

# Secrets of the Courts of Europe

An Old Ambassador's Revelations of the Inner History of Famous Episodes Heretofore Cloaked in Mystery

Chronicles by ALLEN UPWARD

## THE HONOR OF AN EMPRESS

"This is a trivial affair," commented the ambassador, as he laid down the newspaper in which he had been reading an account of one of M. de Rochefort's numerous duels. "I do not wonder that you English amuse yourselves with these comedies, which reflect little honor on France. Nevertheless, let me tell you that, when we please, we can make of the duel something very different; that is to say, an affair of life and death."

"Without doubt," I answered, tossing aside my own copy of the *Matin*—we were in the smoking room of the Cercle des Etrangers—"but your press should not give such importance to these farces."

The ambassador brushed this observation aside with a wave of his hand. "It is the too great facility with which these affairs are arranged that has involved them in ridicule," he said, pursuing his own line of thought. "It is when a crime has been committed which is truly worthy of death, and yet which, from its nature, is beyond the reach of laws, that the duel becomes a sacred resource, indispensable in the interests of mankind."

"And are there such occasions, then?" I responded, in order to see what was in his excellency's mind.

"I have at all events known of one," he returned gravely, as he began to roll a cigarette.

"I cannot recall the exact date at which I was accredited to the court of St. James, but it must have been at least twenty-five years ago. I had come to Great Britain with a sincere desire to win the confidence of the brave English people; and knowing that in your country even politics receives less consideration than what you call 'sport,' I resolved to prove myself a huntsman. Accordingly I bought myself horses and went out to hunt the fox."

"The hunt of which I became a member was at that time the most aristocratic in the world, made so by the patronage of an illustrious personage whose name I shall not mention. Her imperial majesty had formed the habit of coming over to England during the season of the chase, under a strict incognito, and attended by only a small suite, in order to take part in this sport. It was in this way that I obtained the privilege of an acquaintance which I shall always look back upon as my most cherished remembrance."

"Among the members of her majesty's suite at this time was a certain Baron Magrats, who filled the post of private secretary and comptroller of the household. You will understand, of course, that my intercourse with the empress was on the most respectful footing, but it was not long before I discovered that this baron, of whom I saw a good deal, was a dangerous, insolent man, quite unworthy of the confidence reposed in him by his august mistress."

"So acutely did I realize this that it became a question with me whether the favor extended to me by that noble and unsuspecting lady did not cast upon me the obligation of warning her against this man's presumption. While I was still in doubt an incident occurred which rendered it unnecessary for me to speak."

"One morning, when we were engaged in waiting outside a small covert for the fox to appear, I observed Magrats ride up to the empress and point with his hand, as if persuading her that the beast was about to emerge from a point further on. She turned her horse, and they rode off together round a corner of the wood. Troubled by some vague presentiment of mischief, I at once gave rein to my horse and followed."

"I got round the corner just in time to perceive what took place. The baron had stooped forward, with an air of undue confidence, and was apparently addressing some remark to the empress when all at once I saw her majesty rein in her horse, lift up the riding whip she held in her hand and draw it swiftly across his face."

"Magrats started with a violence which caused his horse to rear. What he would have done next I cannot say, but luckily at that moment he caught sight of me. The empress had already turned, and she rode back past me, the angry gleam in her eyes relaxing into a gracious smile as she acknowledged my respectful salute."

"The baron followed at a walk, and as he came up to me I observed on his face a narrow streak of red, crossing from the right ear to the mouth."

"Stung, doubtless, by my indignant look, he checked his horse and addressed me with bitter emphasis:

"I congratulate you M. l'Ambassadeur, on your good fortune." (The ambassador spoke in French—no doubt for the sake of the double meaning.)

"You have seen how a member of a family which is six hundred years old is treated by one of these royalties. We others are not of the same clay, you perceive. A Magrats is no more than a man from the ground beneath their feet. But perhaps this chapter will be concluded to make any answer."

and he passed on, with a wicked smile, and rode away out of sight.

"The next day I heard that he had quitted England under the displeasure of the empress, and some years passed before I was again reminded of his existence."

The ambassador stopped and flicked his cigarette ash into the fireplace before us with much dexterity.

"It was in — that I next met with my baron." His excellency checked himself abruptly and appeared to be overwhelmed with confusion at having allowed this name to escape him. I was careful to show that I had not heard it.

