



The Development of Modern Europe Volume I: From the Wars of Louis XIV to the Congress of Vienna

James Robinson, Charles Beard

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The nation which has unmistakably assumed the leading role in European affairs during the past two hundred years is France. At the opening of the eighteenth century she already enjoyed a commanding position. In the wars to which the ambition of her king, Louis XIV, gave rise, almost all the countries of western Europe took part; even their colonies in distant regions were involved, and the map of the world was fundamentally altered. A generation after Louis XIV's death France began to be recognized as the great teacher of Europe; her philosophers and economists denounced the abuses which existed everywhere and urged the reform of ancient, outworn institutions. When, in due time, France wrought a revolution in her own government, she speedily forced other nations to follow her example. Indeed, carried away by the genius of her general, Napoleon Bonaparte, she seemed at one time about to bring all Europe under her sway. Even since that arch-disturber of the peace was finally captured and sent to die on the rock of St. Helena, France has twice precipitated serious crises in European affairs, when in 1848 she proclaimed a new revolution, and in 1870 she assumed the responsibility for the last important war that has afflicted western Europe.

Of the long history of France from the conquest of Gaul by Julius Cæsar to the accession of Louis XIV in 1643 little can be said here. The French kings had, from about the year 1100, begun to get the better of their vassals and had succeeded, with some setbacks, in forming a tolerably satisfactory kingdom when, about a hundred years before Louis XIV's time, the struggle between Protestants and Catholics produced new and terrible disorder which lasted for a whole generation...

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