

THE UNSENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

A Study of Feuchtwanger as an Historian

IN an age of shifting values, even those who reject most deliberately all Christian standards are unable to free themselves from the complex and pervasive influence of a recent profoundly Christocentric past. The Jewish race alone escapes such influence. With a combination of a practical grasp of detail and a high imaginative vision it is given to the representatives of the Semitic culture to view that Christendom in which they never merged. To those so vitally concerned it is of interest to observe the Christian structure as seen through the alien eyes beneath the caftan, patient and suffering. Among those groups familiar with the Western European peoples, two standpoints remain defined and clear, the Catholic and pre-Christian. How deep is the contrast between these long inherited traditions and the wavering affirmations made in the gaunt mental shadows of that great, wrecked, Lutheran Theology which still cumbers the mind and the prepossessions? Freed from such burden the pre-Christian tradition now reveals a curiously integral quality : Lion Feuchtwanger in this points the example. He can describe, in some ways more clearly than a less remote writer, the external apparatus of the Christian life and the flavour, for no other word can so well express it, of certain individual Christian lives. Still he has the defects of his great qualities, and in dealing with the *Goyim* he is limited, as far as successful portraiture is concerned, to those in whom all trace of the Christian spirit has vanished. He has, in fact, an admirable gallery of portraits of those who only wear the Christian mask. *Jew Süß* has surely made this very plain.

The Unsentimental Journey

Marie Auguste, Princess of Thurn and Taxis and Duchess of Württemberg, stands delicate and fragile on the balanced and graded parterres of the eighteenth century, seen against the slow movement of the life of Suabia. It is a study of the formal landscape garden menaced by feudal customs and the complex agricultural peasant world, one of those conversation pictures of the burdened countryside which form the present generation's special talent. It is very characteristic of the period, this perception of each detail of a setting, the care for the *mot juste* in an account of the changing element of crowds. The ceaseless motion of the international life would seem to have assisted in the development of a form of economic vision, the assessing of wide movements of a countryside, which the historians of the earlier home-keeping generations could only with difficulty envisage. A very just appreciation of the purchasing power of money in terms of eighteenth century luxuries imparts a sharp reality to a pastoral scene which at no point descends to the idyllic. And against this background there stands the figure of the Princess, small and slender, with her bright gay mind like a canary. It all rings true, the circumscribed friendliness and malice and, defining both, a mercenary frivolity: 'Marie Auguste . . . with her young, ambiguous smile.' She belonged indeed to the *Goyim* and in fact to a most select section.

Again Philip Heinrich Weissensee, the Prelate of Hirschau, has received something of the same accurate care of observation. The position of Consistorial Councillor, the discreet influence on the Sub-Committee of the Estates, such matters can be assessed and valued by those economic standards which have produced a picture in some senses so revealing. The honour, too, calculated for and gained, of the Presidency of the State Church Council will also submit to this same weighing, with all the detail that went

Blackfriars

with it; the political levers of the Established Lutheran Church in Württemberg, the fixed interest from the good securities, the Commission for Consolidated Lands. Politically, a balance can be well perceived, the secularization of Church property, the new links with the Hohenzollern, the deep respect for Austria, still half-distrustful. The sap of religious movement had long gone free from such dead branches. Yet, even so, more than the study of a character, it is the physical features which are apprehended.

In the portrait of Duke Eberhard Ludwig pacing by his travelling carriage in the fine continuous rain, considering his kinsmen, the sour Margraves of Durlach, there appears that grasp first of an economic and then of a physical reality. 'Duke Eberhard Ludwig,' the passage runs, 'paced moodily, his velvet hat in his hand, so that the fine, warm rain bedewed his peruke, and he gave no heed to the puddles which splashed his shining boots and his magnificent long-skirted coat embroidered with silver. He walked slowly, absorbed, often stopping short, snorting with nervous ill-humour through his big fleshy nose.' It is finely observed description, succeeding to that memorable impression of the roads in Suabia and the traffic.