"You met him, where did you say?" I asked languidly.

"In the dominions of the emperor whose illustrious consort I have spoken of," replied the ambassador, swiftly recovering himself. "I had just been appointed to the charge of our embassy in the imperial capital, and it was at a state ball given in honor of the crown prince's birthday that I recognized Magrats again."

"He was moving about among the guests with the assured manner of one who held a recognized position at court. He wore on his breast the cross of the order of St. Luke, the second order in the empire, and everyone appeared to treat him with marked distinction. But what attracted my notice particularly was a young girl of extraordinary beauty, whom he was escorting through the ballroom, and who clung to his arm with a delicious shyness. You know that I am not easily moved by the sex; picture the fascination of this damsel, therefore, when I tell you that I had hard work to refrain from going up to the baron and soliciting an introduction."

"While I was wondering who she could be, and how Magrats had contrived to regain the imperial favor, I observed a movement in the crowd through which the pair was straying. The bystanders fell back, and a young man suddenly came through, a young man with heavy features and blood-shot, rolling eyes, who was dressed in a rich uniform blazoning with the stars of a dozen royal orders. It was the crown prince."

"The prince, whose leaden face flushed with pleasure on catching sight of the couple, greeted Magrats in a style of much intimacy, and eagerly took possession of his exquisite partner, whom he led off through the apartments out of my sight."

"Magrats stood looking after them with an expression of dark and furtive satisfaction. Then he turned round, and for the first time caught my eye. He bowed with a polite, almost cordial air, and advanced towards me through the throng."

"Permit me to welcome you to my country, M. l'Ambassadeur," he said, extending his hand, which I accepted with reluctance. "What little influence I may possess here, and especially with his imperial highness, is entirely at your service. I trust you will allow me, within the next few days, the pleasure of paying my respects to you at the embassy."

"While I murmured my formal acknowledgments I could not take my eyes off his face. It was doubtless an illusion, but I thought I could distinctly perceive a faint purple mark where I had seen the whip of the empress descend."

"M. de Magrats no doubt divined my thoughts, or rather they were conveyed to him without words, by that subtle process for which science has not yet invented a suitable name. He bit his lip and permitted himself an ill-bred remark:

"To a man of your excellency's well-known discretion it would be an impertinence to recommend silence with regard to certain incidents of the past."

I bowed, but with coldness, and changed the subject by complimenting him on the beauty of the young girl whose arm he had just relinquished.

"Ah! that is my niece," he observed, with affected carelessness. "She is an orphan whom I have brought up. The crown prince is good enough to interest himself in her, but of course the difference in their ranks is too great for it to be any more than a passing fancy."

"He pronounced these last words with a fatherly air which did not impose upon me. I even fancied I detected in them a veiled allusion to the circumstances of our last meeting."

"I turned on my heel, feeling strangely disturbed, and passed on through the rooms. The crown prince and his charming partner were nowhere to be seen."

The ambassador paused. His cigarette was smoked out, and he proceeded to roll himself a fresh one.

"Catching sight in the crowd of my friend the little Count Messana of the Italian legation, I resolved to question him. The count is a most remarkable man. He is the greatest repository of scandal in the whole of Europe, and, as his tongue never spares man or woman, he is immensely popular and goes everywhere."

"I think I have heard of the count," I remarked. "Was he not mixed up in that scandal in the Quirinal, in which Prince—"

The ambassador frowned rebukingly. "Yes, yes; we will speak of that some other time. Do not let us distract ourselves now, I beg of you."

I excused myself for my interruption, and his excellency went on:

"From Messana I gathered enough information to confirm my uneasiness. It appeared that Magrats, after being in disgrace for some years, had recently been allowed to present himself again at court. Fatal magnanimity! Unpardonable forgiveness! He had come up from his estates, bringing with him this niece, who had immediately cast a spell over the crown prince, a young man unfortunately not without a reputation of a certain kind. Her uncle conducted himself in this affair with great prudence, so managing matters that his niece's reputation was not compromised, while the prince became every day more desperately enamored; and all kinds of conjectures were afloat as to what would be the ultimate issue of this strange situation."

