

BOOK OF THE MONTH.

JEW SUSS.*

It would be possible to exhaust every virile adjective and yet fail to bring into the purview of the reader any adequate idea of the colossal merit of the book under notice this month. No; it must be read and re-read with every power of imagination let loose, under the marvellous torch that has been kindled to illumine the period in which the *mise en scène* has been laid—the historical setting of the Duchy of Wurtemberg in the middle of the eighteenth century—when Karl Alexander ruled in Swabia.

For the purpose of painting a vivid picture of that licentious period, it has no doubt been unavoidable that there is much that must offend modern sensibilities, but it leaves one amazed at the rapidity of evolution, and thankful that the bestialities which formed part of the normal life in high places are indeed nightmares of the past.

Jew Süss is, of course, the central figure of the book—the favourite and adviser of Karl Alexander, the handsome climber of ambition, the devotee of power, and yet with a stupendous belief in, and loyalty to, his own people and faith, who, in spite of the benefits that Christianity would undoubtedly procure for him, preferred to remain the hated and despised "Jew"—a forceful and baffling personality.

His temperament had driven on from childhood and given him no rest. When he was still quite young he had insisted on not being left behind in Frankfurt with his grandfather, the pious and meditative Reb Salomon, leader of the synagogue. His father was the director of a Jewish theatrical company and he made his parents take him with them on tours; so when he was only six he had been at the ducal court of Wolfenbüttel and made the acquaintance of grand people. His eager desire to associate with gentlefolk dated from that time.

He needed variety, he must have many faces thronging his path; he had a thirst for people, a raging desire to cram more and more faces into his life and he never forgot any of them.

The dictates of fashion and of his temperament demanded a succession of new dishes, new wines, new crystal for his table, and new women. He used them and used them up.

One solitary woman had touched something more deep in him than his senses, and the year she had spent with him—the year in Holland—was apart and very lonely in his life; but he had sealed up the memory of it. He never spoke of it; his thoughts shyly skirted round this year, and its hidden sorrow; only very rarely it opened great eyes upon him and looked at him terrifyingly and bewilderingly.

The earnest of this outstanding year was the child Naemi, who lived at Hessian with Rabbi Gabriel, the cabbalist, his uncle, of whom it was whispered that he was the wandering Jew.

The one innocent and beautiful thing in the life of Süss was his little daughter and her tragic fate at the hands of Karl Alexander went to the making of destiny. For the Jew could wait till vengeance was ripe.

Marie Auguste was the daughter of Prince Anselm of Thurn and Taxis. Under her shining black hair there peeped out a small, delicate, lizard-like face of the mellow tint of fine old marble. She was called a coquette and a man-hunter. But she—her small delicate head held high and an indolent, enigmatic smile on her lips—went her way, which was thronged with admirers.

The first evening on which Princess Marie Auguste

appeared in society was a successful one for Josef Süss. He won the Princess's approval and the Princess was shortly after betrothed to Karl Alexander, who now firmly determined to turn Catholic.

With a Catholic on the throne and a Jew for the chief minister and adviser, it was no wonder that the Protestant State went through troublous times, especially when both sovereign and minister were unscrupulous and profligate and corrupt.

What awful crimes, political, religious and social, are recorded by the author's powerful pen, in words that are both scorching and freezing!

The undoing of the beautiful and devout Magdalen Sibylle, daughter of Weissensee, the Lutheran Bible Commentator, who, with Süss's connivance, tacitly sold her to the lustful monarch, is but one of the many incidents of that shameful period.

He knew with certitude that a few paces away behind a locked door his daughter was fighting for her honour. And he heard the sharp and matter-of-fact voice of Süss. "As things stand this evening, I dare promise you quite definitely promotion and honours."

Terrible retribution is meted out to the Jew in Naemi's death. Weissensee's remorse at his daughter's fate took vengeance when he conducted Karl Alexander to the little house in the forest where the Jew's little daughter lived her sheltered innocent life. But Weissensee had only heard the child was dead. "The Jew had won. The child was dead. She was not smirched, defiled, crushed; she was simply dead; she had escaped unsullied, and from the height smiled, a lovely apparition. Before filthy hands could touch her, she had freed herself in the pure ether of God."

But the Jew waited in silence and his power over Karl Alexander grew.

"Go, Jew!" Karl Alexander commanded, raging; and Süss went slowly with his head lifted high, consciousness of his power in his deep malignant smile.

The Duke alone foamed and raged, chafed himself sore, against the invisible, inextricable, horrible thing which bound him to that man.

With sly casuistry learned from the Jesuits, he persuaded himself that the Jew was necessary to him on political grounds. Sometimes he would say to himself that if he achieved a triumph for the Church in Swabia, God would certainly reward him from his painful bond to the Jew.

The sudden death of the Duke was caused by Süss's betrayal. In Süss's harangue over his dying monarch was concentrated all the venom and bitterness that was raging in his heart.

"Because I didn't spit on you, you believed all was well!"

His own arrest and imprisonment followed quickly. His horrible captivity and degradation he bore with a stoicism and doggedness that compelled admiration.

"The Jew must hang" was shouted on every side, and he replied, "You cannot hang me higher than the gallows."

In his nauseous cell his child came to him. She had become younger and smaller. She spoke, too, of all sorts of trifles with the important gravity of a child—about the tulips, about the meaning of a passage in the Song of Solomon, about the lining of her new skirt.

What a fool he had been! She was so tiny, such a tiny contented creature. What could she have to do with his great blazing schemes and sacrifices? But her visit was a great and satisfying gift, and the cell was rich and overflowing.

His horrible death, by hanging, in the sight of the jeering populace, was accentuated by giving the lie to his words, and suspending him in a cage high above the gallows.

The book ends with a weird and fascinating picture of his burial by stealth, with full Jewish rites.

* A Historical Romance, by Lion Feuchtwanger. Translated by Willa and Edwin Muir. Martin Secker, Ltd., 5, John Street, Adelphi, London, W.C.

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