

JEAN-BAPTISTE CLÉRY



EYEWITNESS TO LOUIS XVI &
MARIE-ANTOINETTE'S NIGHTMARE

H. WILL BASHOR

Jean-Baptiste Cléry: Eyewitness to Louis XVI & Marie-Antoinette's Nightmare

Will Bashor

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While tending his family's garden one September morning in 1779, a young commoner encountered a prince in a chance meeting that would change both of their lives. The young man certainly never imagined that he was setting out on a journey that would take him from the quaint village where he was born to the magnificent courts of Russia, Poland and England. But neither could the young farm boy have imagined that he would one day also witness firsthand the horrific treatment of the royal family imprisoned in a dark medieval prison during the mayhem of the French Revolution. Cléry, born Jean-Baptiste Cant Hanet, was the only personal servant to remain with King Louis XVI and his family in the tower of the Temple Prison. Although Cléry himself was closely scrutinized in the tower and even threatened with the guillotine, he managed to secretly record the guards' cruel and merciless treatment of the king, Queen Marie-Antoinette, their two children, and the king's sister. JEAN-BAPTISTE CLÉRY is the first non-fiction work to provide insight into the cultural and psychological world of this tragic royal family from a very different perspective, that of a dedicated servant. Cléry was the only personal servant permitted to accompany and remain with Louis and his family in the Temple where they were imprisoned in 1792. Isolated from his family, accused of spying, and eventually imprisoned himself for his loyalty, Cléry spent his final days in exile in Austria. Was Cléry wrongly accused of infidelity to the royal family? Was he an agent of the revolutionaries? JEAN-BAPTISTE CLÉRY separates fact from rumor, and finally unravels the truth about this ordinary man in an extraordinary setting with very extraordinary actors. The biography also exposes the inner struggles of the young servant who served as the personal valet to King Louis XVI and Queen Marie-Antoinette before their tragic rendezvous with the guillotine. Incorporating findings from research based on journals and memoirs from the late 18th and early 19th century France, the compelling story sheds light on the often neglected aspects of the lives of royal servants including their steadfast loyalty and dedication to the king's family as well as concern for their own personal well-being in dangerous, terrifying circumstances.

Jean-Baptiste Cléry: Eyewitness to Louis XVI & Marie-Antoinette's Nightmare Details

Date : Published December 27th 2011 by Diderot Press

ISBN : 9780615584904

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Format : Paperback 312 pages

Genre : History, Cultural, France, Nonfiction, Biography, European History, French Revolution

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From Reader Review Jean-Baptiste Cléry: Eyewitness to Louis XVI & Marie-Antoinette's Nightmare for online ebook

Conny says

I was fortunate enough to have been a first reads winner and I have to say it was a fascinating and sad read of the nightmare the royal family had to endure during their last years alive. It was told from the perspective of their faithful servant Cléry. I have read accounts of the french revolution before but never with the added human dimension of an eyewitness. My heart goes out especially to the young dauphin who had to suffer so cruelly. I highly recommend this book for any history lovers.

Janelle says

I was lucky enough to be one of the First Read winners from Goodreads for this book. Overall, it is a very compelling and sad story about the life and death of the royal family. I thought that the author did a good job at being a story teller and trying to not only give Cléry's side of the story but also the various royal family's as well. I was rather confused at times with the way the author presented events. In multiple cases, he would repeat word for word what he said in reference to an event in a previous chapter. While a summary of an specific detail can be helpful when reading a book about a historical event, the summary shouldn't feel as though the author copied and then pasted the same paragraph from a previous chapter into the current one. I would recommend this to anyone who is interested in the time period because it is a great educational book.

Nash Bork says

This is based on a Goodreads giveaway.

This was a decent read giving a somewhat new dimension to the story of the French Revolution. I read this book after reading several books about the French Revolution; A Place of Greater Safety, The Days of the French Revolution, and Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution. This may have influenced my opinion of Mr. Bashor's book. I may have found it more enjoyable if I had read it on its own.

Debbie Thurlo says

Very interesting story! It's hard to imagine anyone volunteering to go to prison just to serve a royal family. This is a look at the lives of King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette, from the inside, that is never told. I didn't know what happened to their children, and now I do. Very nicely written.

I won this book in the Goodreads First Read giveaway.

Mandy says

A very interesting account of this period of France's history. Told from the viewpoint of Jean Baptiste Cléry, who remained with the Royal Family to the end. It is sympathetic to the Royal Family, and it is impossible not to feel sad as we read the cruelty meted out.

A very interesting piece for anyone who loves Royalty.

Andrea says

I downloaded this ebook for free through the Goodreads site.

I didn't know what to expect, after all it could have been a really dry and formal text, but in fact I found it a pleasure to read at the start. It was very interesting to view the French Revolution from a point of view that was neither the royalty nor the rebels, but rather the servants, a group of people often overlooked.

I also enjoy learning not just about the big events, but of the daily lives. Here we learn how the servants were treated, how they lived, what they wore, how they interacted with each other and their masters, what they did in their spare time, and how they were viewed by the rest of the people. We learn about the revolution too, but it's always something that is going on outside the walls, whether it be of a palace or a prison. This book brings us on the inside.