"Although I was still far from suspecting the real object which Magrats had in view, I could not help seeing in all this some machination which boded no good to the peace of the imperial house. I was hardly surprised, therefore, to receive on the following day a summons to a private conference with the empress herself,

queen's daughters is illegitimate in this sense. "But since such a marriage would, at the same time, have sufficient force to render any other alliance impossible, the consequence would be, in effect, that the line of the emperor would become extinct in the next generation, and the crown would pass to some collateral branch of the imperial house."

"Well might Magrats triumph in such a possibility. I could see only one thing to advise, and even now I do not see how I could have taken any different view."

"You must arrange a marriage for his imperial highness without delay," I said with firmness. "Let him be dispatched at once to some court where there is a princess of suitable age, and ordered not to return till the betrothal is an accomplished fact."

"Ah, how profound is the instinct of a woman! Her majesty immediately replied:

"But I dread the effect of a loveless marriage on my son. I know too well—"

The ambassador broke off short at this interesting point, and began coughing with violence. The cigarette smokob seemed to have got into his excellency's throat.

"But I weary you with this long conversation," he observed, as soon as the coughing had subsided. "Enough that this venerated personage placed entire confidence in me."

"Within a week of our conversation



The Prince Greeted Magrats in a Style of Much Intimacy and Eagerly Took Possession of His Exquisite Partner.

and at once divined the subject on which she desired to consult me.

"Her majesty received me in her own apartments, without anyone else being present, a mark of confidence which touched me profoundly. We had not met for six years, and I was distressed to perceive the change which had taken place in this exalted lady. Her finely cut features bore the marks of suffering, and the exquisite gaiety which had formerly distinguished her had become overcast. Doubtless the sad fate of her relative, the king of Bavaria, had done something to effect this alteration, but the chief cause, I more than suspected, was the anxiety given to her by the conduct of her son."

"It is needless for me to repeat to you the kind expressions which the empress was pleased to make use of on this meeting to me again. It was her first words on the subject of the crown prince which roused my alarm. "I have hoped, M. l'Ambassadeur, that an old friend like yourself might be able to advise me with regard to my son," she said, "and I look especially to you, because you alone are in the secret of the past history of M. de Magrats."

"Madame," I replied with fervor, "the only thing that can prevent my advising you is the confusion with which your condescension overwhelms me."

"Her majesty heard me with a mournful smile."

"You have heard, no doubt, of the prince's infatuation for this man's niece?" she proceeded.

"I have, madam. I have even seen the young girl herself, who appeared to me to be quite incapable of knowingly taking part in any treacherous design."

"You may be right, but unfortunately she is under the control of a man who has no such scruples. To come to what I was about to say, this entanglement is by far the most serious of any in which my son has been involved. So serious is it that the emperor and myself live in actual dread of hearing that the prince has privately married this young woman."

"I started, realizing at once the full consequences of such a situation. The crown prince was the only child of the imperial couple. By the well known family statutes of his house, his marriage with a lady not of royal blood would be legitimate only in a social sense. Politically it would be treated as a nullity, and the offspring of the union would be incapable of succeeding to the throne. It is well known that the husband of one of your late

the crown prince had set out for the capital of a small kingdom in the west of Europe, under stringent instructions to offer his hand to the monarch's daughter."

"The manner in which he did so is well known. Harshly ignoring the conventions of love-making, he bluntly approached this young princess in a ballroom, and, in bare words, asked her if she would become his wife. The girl, no doubt under equally strict compulsion, gave her assent, adding a profession of fidelity and submission."

The crown prince instantly turned away, and that was all that ever passed between them in the nature of courtship.

"The next day the betrothal was officially announced to me by the imperial chancellor, and the news speedily spread through the capital, where it created an immense sensation. It was immediately after this that I received the promised visit of Baron Magrats."

"I had given orders that he was to be admitted; for though I am, as you are aware, the least curious person in the world, my high regard for the empress made me anxious to fathom the intentions of this villain."

"He appeared to take his defeat with philosophy."

"I sincerely trust this marriage may end happily," he said, when I introduced the topic. "It is, of course, absurd to suppose that there is any attachment, at all events on the side of the crown prince. Unhappily, the preference his highness has shown for my niece has turned out to be more serious than I believed, and I am afraid the poor child has allowed herself to cherish unreasonable ideas. I shall make it my business to obtain a husband for her, if possible, before the prince returns."

"I saw nothing to take hold of in this announcement. If true, it seemed that the baron was taking the most prudent course, both in the interests of the imperial dynasty and of his niece. I did not yet appreciate the subtlety of his combinations, far less did I foresee the terrible end he had in view, and which you perhaps already perceive?"

