

**THE KINGS  
OF THE EAST**

A Romance of the Near Future

BY  
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# **THE KINGS OF THE EAST.**

## **CHAPTER I.**

### **THE MOVEMENT AND THE MAN.**

IT was a brilliant afternoon in late spring, and Vindobona was taking its pleasure joyously out of doors, as is its wont. The many parks and gardens of the city were crowded with holiday-makers in every variety of national costume and speaking the tongues of all the earth, and in the boulevards of the Ringstrasse a well-dressed throng made the pavements almost impassable. There was not a vacant seat to be found at the rows of tables outside each café, where strange and wonderful liquids were being consumed in vast quantities, but with a deliberation that implied the possession of unlimited leisure. No one seemed to have anything to do but to walk and talk, salute his acquaintances and criticise the rest of the world, pause for a while to refresh the inner man and then saunter on again, and this was indeed the case. The true citizen of Vindobona always has time for holiday-making, whatever other duties he may neglect, and those who make a study of his weaknesses calculate confidently upon this amiable peculiarity. This saint's day afternoon, for instance, there were gathered, in a room on the second floor of one of the palatial mansions in the Opera Ring, four men, whose meeting had been facilitated by the absorption of the populace in its pleasures. One by one they had made their way to the appointed spot, the private office of the great financier Israel Goldberg, and here, where a business-like severity strove with a certain barbaric splendour in the appointments, they had refreshed themselves with fruit sherbets and perfumed Eastern tobacco before turning their attention to the matter upon which they had come together. Some signing of papers and a good deal of

low-toned conversation followed, until at last the host leaned back in his chair and threw down his pen.

“That is well over,” he said, speaking in German. “The movement is on the verge of realisation; we only await the man.”

“Just so,” said the venerable Scythian Jew at his right hand; “we need our Moses.”

“But where is he to be found in this age of doubt and depression?” asked a sallow-faced young man, with large vague wandering eyes.

The remaining person at the table snorted fiercely. “This is the age of limited liability,” he said. “Our Moses will take the form of a syndicate.”

“With the excellent Texelius as managing director?” asked the Chevalier Goldberg, with a sympathetic smile. “I think not, my dear friend.”

“I rejoice to hear you say that, Israel,” said the old Rabbi, whose susceptibilities had been much ruffled by the irreverent remark of Dr Texelius.

“No,” said the Chevalier, “although we are business men and this is a business matter, we must return, I fear, to the old ways. Without the man to whom I hope to present you this afternoon, our movement would be like a ship without a captain. You, my good Texelius, bring us the help of science, in my young friend Rubenssohn we have the support of literature, and our venerable Rabbi Schaul assures us of the blessing of orthodoxy, while I myself supply the not unnecessary item of money. But we must, besides all these, have brains.”

Dr Texelius was understood to reply that no gathering which included himself could be considered deficient in that particular, whatever might be said of the rest of the company, but his host smiled with pitying gentleness.

“My good Texelius, we all admit that you are unapproachable in your own line. You have enabled all the half-educated people in Europe to gabble a parody of your philosophy with more than your own brutality of language, and have taught them new bad names to call their neighbours by. But when it is a matter of conducting diplomatic negotiations of the highest delicacy, something more is needed.”

“I see no need of diplomacy,” protested Dr Texelius. “We have the Grand Seignior’s promise, and we hold the money-bags. The Land is ours, and we have only to keep it, which is an affair of the sword, not of the tongue.”

“And surely,” said young Rubenssohn, “it is the Gentiles who will sue for our favour, not we for theirs?”

“Israel will become at once the exemplar and the monitress of the world,” said the Rabbi. “Her central position, separated from the nations and yet vitally connected with all of them, her theocratic government, and the purity of her family life, will make her not only the model state of the new century, but the natural arbitrator in international quarrels.”

The Chevalier Goldberg smiled again, but less patiently. “My dear good friends,” he said, “do you think the world and its inhabitants will all undergo a radical change because Israel has obtained permission from Czarigrad to re-colonise Palestine? I tell you that as soon as our scheme is known, it will become the butt for the

malice and jealousy of the whole earth. The hostile nations will unite against us; our own friends will be swept into the vortex. To enable us to surmount the crisis before us, we need a leader of such varied gifts and experiences as it would seem almost impossible to find combined in a single individual. In fact, there is only one man in Europe, perhaps in the world, who possesses them, and I expect him here in a few minutes.”