The light of the early eighteenth century reveals the landscape of that pre-Voltairean world, the sense of ease, the atmosphere of Walpole, good currency, a credit still unstrained. It is no mere chance that the most successful of the Feuchtwanger series should be placed at such a time. It was that moment when the last slight ground-swell of the Counter-Reformation had at length subsided. The frontier lines of the religious faiths were fixed, and a suspicion of ill breeding was attached to those who made a mock of serious things. The Nuncios held the first place at the Courts; Religion was everywhere admittedly supreme and for-

The Unsentimental Journey

gotten. It is a suitable stage on which to present a convincingly mercenary conversion. Many factors have combined to produce a descriptive mastery of the external details of the Duke of Württemberg's submission to the Holy See, one more than all else, a complete incomprehension of the Christian spirit.

It was an age in which the complicated frontiers of the religions seemed immutable and even, from a worldly standpoint, sacrosanct; receiving something of the quality of that sanction of the European conscience on which the dying Holy Empire rested. With the physical boundaries of religion thus determined, the phenomenon of conversion was explicable by the accidental worldly circumstance of each career. Such changes were regarded as creditable precisely in accordance with the original rank or standing of each neophyte. It is here necessary to admit that the names of those beneath the princely rank who joined the Catholic Church about this time do not at the first sight inspire great confidence, the Duke of Wharton and Lord North and Grey, Mr. John Law and the Baron, later Duke of, Ripperda. In the case of these last two gentlemen it must be said that the catastrophes in which they were involved do not seem to have permanently undermined those religious convictions which had burgeoned with their too-roseate financial dreams. The fevers of the Mississippi Scheme were perhaps not without their reaction upon such restrained religious emotion as Mr. Law permitted to himself; but in the case of the Duke of Ripperda it should be stated that there is no proof that this eminent convert ever more than coquetted with Islam. As for Wharton, he was of the company of the great eccentrics, and among the Continental converts a balanced judgment would with difficulty be conceded to Gustavus Samuel Leopold of Pfalz-Zweibrücken, or to that querulous, shifting Duke, Saxe-Naumburg-Zeits. Yet

Blackfriars

this was the lesser half of a wide question ; for, against the changes of such doubtful men, there was the occasional shifting of allegiance which the movements of the political chess board might indicate as wisely placed and prudent.

Thus the gentlemen of the Imperial service would be well advised to ponder seriously upon this question, which would solve the embarrassment attendant upon the holding of the higher military governorships by field-officers not of His Majesty's religious faith. His Imperial Majesty's religion alone could qualify such general officers to maintain the variations of indifference and respect and half-veiled insolent rebuke, with which the Caesarian Government saw fit to treat the Catholic Bishops. That Duke Karl Alexander, whose reign in Württemberg has formed the background for *Jew Süß*, should come to such a decision was in no way a matter for surprise. The same prudent acceptance of the Faith of Vienna had been of marked benefit to the career, now for other reasons unhappily truncated, of that eminently respectable officer, the Prince of Darmstadt. Duke Joseph of Saxe-Hildburghausen had entered upon this course in his youthful service and how well such foresight had been rewarded, the governorship of Upper Austria, the hand of the wealthy and venerable Princess of Savoy. And if a name of the inner military caste was to be considered, who could regret the example of Lieutenant-General Duke Frederick William of Holstein-Sonderburg-Beck?

To support the consensus of opinion favouring an occasional measured religious change the practice of the German courts should be considered. With the rising social prestige of Russia the Lutheran Princesses were now prepared either for the sincere, convinced and unenthusiastic discourse upon the points of the Decrees of Trent or for the equally polite but

The Unsentimental Journey

more halting German which foreshadowed the stiff Russian dresses and the singing and the Eastern bridal crown. In all cases such transference was marked by lucid and enlightened reasonings, mirrored as in an eighteenth century water party by a tideless and artificial shore. In such a fashion did the demure Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst imbibe her lesson. It is strange to consider, remembering Catherine the Great of Russia and her strained, tempestuous reign, that she herself in Zerbst and Köthen long before had experienced almost the last of these eminently decorous and quiet conversions.