I evaded this question.

"Proceed, my dear ambassador, if you please," I said. "Your story interests me greatly."

His excellency blew a wreath of smoke from his lips and complied with this request.

"For a moment I thought of immolating myself on the altar of the imperial house by offering myself as a match for the charming baroness. But

a secret attachment—of which I am forbidden to speak—restrained me. I allowed Magrats to depart; and before many days had passed I learned that he had found a husband for his unfortunate niece in the person of Count Schwartzfeldt, an immensely wealthy nobleman of fifty, but possessing no single attraction which could recommend him in the eyes of a young girl."

"The ceremony was hurried on, and Paula von Magrats became the bride of this ogre on the very day on which the crown prince returned to the capital."

"I happened to meet the prince next day, and for the first time I was seized with a presentiment of the coming tragedy. If ever I read anguish and despair on a human face, I read it on that of this miserable young man. So violent was his grief that he openly threatened to put an end to his life, and his unhappy parents were reduced to the extremity of distress."

"It was, of course, impossible that a scandal of such a kind should be long in reaching the ears of the bridegroom. Naturally alarmed and annoyed, Count Schwartzfeldt left the capital with his wife. He carried her away to his estates, some hundreds of miles off, and buried her in one of those frightful feudal castles which this nobility continue to inhabit."

"In the meantime the only resource which occurred to the troubled emperor and empress was to press forward the marriage already arranged for their son, in the hope that he might be distracted from dwelling on his fatal passion for the young Countess Schwartzfeldt."

"I was present in the diplomatic gallery when the royal nuptials were celebrated in the national cathedral, before an immense concourse of the nobility and citizens. It was the most melancholy pageant at which I have ever assisted. The demeanor of the wretched bridegroom created universal dismay. It was impossible to escape noticing the reluctance with which he uttered the responses, and the sullen coldness with which he gave his arm to the trembling bride."

"Among the most interested spectators of it all, I caught sight of Magrats. He had but to glance from him to the pale face and drooping eyelids of the illustrious object of his hatred to see how far his scheme of vengeance had already succeeded."

"Some months passed before he made his next open move. He waited, with prudent calculation, for the crown prince to begin to feel the chafing of his new fetters. It was with alarm that I discovered he was beginning to renew his intimacy with the prince."

"I had the opportunity once or twice of observing them together, and I noticed that his imperial highness, when with this man, shook off the listless apathy which had become his habitual mood, and listened with feverish interest to the baron's conversation. It was not difficult to guess the subject of their discussions."

"Finally, Magrats came one day to the embassy to take leave of me before departing on a visit to his niece at her husband's residence. There was an ill-suppressed ring of triumph in his voice, which warned me that he was on the eve of some new stroke. Perhaps even then, if I had comprehended the nature of his designs, I might have interfered. But as it was, I could do nothing except to express in delicate and guarded terms my hope that his visit would contribute to the peace and happiness of the Schwartzfeldt household."

"On rising to go he lifted the mask for one instant."

"I have been greatly distressed by the unfortunate result of this marriage of the crown prince," he said, "and especially when I reflect on the grief it must cause to her majesty my late mistress."

"As he spoke I positively saw the faded scar of the whip leap into sight upon his dark skin. I drew back, and clenched my teeth firmly to prevent myself from making the reply that rose to my lips. But you will realize the difficulty of my position. As the representative of a great government, I could not afford to enter into a quarrel with a private nobleman at the court to which I was accredited."

"I suppressed my indignation, and allowed him to depart on his fatal errand. The event which followed has become the property of the world."

His excellency turned his eyes upon me as if to ascertain whether I desired to hear more. I entreated him to complete the narrative."

"The European press," he observed, "always misinformed in these matters, put forth a thousand different explanations of what had taken place, all of them sufficiently incorrect. I will tell you the actual sequence of events as I learnt it soon afterwards from the confession of Magrats himself."

"It appears, then, that this monster commenced by insinuating his sympathy with the poor young prince in his unhappy union. From that he passed to lamenting his own action in having given his niece's hand to Count Schwartzfeldt."

"Having excited the prince's mind sufficiently by hints of this sort, he at length went on, with pretended reluctance, to depict the young countess as a victim of intolerable persecutions on the part of a jealous and tyrannical husband, and to bitterly accuse himself for being unable to devise a means for her deliverance."

