

== THE BORGHIAS ==

(By Major G. Blake Palmer.)

OF all the characters in Italian history the Borgias are probably the most widely known and the most poorly understood. Many factors have contributed to the growth of the evil legends and obscene exaggerations around the memories of this capable, ambitious, and on the whole, successful family.

The contemporary dislike of the Italian nobility, the hatred of the many families and proprietors who were dispossessed, the curious and impassive diligence of the Papal Secretary, Burckardt, and not least the self-righteous denunciations of zealous non-conformist writers and painters of the 19th century, have all contributed their share to the biased accounts which pass as Borgia history.

Nevertheless, there remains a solid enough residue of truth out of which the legends and popular accounts have grown. Even without the poisonings—which are by no means proved and of which Lucrezia Borgia is almost certainly innocent—the family record is no mean one, even compared with the standards of those days when none but the most ruthless survived.

The Borgias came of a noble but obscure family of Jativa in the Province of Valencia, and it is highly probable that they had Moorish as well as Catalan blood. The first Borgia to arrive in Italy was Alonso de Borja who, in 1412, followed the Spanish King Alphonso V to Naples. He was extremely useful to Pope Martin V at the Council of Basle, and in 1444 was made Bishop of Valencia.

In 1455, the Conclave of Cardinals, being unable to agree between the rival Orsini and Colonna candidates, elected the Spanish Cardinal Borja as Pope with the name of Callixtus III.

Callixtus III was energetic and boldly prosecuted the war against the Turks which resulted in victory in 1456 at Belgrade. To protect himself in Rome, he naturally encouraged a Spanish faction. Among those whom he selected was his own nephew, Roderigo, a brilliant student and forceful

character, who, at the age of 27 was made Cardinal at a secret consistory, and very soon found himself in possession of a revenue of 38,000 ducats, about £18,300 per annum.

Roderigo excelled at everything he undertook. In this he at first followed his uncle, who was perhaps the most learned and austere of the occupants of the Chair of St Peter's. Roderigo's interests, however, were wider and both in the arts and in the art of living he showed excellent tastes and marked success. His palace was soon one of the richest in Rome and the best artists of the day contributed to its adornment.

His amours were conducted with discretion and considerable faithfulness. He was careful to ensure that Vanozza Cattanei was con-



veniently married to some accommodating office-holder in Rome. Thus she always had some legal pretext for being at hand. By Vanozza he had four children, two of whom showed the greatest ability of any contemporary Borgias, and it is with these children, Juan, Cesare, Lucrezia and Goffredo that this history is