have assisted me during the course of my work; to Dr Prothero, the Editor of the series, for invaluable assistance in the general planning of the book, for many suggestions on points of detail, as well as for minute care in the tedious work of examining the proof-sheets; to Professor Tout of the Owens College, Manchester, who has read over nearly the whole of the proof-sheets and given many valuable suggestions and corrections; to Mr Oscar Browning, of King's College, Cambridge, who was kind enough to read chapters XIV and XV in manuscript; to Miss Thompson, of Scarborough, for much help given in the correction of proofs; lastly to my sister, to whom I am indebted for the Index.

A. J. GRANT.

September, 1900.

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