"It is needless to say how the agitated lover received these tidings. His own sufferings he might have schooled himself to bear, but as soon as it became a question of the life-long wretchedness of the woman he loved more than life itself, all thoughts of

submission were thrown to the winds. In a frenzy of passion he swore to put an end to this state of things, and implored Magrats to assist him."

"After some well-acted hesitation the tempter professed himself won over. He furnished the prince with the direction of a certain hunting lodge in an out-of-the-way corner of his own estates."

"The prince was to travel secretly to the spot at a certain date, by which time the baron undertook that his niece should be there to meet him. Then the two lovers were to lie concealed until Magrats had succeeded in pacifying the outraged husband, and bringing about an accommodation with the emperor's sanction."

"This understanding arrived at, the worthy uncle departed to the Schwartzfeldt castle. The first part of the arrangement he carried out in the manner agreed upon. The love of the poor young countess for the prince was no less intense than his for her; her married life had not been happy, and, in fact, she was persuaded to accept the part assigned to her. She fled from her home with the baron's secret assistance, and the lovers were speedily united."

"Now Magrats proceeded to execute his real design. He had stayed on at the castle after his niece's flight, pacifying the furious count, not in the way he had promised the crown prince, but by undertaking to discover the fugitive's retreat. As soon as he knew that the pair had met, he boldly announced to Count Schwartzfeldt that he had received private intelligence of his niece's whereabouts, and offered to conduct the other to the spot. They set out together."

"But it would not have suited the baron's purpose to bring the rivals face to face. The crown prince's high rank might have overawed the husband, and the whole affair have been hushed up. He therefore sent on a secret warning to his victim, managing so that it should reach him too late to afford any chance of escape. In this warning he pretended to the prince that the elopement was known publicly, and that the count was coming to take signal vengeance on both."

"The resolution thereupon taken by the unhappy lovers is a matter of history. When the deceived count and his conductor entered the lodge, they found the two young people lying dead in each others' arms."

The ambassador again interrupted himself, under the pretense of loosening his cravat. He went on presently, in a firm voice:

"When all was over the author of this dreadful catastrophe had the assurance to return to the capital, and to pose as the disconsolate uncle whose efforts to save his niece from the consequences of a fatal passion had unhappily miscarried."

"Two persons knew or suspected something of the truth. One was the stricken empress, who sat in her palace, tearless, beside the corpse of her only son. The other was myself."

"I do not doubt that this man had been tortured in his wicked heart all these years by the recollection that I had been a witness of his well-merited chastisement. The moment he had, as he conceived, wiped out the stain in blood, he came to me to boast openly of what he had done."

"It may be that long brooding on his vengeance had so warped his mind that he could not realize in what light his conduct would present itself to another."

"When I sat and heard this terrible creature unrolling the awful story of his crimes, in the perfect confidence that he was beyond the reach of human justice, and then thought of that imperial mother whose life had been rendered desolate for ever, I realized that there are occasions when the duel becomes the most holy of sacraments."

The ambassador closed his lips, and leaned back in his seat with the air of one who had no more to say.

I waited a few moments to see whether he was going to resume of his own accord. Then I inquired:

"And what did you do then?"

His excellency transfixed me with a gaze of fine scorn.

"Ask yourself, as a man of honor, what I could do. I waited merely till that carrion was gone, to telegraph to Paris for a week's leave of absence. It was granted. I crossed the frontier as his excellency the French ambassador, and returned the next morning as plain M. le Baron. Then I sought out Magrats."

"I found him in a club to which we both belonged. I offered him a game of piquet, and he accepted with a smile, and at the first card he played I said:

"Monsieur, you cheated. I saw your mark that queen."

"That was all. You see, there was no scandal. There could be no suspicion of any other cause for our quarrel."

"And the result?"

A faint flush came on his excellency's face.

"Our encounter was not prolonged. Within ten seconds after our swords had crossed I had passed my blade through his heart—and I have never wiped off the blood to this day."

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The New Pulpit.  
The press has become the new pulpit. Today there are one hundred writers and authors to one in 1860. The people are crying for a voice. The whole country has become a debating club. It was essential to democracy; supplementary to free schools and free thought. At last we are getting free speech. Talk it is that is the glory of humanity.—T. P. Powell, in the New York Independent.