A capacity to render with some accuracy these severely practical aspects of conversion implies a power to understand the other very material interests of Duke Karl Alexander's time. So much of the anxieties of that period when Princes suffered from a medical science, so vague and so courtly, is summed up in the phrase *Goutte Militaire*, a phrase which one feels the elder Chevalier de Balibari would have used, although traditions of a later time forbade Thackeray to transcribe it. But the ultimate test of the details of Feuchtwanger's German picture is the comparison which it will bear with contemporary and characteristic writing. For this purpose an account of Court life should be used, and the very self-consciousness of Lord Hervey's descriptive manner adds to the value of his elaborately artificial work. It is not the accuracy of statement which is significant, but the revelation of a mind whose interests were linked to German Courts. And in this case of the Court of George II, with which Lord Hervey is concerned, absence had only emphasized a closed, strong influence of the German homeland, which perhaps found its full expression in the seventeen-thirties in the Hanoverian idiom of Richmond Lodge.

Judged by this test, the *Jew Süss* detail is quite

Blackfriars

faultless. 'The chapel,' Lord Hervey had written of that essential appendage of all decorous households of a certain rank, 'was fitted up with extreme good taste and as much finery as velvets, gold and silver tissue, galloons, fringes, torches, gilt, lustres and sconces could give.' Reb Joseph would certainly have appreciated the intentions in the construction of this chapel royal. Again in the choice of suitable phrasing to apply to princely character the study of *Jew Süss* here finds support. The following quotation is extracted from what was intended as a detached character sketch of George II. It is quite unnecessary to consider the veracity of any specific statement; but the passage is included as giving an impression of the phrases which the restricted reading public of the period were prepared to find applied to a royal ménage. 'His passion,' wrote this courtier of his then sovereign, 'his vanity, his loving to talk of himself, his military declamations, his giving himself airs about women, the impossibility of being easy with him, his affectation of heroism, his unreasonable, simple, uncertain, disagreeable and often shocking behaviour to the Queen . . . in short, all his weaknesses, all his errors, and all his faults were the topics which while at Kensington the summer, being much in Lord Hervey's company, she (the Princess of Orange) was for ever expatiating.'

So far so good, but a third extract will indicate an essential element in the eighteenth century scene which seems to have been omitted almost entirely in the study of Suabia. Lord Hervey is speaking of Sir William Pulteney, the celebrated politician whom he held in a certain disesteem. 'Lord Chesterfield and Mr. George Berkeley,' wrote Lord Hervey, 'with whom he (Sir William) lived in the most seeming intimacy, he mortally hated; but continued that seeming intimacy long after he did so; merely from a refine-

The Unsentimental Journey

ment of pride and an affectation of being blind to what nobody else could help seeing.' The refinement of pride and an affectation : in *Jew Süß* the intrigue is rendered, but not the subtlety. It is one of the dangers of a too-economic view that, while it prepares for the interpretation of commercial and royal personages, it can throw no light upon the *Grand Seigneur*. Compared to Karl Alexander, Franz Anselm of Thurn and Taxis seems wraith-like and vague. In a sense it is the material entrenchments and the strong-based quality of Feuchtwanger's talent which leads to this result. It is not only the Christian spirit which escapes him. The *Grands Seigneurs* of the eighteenth century might suffer from the horrors of Revolution, but from posterity they have gone free.

DAVID MATHEW.

PICTANTIAE.

If ever Great Britain is converted, it will not be by the time-serving English Catholics, but by the uncompromising, fearlessly outspoken Irish Catholics domiciled in England, Scotland and Wales.

Mr. John G. Rowe, in *The Catholic World*.

*

For every thoughtful man and woman as well as scientists.

From a publisher's advertisement in *The Observer*.

* *

We Roman Catholics are the religious snobs of the world.

Lord Castlerosse, in *The Sunday Express*.

* * *

Help to stop the organized cruel sports of hunting and coursing, thus releasing land for food production and promoting national prosperity.

From a L.P.C.S. advertisement.