“And who may this heaven-sent leader be?” sneered Dr Texelius.

“I see him now, coming round the corner of the Opera-house,” pursued the Chevalier, who from his seat by the window could obtain a view through the openings of the sun-blind. “That is he—the short man with the light moustache.”

“An Englishman, evidently,” said Rubenssohn; “or he would not walk to keep an appointment when he might drive.”

“Right, Herschel my son. He is an Englishman. But,” and the Chevalier dropped the blind which he had partially drawn up, and turned away from the window and the sounds of voices, laughter, and crowding footfalls which it admitted, “he is also a true cosmopolitan. For over ten years he was a king in all but name, and might, had he cared to do it, have married a queen.”

“What! You too have been taken captive by the Mortimer idea?” cried Dr Texelius. “Our Thracian friends can’t find words to deplore his loss. To hear them one might indeed think him Moses and David rolled into one.”

“Is your friend really the man who was Prime Minister of Thracia, and was overthrown by foreign intrigues the day that the young



King attained his majority, Chevalier?" asked Rubenssohn eagerly. "He has always seemed to me a heroic figure in an unheroic age."

"What I want to know is, how much are you going to pay him?" vociferated Dr Texelius, while the Chevalier smiled rather drily. Before he could answer the question, a deferential servant at the door announced "His Excellency Count Mortimer," and ushered in a grey-haired man, whose keen blue eyes appeared to take the measure of all the occupants of the room at a single glance.

"Ah, my frient! You hef arrifed, den?" cried the Chevalier in English. "Beholt us all awaitink your pleassure. Dis fenerable clerchymen iss our goot frient de Rabbi Schaul, and here iss de worlt-renowned scientist Dr Texelius. Dis younk men iss Herschel Rubenssohn, de Poet off de Ghetto, a redical in theory, but aristocret by nature."

The Chevalier laughed meaningly, for while the Rabbi had risen from his chair and bowed low at the introduction, not without a touch of the servility of manner natural to one who sees a probable and powerful enemy in every man of superior rank, Rubenssohn had half-risen and then resumed his seat, conscious of the critical eye of Dr Texelius, who acknowledged the stranger's entrance merely by a nod. Count Mortimer was accustomed to associate with kings and queens, and Dr Texelius was an austere Republican, hating an aristocrat, moreover, as an anomaly in nature—a specimen which would not allow itself to be weighed and measured and labelled by his philosophy. Aristocrats worshipped an absurd fetish called honour, some of the manifestations of which could by no means be reduced to the profit and loss denominator to which he referred all human actions, and for some reason or other these same misguided people regarded themselves

as superior to him. It was evident, at least, that this one did, or what was the meaning of the scarcely veiled irony in his glance as, after shaking hands with the Chevalier, he bowed to the rest?

“I am fortunate,” said Count Mortimer, “in meeting two gentlemen of such European reputation as Dr Texelius and Mr Rubenssohn. Of Dr Schaul I heard much while I lived in Thracia; and when I learned that he was throwing himself heartily into this movement, it seemed to me a fact of the happiest augury for the future.”

“And pray, noble sir, are we to think the same of your own connection with the movement?” asked Dr Texelius.

“The answer to that question lies largely in your own hands, Herr Professor. Am I to rely upon your loyal support, or not?”

“My dear Count,” interposed the host, in German, “these gentlemen are prepared to support you to the utmost of their power. I have just made them see that without your kind offices we could have no hope of success.”

“I am glad to hear it, Chevalier. Perhaps it will set our friends’ minds at ease if I explain, first of all, that I derive no pecuniary benefit from my connection with the movement. A busy man does not take kindly to an idle life, and I am glad to employ my leisure for so good an object.”

“And do you wish us to understand that you cut yourself off from your class, and range yourself on the side of Israel in the sight of the world, purely for the sake of occupation and philanthropy?” snarled Dr Texelius.

“Herr Professor, I am a man who has not a little to avenge. If I choose to combine my own pleasure with the advantage of your

nation, you will do well to be thankful and accept my help. Do we understand one another?"

"Your Excellency does not mince matters, nor will I. What guarantee have we that the interests of Israel will not be sacrificed to your own?"

"Your frankness charms me. You have no guarantee. But without my help the interests of Israel will remain where they are at present."

"Prove it!" shouted Dr Texelius. "How are we to know that you have the power to do what you pretend?"

