



Theirs Was the Kingdom

R.F. Delderfield

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A brilliantly woven tapestry of history and adventure, this imposing novel continues the saga of the Victorian giant of commerce Adam Swann and his tough-minded wife, as it follows their fortunes in the penultimate decade of the nineteenth century, and in the careers of the five Swann children reflects both the triumphs and tragedies of Imperial England.

Theirs Was the Kingdom Details

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From Reader Review Theirs Was the Kingdom for online ebook

Kate says

I was stunned, but I just couldn't get into this book! I read about half of it, thinking it had to get better because it's so popular. But it never did. Very formulaic: stereotypical characters and plots. Yuck.

Mary Lou says

I read this series when I was a teenager. Ran across this copy at the library book sale last fall and decided I would re-read it and see if it still held some appeal.

The book is part of a family saga about the Swanns, a merchant class family in England in the last half of the 19th century. This one is set in the 1880s. It is interesting to me now for the depiction of the family contrasted with the depiction of the company that Swann founded, and the descriptions of the increasing industrialization in Britain at that time.

Delderfield is somewhat longwinded, and there are seemingly endless explanations of how Henrietta Swann is feeling. But it was interesting to read the book from an older perspective, and not bad bedtime reading.

Sandy says

I read this a hundred years ago, long long long before this edition was published.... but they offered me no other editions to choose from. I remember that I loved this book England before and during WW I, the hearts and souls of the class systems, the thankless hard work of the serf-classes, the privileged lifestyle of the upper classes coupled with the attendant parental 'affection' and 'caring for' or condescending arrogance toward the working poor. Since first reading this I have grown up completely and see the harsh realities for what they were and still are to some extent, but I still love the England of old with its resplendent countryside, beautiful old manor homes, cozy cottages and rural villages... for a simpler, more fundamental life they seemed to live back then.....

I have recently found the book again at a yard sale, bought it and often see it on my shelf, awaiting a reread and perhaps a new perspective on their kingdom.

Larry Epp says

Rating more like 3.5. I had read God is an Englishman about Adam Swann's building of a cartage business across England in the mid-1800s. This is a continuation -- a brick of a book with lots of rabbit holes following each child, often business partners, Adam and wife Henrietta. The essential story could be told in about half the pages -- I found myself skimming a number of times. Still, so much Victorian social, business, life, attitudes stuff, often comparing England to Europe. Worth the read just for that, even with the skimming.

Ruth says

Delderfield (1912-1972). Born in London in 1912, Delderfield moved with his family to South Devon in 1923, when his father, William James Delderfield, became editor of the Exmouth Chronicle. RF subsequently worked as a reporter on the same paper. This novel was published in 1971 and televised in 1980 and was set on the edge of Exmoor. Sadly, Delderfield died of cancer at the relatively young age of 60. This is the second volume in the trilogy and continues the story of the Swann family. I found this a well written and compelling story, "He thought about the Empire for a moment. Where its frontiers would be drawn and which tribe, if any, would overhaul it and challenge its supremacy by the time the old queen died and that plump, racketty Edward mounted her throne. The gloomy Germans, possibly, who had given the yammering French such a thrashing a few years ago. Or the Yankees, who were not likely to stay minding their own business." Love it!

Craig says

Not as good as GIAE - see why in that review.

Janci says

Really 3.5 because I did not like it as much as "God is an Englishman" but better than most 3 star books. Always interesting to read what Adam was thinking but I found myself liking Henrietta less and less. Similarly, some of the children were more interesting and likable than others.

Kilian Metcalf says

This is the second of three novels telling the epic story of the Swann family: mother, father, and nine children. The parents have hopes and dreams for the children but allow them the freedom to find their own way, make their own mistakes, and finally come back to the family.

I love stories set in the Victorian period, and this is one of the best. The patriarch Adam Swann struggle as much against the constraints of the society as he does against the challenges of growing a business. When he is injured in a train accident and loses a leg, it is his wife who teams up with one of his female employees to run his business and keep it going until he returns.

Each family member gets his attention, 768 pages worth. Now I'm on to read Give Us This Day to see how it all wraps up.

Blaine DeSantis says

Not as good, in my opinion, as book 1 of this series. I enjoy the Swann family but this book was definitely 200 pages too long. Why? Adam Swann is the patriarch of the family and the owner of the transport business, Swann on Wheels. He is married to Henrietta and this book has way too much of Henrietta reminiscing about their family. I am not sure why the author did this, and whether this was to allow us to keep all the family members straight in our minds (they did have 9 children!), but the book dragged for me. Yes it is a good story, and yes there are interesting sections in the book, but just as things got interesting there was Henrietta reminiscing about her family and then Adam started doing the same with the business. Enjoyed the story of how the 2nd generation of Swanns is now doing, but in my opinion there should have been much more about their stories and less about remembering.