One thing I felt I missed was an understanding of why the people disliked the monarchy so much. Cléry was loyal to the family, so he depicts them as these most amazing, wonderful, gentle and kindly people. But there must be another side too, for them to receive such hatred directed towards them. Whether or not the feelings were warranted, I would have liked to have a little more insight. But this is mostly Cléry's tale, and was never meant to be complete coverage of all sides of the story.

I was going to easily give the book 4 stars, but as the book went along, it started to get repetitive. Sometimes it was because we switched which family member we were discussing, so we cover the same event from two different angles. However, sometimes two sentences in the same paragraph would be nearly duplicates of each other. In fact copy/pasting was clear in a couple places because the same error (e.g. Princess Elizabeth being executed in 1974?!?) would appear more than once. A bit of editing is warranted.

Rick F. says

VERY FACINATING!! An extremely well written account of a stunning period in history- Mr. Bashor has managed to find a new view on an oft told topic- and it is a winner in every sense- WELL DONE!!!!

H. Will Bashor says

Fascinating story that adds a human dimension to the history of the French Revolution that most readers will not know. (Promenade Magazine, Phyllis Singer, Ed.)

Peanut says

Won this book on goodreads from their goodreads first reads giveaways and its was by far one of the best history books I have read! It was easy to read and understand and no odd wording. The only reason I didn't give a 5 star rating was because of some date inversions.(Instead of 1793 it would be 1973) But over all a very good book that i would recommend to anyone.

Sarah Wagner says

I have consistently been attempting to read this book for more than a book & I'm finally giving up. To be fair, this is likely somewhat due to the weird e-book format I got the book in. On the other side of things, the writing sort of failed to engage me and convince me that Clery is a figure I should know about to better understand Louis XVI and the French Revolution. The details about servant life and how one had to rise the ranks are interesting, of course, but they could have been presented in a slightly more engaging manner.

Kathy says

All in all a sad and engaging book that does seem to lay to rest any concerns about the fidelity of Clery to his royal masters, and which makes vivid the sufferings of royalty during the revolution. Bashor has certainly chosen his side, and he sticks to it. There are a number of points in which Bashor speculates in a sort of novelistic way about what Clery or another person may have been thinking or doing (smelling lilacs in the garden, enjoying the view, worrying about one's family) at a given point in the narrative. The included photographed etchings and documents add a lot to the story. The book would have benefited from more careful editing and proofreading (I doubt that a member of the royal family really went to the guillotine on May 10, 1974--a date that is twice repeated). Bashor knows his stuff and has done his research. I am left wondering why Clery so captured his thoughts (is he perhaps a late relative of the family?).

This was a GoodReads win, and I am grateful to have had the chance to read it (often through tears).

SoundofSilence_BookFan says

I began following Will Bashor on goodreads after falling in love with his unique snapshot of Versailles in his book on Marie-Antoinette's hair dresser. I saw this book on his feed and on Amazon Prime (I have since bought it). This book is a must read for anyone interested in French royalty, their court and the revolution. This is not another repetitive biography.

This book has the details that most treat as a brief intermission, of a few paragraphs, between the two 'interesting' acts - the hedonistic court and the gory executions. The royal family's imprisonment was lengthy and inhumane. It was also mired in sacrifice, chivalry and loyalty by those who chose to risk their lives for the family. There was no happy ending. The jail does not have the flash of Versailles. Hints of illicit liaisons give away to piety and humility. The sumptuous clothes, furnishings and jewels give way to rags and rotting straw for bedding.

This is not fiction. It is the true account of Jean-Baptiste Cléry. The details come directly from primary sources including journals, manuscripts, archives and letters. Cléry volunteered to go to the family in prison. He was the last person with the King in the months before his execution. He literally gave his life, his family's future and fortune only to sacrifice his last treasure, his reputation.

I thought I knew the story of Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette, their children and the Princess Elisabeth. I was wrong. I have never read such a riveting and moving account and I could not stop reading. I was moved to read about their dignity as they prepared piously for death. I was warmed by the servants, strangers, family and friends who courageously risked or lost their lives while so many others turned away. I was horrified by the details of years of abuse and torture endured by innocent adults and children.

Cléry was the last servant allowed to stay with the family and was honored by the King. His reward was slander by jealous servants and aristocrats, rejection by the traumatized surviving Princess, and uncaring misuse by her Uncle Louis XVIII.

I am shocked Cléry was not absolved long ago. Will Bashor has given this man and his heirs justice. Bashor even sought out some of the remaining heirs of the French Royal Family. After reviewing his manuscript, they agreed to publically correct hundreds of years of slander and sloppy research by historians and gossips. Given the topic of Bashor's upcoming book, this story could have been buried in that larger work where the details would have been lost. Instead it is available on Kindle Prime and as a low cost purchase to ensure it has a wide audience. Other historians have not been so honourable.

If this is a sample of what we will see in Bashor's upcoming book on Marie Antoinette's last days, I can not wait. Luckily it was just announced as available to preorder on Kindle!