"Simply by waiting to see. But do not mistake me, Herr Professor. I believe that you and Mr Rubenssohn enjoy considerable influence with the Jewish press. If we are to work together that influence must be employed exclusively and loyally on my side, which is your own. Should there be the slightest attempt to weaken my position, or to form a cabal against me among your followers, I shall take my choice between getting rid of you and ceasing my efforts on behalf of Israel, which will then be far worse off than it is now. Do I make myself plain?"

"Your Excellency's demand is only reasonable," said Rubenssohn; while Dr Texelius spluttered inarticulately. "Such influence as a poor poet may possess is placed unreservedly at your service."

"And if your influence is used wrongly, my excellent Texelius," said the Chevalier Goldberg, "I shall find myself under the painful necessity of ceasing to finance your newspapers, when the annoyance will die a natural death."

“My fears are not for myself,” was the sulky response. “If the Gentile is loyal to Zion, he shall have my support. But what reason is there for his joining us, and what good can he do us? That’s what I want to know.”

“Friend,” said the Rabbi reprovingly, “if the noble gentleman is willing to forsake his own people and cast in his lot with Israel, is it for us to sneer at his chivalrous offer and throw doubt upon his motives? Surely he is one of the sons of the stranger who shall build the walls of Zion.”

Cyril Mortimer bowed gravely to the Rabbi. “I give Dr Texelius free leave to trust me in private no further than he can see me, provided that he supports me in public,” he said. “And now that this is settled, perhaps we may come to a clear understanding of the position. Through my friend the Chevalier Goldberg I am informed that you, gentlemen, form the executive of the guild called the Children of Zion, that your object is to colonise Palestine with Jews from Europe, buying out the present inhabitants where necessary, and that you are in command of a certain sum of money for this purpose, invested on proper security in a series of commercial schemes?”

“Of which the control is in Jewish hands,” interjected Dr Texelius.

“Quite so. I understand also that the Chevalier has volunteered to bear the entire cost of obtaining the necessary concession from Roum, leaving you at liberty to devote the whole of your trust-funds to the work of colonisation. Indeed, gentlemen, you are to be congratulated. What with a sum of money to be paid down at the outset, and a yearly rent for the province, together with the necessary compensation, palm-oil, and perquisites, my friend will

sacrifice a very large part of his fortune in giving your movement a favourable start. I honour his motives, and I only hope you appreciate his generosity.”

“If Goldberg had shown this generosity ten years ago, the Land would be already repopulated by a thriving race of colonists,” said Dr Texelius.

“There, Herr Professor, you are in error. The Chevalier could not show this generosity ten years ago for two reasons. In the first place, it has been the labour of years for him to establish the agreement now arrived at between the Jews of all nations, by which they bind themselves to assist the Children of Zion by bringing pressure on their respective Governments when it is needed. Without this solidarity of action, a band of selfish plutocrats in any one country might have overthrown the whole scheme. And in the second place, ten years ago I was not at liberty to devote myself to assuring the success of the movement.”

“Which is now secured by your Excellency’s adhesion.” The tone was sarcastic in the extreme.

“You are very good, Herr Professor. To me it falls to direct the working of this new machine. Without a single head, to ensure the application of the pressure at the right moment and the right spot, the financial union would soon break up, or at best fall to pieces. It is my aim to produce the necessary effect before disintegration sets in, and I may say I have every hope of success. The Children of Zion may colonise Palestine, but it is the United Nation Syndicate that will make their work possible.”

“Under your Excellency’s guidance.”

“I hope so. You will perceive now the necessity there is for absolute unanimity. Our enemies will be on the watch for the slightest sign of dissension. There is one point upon which it may be desirable to give you a special warning. You are aware of the fanaticism of the Scythians and others with regard to the Holy Places? Now I think it highly probable that I shall be obliged to consent to the appointment of a Christian prince as governor-general, as a guarantee against their desecration.”

“Oho, the thin end of the wedge!” cried Dr Texelius. “A Christian governor—a prince, too—with a Christian Court and army and executive. Where is our free and independent republic, in which the Jew might at last obtain security and justice? Rubenssohn—Rabbi—you have heard the Gentile speak, will you still believe that his forked tongue utters truth?”

“Friend Texelius, you insult his Excellency,” said Rabbi Schaul. “How can it signify to us what precautions the Gentiles take in the vain hope of maintaining their ascendancy over Zion? Of what use would it be to us to draw up the wisest republican constitution, which would last but a day? Once we are restored to the land, He will come whose right it is to reign, and neither Christian prince nor atheistic republic can stand against Him.”

