

How Austria's Destitute Empress Was Robbed of Her Fabulous Treasure

Amazing Verdict of the Secret Court That Sought the Stolen Jewels and Revealed "the Greatest Swindle of the Century"



(C) Keystone View Co.
One of the Last "Royal" Photos of Ill-Fated Emperor Karl, Princess Zita, and Prince Otho of Austria, and in Background the Magnificent Coronation Mantle of Jewels Worked on Purple Cloth.

One of the Beautiful Gem-Encrusted Gloves Treasured by Hapsburgs for Centuries.

who have been holding a secret inquiry at Geneva. Zita, they say, was tricked out of the treasure; her agents inveigled into accepting an "advance" of \$25,000 for the sale of baubles valued at more than two hundred times that much; left with no documents but debts that quickly gulped, that paltry sum; duped as surely and swiftly as any farm boy parting with his savings for a gold brick! Zita, her sons and daughters, are living in penury on the little island of Madeira

VIENNA. An emperor dead from starvation! His widow destitute! Her seven children objects of charity! A year ago they owned gems worth thirty million gold crowns, or \$6,000,000! To-day they are victims of what investigators call "the greatest swindle of the century!" The first complete story of why Emperor Karl of Austria died from very lack of food, and how Princess Zita lost her crown jewels—a truly fabulous fortune!—is revealed by Swiss officials

Front View of the Ancient Roman Iron Cross with Jewels in the Austrian Crown.



The Crown of the Lost Austrian Empire Showing Some of the Priceless Jewels Dating Back to the Roman Period.



Ex-Empress Zita and Six of Her Seven Children. Left to Right, ex-Crown Prince Otho, Archduke Robert, Archduke Felix, Archduchess Charlotte in Princess Zita's Arms; Archduke Rudolph and Archduchess Adelaide.



The Imperial Golden Orb and Cross

Austrian crowns lavished by emperors for many decades past to enrich the house that had been giving kings to Hungary since 1282.

The jewels included four pink diamonds—and in the entire world only eight pink diamonds have ever been discovered! They included the coronation mantle of the Holy Roman German Empire, its lions and dragons worked in gems on a background of purple cloth. There were, too, the coronation sandals of pearls sewn on purple velvet, and the iron crown with its diadem of rubies, and the iron cross set with shimmering stones.

With such a stupendous treasure in their possession, Karl and Zita spared no expenses in their Swiss life. The jewels were left intact, for Karl's head seethed with a plot to regain his throne. On October 22, 1918, the conspiracy came to a swift head—and swifter disaster. Karl and Zita flew in an airplane to Burgenland, where royalists were in revolt. Scarcely had they arrived,

when the insurrection was crushed. The ex-emperor and his devoted wife were turned over to the Allies, placed on a British warship, and sent to Madeira.

Before starting his dash for a throne, Karl entrusted the crown jewels to his faithful major-domo, Baron Steiner, instructing him not to part with them without written authorization.

As soon as the failure of the plot became known, the creditors of Karl in Switzerland descended on the Baron like a horde of harassing wolves.

Despairing of getting Karl's ear or obtaining a written order to sell some of the jewels and thus stave off the creditors, Baron Steiner went to an aunt of the emperor. She willingly signed an authorization for the sale of the jewels through a small group of financiers, ostensibly only for the purpose of paying off the most pressing obligations of Karl.

In a few hours after Baron Steiner obtained his written permission to dispose of the jewels, there appeared in Geneva three men who described themselves as "international jewelers."

They offered to find immediate purchasers for the entire collection. They agreed to advance three hundred thousand francs, or about five thousand pounds, as an evidence of good faith. And Baron Steiner, seeing the one way out of a maze of trouble, accepted their proposition and handed over the gems!

Karl was in complete ignorance of what was passing on the continent. The Allies had placed him in a handsome villa in Madeira for which they paid the rent. Not a penny, however, was granted for his maintenance.

One of the stipulations of the ex-emperor's exile was that he could not leave the island. This ban did not apply to the empress. Karl sent her to Geneva to get the jewels, sell a few of them and thus supply him with enough cash to meet expenses. When Zita arrived in the Swiss capital, she was stunned to learn that the jewels were gone. More than that, she was in-

formed that the thirty thousand franc "advance" had been swallowed up in the enormous bill of costs presented by Karl's creditors.

A faithful lady-in-waiting describes the scene when the ex-emperor stood on the wharf at Funchal to welcome back his wife, fondly imagining that she brought with her the wherewithal to end their troubles. They embraced and exchanged a few words. She whispered in his ear; he started back with a look of horror on his face.

The next day Karl and his family vacated the villa. Once lord of millions, the last of the Hapsburgs was literally a beggar. Through the kindness of the neighborhood priest, a cottage on the island was placed at their disposal.

In a few weeks the former emperor aged twenty years. His hair turned white. He looked fifty instead of thirty-five. On some days, but for charity, the family would have gone without a crust. The cold was great despite the supposed mildness of the Madeira climate. No wood or coal could be bought because of lack of money. Karl paced his garden like a caged lion. He developed a racking cough. Bronchitis, then pneumonia, attacked him. Weak for want of food, exhausted by worry, his pride cut to the quick, his heart broken, he took to a tumble-down bed in a ramshackle hovel.

So died Karl Franz Joseph, emperor of Austria and king of Hungary from 1915 to 1918, last of a line that from 1282 gave kings to Hungary and Bohemia, from 1438 to 1806 rulers to Germany, from 1516 to 1700 kings to Spain, from 1804 to the proclamation of the Republic kings to Austria—a poor, shivering, hungry pauper at the last, literally killed by the same privations suffered by the humblest subjects of his former kingdom.

At the instance of the mourning Zita, the Swiss began their inquiry. The three "international jewelers" testified they had been deceived by intermediaries. Finally they contradicted each other, dodging the onus of the "sale," laying responsibility at each other's doors. The jewels, they declared, had passed beyond their hands. They were—who knew where? Not they. Not the court. Certainly not Princess Zita, looking out from the doorway of her cottage to the gray waste of the Atlantic.

off the Spanish coast where Karl, last of a line of kings that ruled in Europe since the thirteenth century, sleeps in what is practically a pauper's grave.

The world is familiar with the events leading up to the exile of Karl and Zita and the fallen emperor's sudden and tragic death at the age of only thirty-five. What the world did not know, until the Swiss inquiry revealed it, was the juggling of millions that went on behind the scenes.

On March 24, 1919, Karl and Zita and their family left his Castle of Ekartsau on the Danube whither he had retired after the proclamation of November, 1918, that created the Austria-Hungarian republic, and travelled to Switzerland.

The ex-emperor laughed at the idea of want then, for he carried with him one of the most marvelous collections of jewels the world has ever known—the Hapsburg gems, representing centuries of search and million upon million of



One of the Missing Coronation Sandals Worked with Pearls on Purple Velvet.