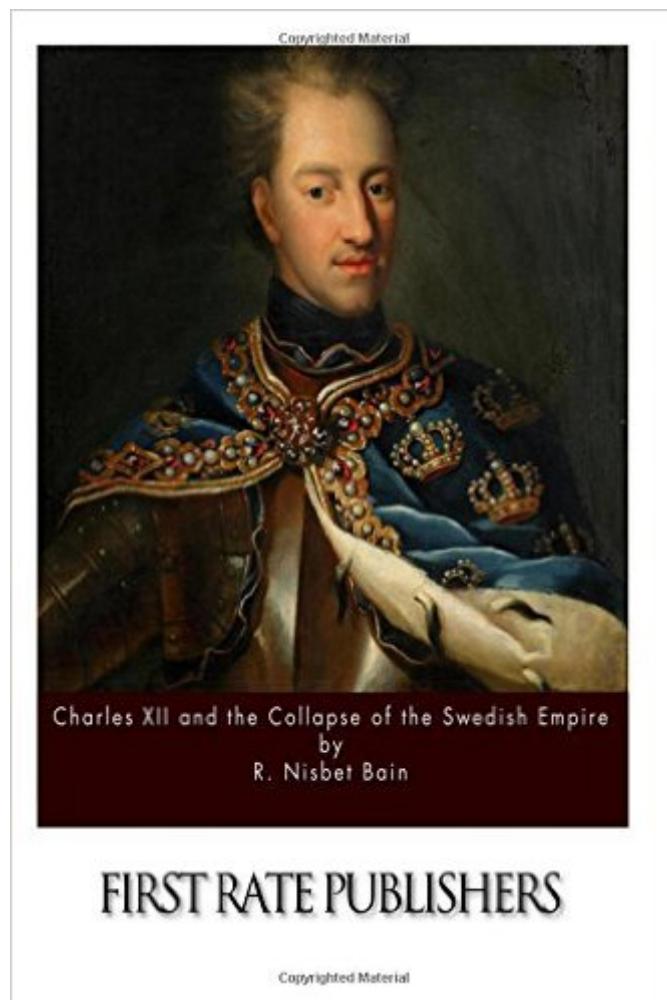


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Charles XII And The Collapse Of The Swedish Empire



Synopsis

Charles XII and the Collapse of the Swedish Empire is a history of the famous Swedish monarch and the Great Northern War.

Book Information

Paperback: 234 pages

Publisher: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform (June 21, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1514632683

ISBN-13: 978-1514632680

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.5 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.7 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (8 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #522,016 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #28 inÂ Books > History > Europe > Scandinavia > Sweden

Customer Reviews

This is a reprint of an 1895 biography of King Charles (or Karl) XII of Sweden written by Robert Nesbit Bain. Karl XII reigned in Sweden from 1697 until 1709. At the start of Karl XII's reign, Sweden was a large empire that had vast holdings in the Baltic States and Germany. However, at the end of Karl XII's reign Sweden was clearly in decline. This decline of Sweden was blamed on the adventuristic military ambitions of Karl XII which led to the continuous wars with Russia, Poland and Saxony that dominated the reign of Karl XII. The school of historians which are now called the "old school" tend to blame King Karl XII directly for the decline of Sweden. This school is largely a nineteenth century view of Karl XII. Since 1900 a "new school" of historians has revisited the reign of Karl XII with a gentler view of the king. This new school suggests that events outside the reach of King Karl XII are to blame for the decline of Sweden. Written just prior to 1900, Bain's biography of King Charles (or Karl) XII of Sweden is an example of the new school of history in regards to Karl XII. Bain holds that the Swedish Empire was built on the shifting sands of military expansionism during the Thirty Years War (1619-1648) on the part of King Gustavus Adolphus (who reigned in Sweden from 1611 until 1632). During the Thirty Years War Europe, Germany and the Baltic States were devastated. Gustavus Adolphus entered the Thirty Years War and carved out a large empire for Sweden over the weakened and prostrate states of northern Germany. Bain maintains that in normal times, Europe and Germany would have put up more defense to Gustavus Adolphus and

Sweden would never have built the Empire that it did.

This is an older book written about 1899 but it is definitely a classic because of its brevity and readability. It's hard to believe that at one time Sweden could compete against almost any European or Middle Eastern power in regard to world politics and come out on top. The Swedish Empire seems like it took advantage of a window of opportunity when Russia, under Peter the Great, was just beginning to realize its potential to become the major world power it became. Charles seems like an old Viking style conqueror type ruler more at ease on the battlefield than the court. However as the author points out repeatedly, Charles' efforts while initially a continuation and heightening of Sweden's power politics, later became more a liability as he overextended his conquests and at time came close to ruining the country. His motto seems to be in regard to the rise of the "modern" nation state, the same as Clausewitz, "there are no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests". At times his juggling of Sweden's alliances seemed prudent, at other times he made major miscalculations. There are also some good capsule type descriptions of Charles' ministers and military shoguns some of whom ended up being executed, in this regard few happy endings. So was Charles an "enlightened despot"? -that description seems to hold according to this book, he is both just and cruel at times and sees people as little more than cattle at times,(or most of the time), to be used to make Sweden great, (of course according to his own terms).

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