One more to go in this series, but I am taking a break from the Swann's for a bit, which I am sure will be OK since Henrietta will most likely be back in Book 3 and remind me of anything I may have forgotten!

Brian says

Sometimes if you're looking for an unexpected find, it pays to check out the 30 year old books your parents are giving to goodwill.

Theirs was the Kingdom is book II in what is commonly called the "God is an Englishmen" trilogy. Book I is the story of a guy who quits the army to seek his fortune and start a family at the dawn of the industrial revolution of Victorian England. Book II is the continuation of him and his large family, with each child now spawning a subthread.

It's a great, involved, historical trilogy. (Trilogies are my favorite kind of -ilogy). Sometimes it pontificates a bit much, but my only real criticism is that the author tends to be formulaic in the way his complicated threads and intrigues all eventually work out the way they should. (But hey, if we want to read about things not working the way we want, maybe we should all just stick to work emails...)

Be forewarned, these books are thick tomes...the kind of books that made you wish you had a kindle. In fact, they'll probably even make your kindle heavy.

Denise says

I have really enjoyed these books and look forward to reading the third and final one in the series. Great stories and you really get the feel of the times. These are not only sagas about a family but really about Great Britain as a whole and the progress of thought concerning human rights, individual responsibility, morality, success and money.

This book follows Adam and Henrietta Swann, the central characters in the first book, who epitomize the age of industry. The story also includes interesting portraits of their children as they reach adulthood, marry and are individually launched to various reaches of the British Empire. Great characters and totally enjoyable reading. The author was a historian and the writing is both warm and academic. He uses very precise (and now antiquated) language of that era of history that adds a rich element to his style.

Lori says

This book tried my patience! Beautiful writing. Fields and fields of lush, beautiful writing. A continued family saga with plenty of characters that I really like. There were chapters that would have garnered five stars on their own. That said, I can't say that this book lived up to my expectations.

I just wanted to take a beautiful journey with the Swann family and instead I got bogged down in some lengthy asides about the family business, much of which was just Delderfield rehashing events from the first book in the series. There are some other things that I could quibble about also.

This series does cover some important events in British history such as the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria and inventions that changed the way people lived forever. And, Delderfield can write. All things considered, I would have to say this is a three and a half star book for me.

Full review to follow.

Sara says

3.5 - rounded down.

The second book in a three-part series that began with *God is an Englishman*. I did not like this book as much as the first one, primarily because I think a good editor could have cut it by a good 250 pages. There is much time spent on offshoot characters, detailed business dealings, and repetition and it detracts from the stories which are interesting and which you really want Delderfield to get back to. In the end, I found myself dissatisfied and wanting to restructure and rewrite whole sections.

Much of the history in the book is well-researched and accurate, but there is also a touch of anachronism in some of the actions and attitudes that reflect more toward the time in which the book is being written than the time in which it is set. Several times I had to stop and think about whether I found certain elements believable in 1885 or whether they didn't seem more akin to 1970.

Can you say all those negative things about a book and then say you are pleased to have read it? There are moments when I was completely hooked and anxious to see where the thread was leading. There were moments when he surprised me and the plot took a turn I did not expect, and I enjoyed that feeling that perhaps I did not know where every path would lead. And, I keep thinking that if I had read this series before I read the Poldark books, I might have liked it better. I keep drawing comparisons and Delderfield keeps losing out to Winston Graham.

Colleen Formichelli says

Excellent!

I was so glad to see the Delderfield books released on kindle. I am rereading all of them and enjoying the Swann family saga as much as the first time. Order them all as you will not want to wait between books.

Ian Billick says

I'll admit it. Despite my better judgement, I'm hooked on the series and find the characters engaging. From a more dispassionate perspective, the book is capitalist propaganda. It's propaganda in an interesting way-- it makes points about the rise of business in England in the 19th century, as well as the role of business in political liberalism. But nevertheless, it's propaganda. It's also a weaker book for the fact that tragedy doesn't strike the family, except as a means towards greater accomplishment. I'm curious to see if the third book in the series introduces more realistic drama.

I think the first book in the series is better than than this, the second. In the first, the characters are engaging and the plot is dynamic. In this book, it's a bit more plodding as it follows the mini-triumphs of the second generation of Swanns. Despite my misgivings, however, I rushed out and bought the third in the series. And if you judge a book by how engrossed you become, I've got to give this one four stars.
