

Book Notices.

"A Keystone of Empire: Francis Joseph of Austria." By the author of "The Martyrdom of an Empress." New York: Harper & Bros. Toronto: William Briggs. 8vo. Pp. 322. Illustrated. Price, \$2.25 net.

We all like to get an inside view of court life. This book gives such a view. The author was a lady-in-waiting upon the late Empress Elizabeth of Austria, and was a keen observer and student of court life and court doings. It is sad tale she has to tell, that quite disillusioned the reader of the glamour and glitter of court pageantry. Like the doom that brooded over the house of Atreus is the tragic story of the house of the Habsburgs—so the author spells it.

Few kings have been so "battered by the blows of fate" as the knightly Francis Joseph. He has seen army after army defeated with tremendous slaughter—at Magenta, Solferino, and Konnigkratz. His brother Maximilian was shot as a usurper at Queratero in Mexico, while the unhappy Maximilian's wife still lingers a hopeless maniac. His only son perished shamefully by his own hand. The Empress Elizabeth, whom he deeply loved, after a life of alternate estrangement and reconciliation, was done to death by an assassin's dagger at Geneva. The sister of the Empress, the Duchess of Alençon, perished heroically at a charity bazaar fire at Paris. Another sister and her husband were hurled from the throne of Naples and lived for years in obscurity in Paris. His own life was dominated by an imperious mother, the Archduchess Sophia, who made the life of the Empress Elizabeth a living martyrdom.

The very year of his accession saw Vienna in the throes of a revolt, akin to those of the French Revolution of '89. The sixteen wrangling nations that make up the Austro-Hungarian Empire have been often in turmoil, and when the "keystone" of the arch falls out the empire seems destined to fall in ruins. The story is told with much minuteness in this graphic narrative, whose title might well have been "The Miseries of a Palace."

The aged Emperor, now in his seventies, has had the longest reign of any sovereign in Europe, except Louis XIV. and Queen Victoria. Like Vic-

toria the Beloved, he has been the idol of his people. "The only man," said Napoleon III., "who ever returned a crushed and beaten soldier from the field who was received with acclamation by his subjects." How different from the treatment of Napoleon by his people—himself driven into exile, his empress a fugitive from the Tuileries, his son slain by a Zulu assegai on the veldt of Africa. The author of this book possesses full knowledge of the inner history of which she writes. She severely condemns the pride and tyranny of "Sophia the Pitiless," and keenly sympathizes with her beloved mistress, the Empress Elizabeth.

The old Emperor is a model of industry. At early dawn he rises from his iron camp-bed, shaves himself, sometimes calls a council at seven o'clock, goes unattended through the streets as we have seen him in Vienna, works like a bureau clerk at the reports of nineteen ministers of two separate and often rival parliaments; attends the details of two distinct governments, is the acting head of an army of a million, visits incessantly the sub-sections of his empire, especially in times of flood, famine or fever, and endeavours in all things to be the father of his people.

The author is mistress of a remarkably picturesque style. Her descriptions of nature are highly poetic. She makes fine rhetorical use of specific rather than generic terms, as birch and oak and wych-elm and ilex, the lilies and irises, the nettles and absinthe plant, instead of a vague general phrase. The account of her visit to the ruined castle of the Habsburgs in Switzerland, now used as a stable for cattle, which the Emperor, and his son Rudolf tried in vain to restore, is as vivid as a painting by Salvator Rosa. At times the description of court pageantry is overdone and the personality of the writer is too prominent, but the book, as a whole, has a strange fascination, the plain prose of fact being stranger than the fancies of fiction. In the hands of a Shakespeare, or a Schiller, what a drama could be written of these stirring scenes "where tragedy with crimson pall sweeps by!" This is a book of such importance that we shall put it in the hands of a thoroughly competent writer as the subject of a special article.