“Beautiful dream!” murmured Rubenssohn, his eyes kindling, “but it is only a dream. A literal Messiah is an impossibility. The house of David is extinct, the monarchical principle incapable of revival among us. The Grand Seignior may play the part of the Messiah in bringing us back, or there may be before us a Messianic age of peace and plenty, such as the prophets picture, but we need look for nothing more.”

“Young man, will you limit the Holy One of Israel? A few years ago this return, for which we are planning, was counted impossible, but it is now at hand. The appearance and reign of Messiah will follow in due time.”

“Rabbi, you are a dreamer!” cried Dr Texelius angrily. “Will you allow your absurd visions to interfere with practical politics?”

“Visions? You call the prophecies of the Divine Word absurd visions?” cried the Rabbi, trembling with mingled anger and alarm. “Let me go, Israel Goldberg. I dare not sit at the same table as this unbeliever.”

“No, no; Texelius spoke more strongly than he intended,” said the Chevalier, whose hair had grown grey in the endeavour to induce the orthodox and free-thinking sections of his co-religionists to work together. “He has the highest respect for your views, Rabbi, and I, as you know, share them.”

“Well, let him show his respect for the prophecies by abandoning his opposition to Count Mortimer,” said the old man, supporting himself with his shaking hands upon the table, “or I must withdraw from all association with him, and call upon my flock to do the same.”

“I agree,” said Dr Texelius hastily, for the defection of Rabbi Schaul’s following would have been a serious blow to the movement. “Perhaps you will own some day, Rabbi, that it would have been better to take the advice of a practical man, but by all means let us all become dreamers together.”

“If the learned Dr Texelius had listened more carefully to what I said,” remarked Cyril, “he would have noticed that I proposed only

to consent to the appointment, not to make it. That will be the business of the Powers, and while they are wrangling over it we are establishing ourselves in Palestine.”

“But they will soon perceive that,” said Rubenssohn.

“True; but I shall propose a commission, composed of the various consuls, to take charge of the Holy Places until the governor is appointed. That will lead to further wrangling, but it will only give us more time.”

“But why is time so necessary?” asked Rubenssohn.

“To enable us to import our Jews. You understand, Dr Texelius, there must be no interference with Christian communities or forcible dispossession of Moslems, nothing to give a pretext for European intervention. If you can’t buy one piece of ground easily, turn to another. Do everything quietly, settle your Jews wherever there is room for them, and then we can confidently demand a *plébiscite* of the whole country, if we see the opportunity, or at least ask permission to elect a temporary governor until the Powers have agreed on their nominee. I need scarcely say that if the colonists possessed a spark of gratitude, their choice would fall on Dr Texelius, and the Powers might even be brought to confirm that appointment.”

“So!” cried Dr Texelius, with evident pleasure, “I perceive that you are not wholly a dreamer, Count.”

“Few men less so, Herr Professor. We are agreed, then? You will hurry on your part of the work by every means in your power, while I do my best to keep the attention of Europe fixed upon side-issues?”



“And if you are agreed upon that,” cried the host, when the rest had signified their assent, “it would be as well for us to separate. I have been on thorns all the afternoon, lest the police should have noticed you coming to this house, friends. Unless the movement is to be rudely checked, you ought all to be on your way back to your own countries to-night.”

At this very plain hint the conference broke up, its members leaving the mansion singly. The Rabbi went first, shuffling down the grand staircase in his shabby clothes, a decrepit figure in whom the most lynx-eyed police agent would have found a difficulty in recognising the chief spiritual guide of multitudes of orthodox Jews in Pannonia and Southern Scythia. Rubenssohn, who had lived in England long enough to pass on the Continent for an Englishman, left the house openly, but by a different door, after taking a reverential farewell of Cyril, Dr Texelius utilising the moment by whispering to the Chevalier—

“I have classified your friend, Goldberg. His ambition is enormous, amounting, indeed, to mania. If Europe will not admire him, Europe may hate him, but it shall not disregard him.”

And Dr Texelius stumped down the stairs with an aggressive air peculiarly his own, which he joined on this occasion with the stateliness of demeanour proper to the future president of the Hebrew Republic. Meeting on the threshold a young Jewish *savant*, who had made the great philosopher’s acquaintance at a scientific congress, he responded affably to the timid greeting of the neophyte, and piqued his curiosity by informing him that he had just been investigating a very interesting case of lunacy.

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