

THE ROMANCE OF THE ROTHSCHILDS

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The Romance of the Rothschilds by Ignatius Balla

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IGNATIUS BALLA

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BY
IGNATIUS BALLA



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CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I	THE RISE OF THE ROTHSCHILDS . . .	7
II	THE FOUNDER OF THE HOUSE . . .	35
III	THE ENGLISH ROTHSCHILDS . . .	73
IV	BARON JAMES ROTHSCHILD . . .	140
V	THE ROTHSCHILDS AT NAPLES . . .	209
VI	THE FRANKFORT HOUSE . . .	240
VII	THE VIENNA ROTHSCHILDS . . .	266

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

NATHAN ROTHSCHILD	<i>To face page</i> <i>Frontispiece</i>
<i>(Founder of the London House)</i>	
THE ROTHSCHILD OFFICES IN ST. SWITHIN'S LANE, E.C.	74
LORD ROTHSCHILD	138
<i>(From a photo by Elliott & Fry)</i>	
FIGURE OF THE TERRIFIED JEW IN VERNET'S FAMOUS PICTURE	183
BARON ANSELM MAIER ROTHSCHILD	244

THE ROMANCE OF THE ROTHSCHILD'S

I

THE RISE OF THE ROTHSCILDS

THE Rothschilds, who have held in their hands for more than a century the threads of the financial life of the Old World, were described by Heine many decades ago as the first bankers in Europe. Even to-day there is not one of the more recent financial dynasties that can boast a wealth equal to that of the famous Jewish financiers. The mere mention of their name suggests the power of millions, and, to those who are ever ready to pay homage to wealth, these descendants of a petty hawker of the Frankfort ghetto seem to be the very personification of earthly riches.

The Romance of the Rothschilds

This fabulous success of the Rothschilds seems the more remarkable when we learn that the immediate founder of this powerful dynasty, the aged Maier Amschel, was, little over a hundred years ago, a small trader in the Jewish quarter of Frankfort, and cannot have had even a dream of the millions which his family afterwards amassed. He began his career as a modest shopkeeper; his sons became millionaires, his grandsons multimillionaires. Three generations sufficed to convert this obscure ghetto-family into the greatest financial power in the world. That fact is enough of itself to invest the origin of the Rothschild firm with the significance of an historical event, nor is the interest lessened when we realise the profound influence it has had on the fate of Europe and the whole political and social life of the west.

But the conscientious historian who would relate the almost legendary course of their story will find it useless to explore the dusty archives of States and finger the mouldering

The Rise of the Rothschilds

parchments of heraldic offices in search of earlier traces of the family. There are no documents carrying back the story of the Rothschilds to the Middle Ages. No ancestor of theirs ever sought the laurels of war on the battlefield, and certainly it is related of none that he joined a crusade to rescue the Holy Land from the heathen. We do not find the name of a Rothschild in the illuminated chronicles of the medieval monks, and we should vainly seek their arms in the gaily coloured lists of the ancient knights. No ancestral castle of theirs stands, like a falcon's nest, above the steep shores of the Rhine or the Danube, threatening the prosperous caravans of the plain. The few indications that we have go to show that the earlier members of the family were all peaceful tradesmen. The founder of the present house was certainly born at Frankfort on the Main, in the ghetto of which he inaugurated that struggle for life which was destined to have so brilliant an issue. It was a time when the Jewish inhabitants groaned under severe