



The Bourbon Kings of France

Desmond Seward

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"Licentious or bigoted, noble or ignoble", wrote Nancy Mitford, "there has seldom been a dull Bourbon." The story of the Bourbon kings encompasses the two most glorious and turbulent centuries in French history, yet surprisingly, this is still the only narrative account of the dynasty for the general reader. They emerge from a shadowy line of medieval princes in 1589 to rule France for over 200 years, dominating Europe, launching an endless series of wars, creators of the dazzling splendour of Versailles, survivors from the holocaust at the French Revolution.

They begin with the dashing figure of Henri IV, with his courage, gaiety and sixty-four mistresses; they include figures such as the Sun King Louis XIV and Louis XVI who ended under the guillotine; they close with the little-known "Henri V" - expected to return and rule France in 1873 but whose refusal to abandon the Lily banner of the Bourbons for the Tricolore finally lost the throne. Desmond Seward sets them in historical perspective, each with his entourage of generals, cardinals and whores, wrestling with a haughty aristocracy and financial crisis. Spiced with scandalous contemporary gossip, here is a splendidly readable book.

"A blending of wide historical knowledge and vigorous independent judgement to make a lively, exciting but dependable account for the general reader."

Sunday Times

"Enormously entertaining ... an excellent read ... a cross between a package tour of the Bourbon dynasty and a Guide Michelin to the favourites, mistresses and ministers of the French monarchy."

Spectator

"Seward's biographies of French kings are always charming and informative. This collection of anecdotes about about the Bourbon kings of France, who reigned, with some interruptions, between 1589 and 1830, is no exception ... a unique attempt at portraying a race of kings who were responsible for both the heights and the depths of the French kingdom ... Seward relies on contemporary accounts and memoirs as well as much recent scholarship to reveal the Bourbons in their glory and their despair."

Choice (USA)

"...strong on period atmosphere..."

Spectator

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