

WHERE IS PRINCE GEORGE OF SERBIA?

ON the outskirts of the Serbian provincial town of Kragujevac, pronounced Kragouyevats, in Jugoslavia, is a small and remote villa surrounded by a garden and a strong fence. The villa, half-hidden behind shrubbery and trees, resembles the peaceful retreat of a retired Serbian pig merchant.

You will notice nothing out of the ordinary unless you try to get a closer view. Then a gendarme or a detective will suddenly appear and tell you to move along on the other side of the road. That's as close as they'll let you come to the grounds. And if you happen to show any undue interest or attempt to use your camera, the chances are that, like some who were curious, you will land in jail.

Still, from the wrong side of the road you may catch a quick glimpse of gendarmes and detectives, but no signs of life within the two-storied house itself.

Returning to Kragujevac you may ask about this mysterious villa which, apparently uninhabited, is guarded by a swarm of armed men. Most people will tell you nothing. Others, more inclined to talk, will gulp down a tumbler of shlivovitsa, take a bite of goat's cheese and onions, and whisper confidentially:

"Prince George is locked up in that house!"

"How come?" you ask in surprise.

"Well," your informer tells you after looking carefully over the café, "they say he is crazy. His own brother, the late King Alexander who stole the throne away from him, put him there some ten years ago. But some of us believe he is not crazy at all. His brother was afraid of him, that's why he is there. . . ."

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Color by Anne

The rightful heir, when pictures of him were allowed

Prince George is never mentioned in public or in the Yugoslav press. But most of the people have a vague idea where he is kept. Outside of Yugoslavia few people know that a Prince George exists at all.

Was it Alexander's intention to banish his brother into oblivion? King Alexander was fully capable of such a deed. Since 1929 when he installed a third-rate dictatorship in Yugoslavia until his assassination at Marseilles in 1934, he had attempted to do away in the same manner with thousands of people. He established many concentration camps long before Hitler made them famous. Into these camps he crowded all who had opposed his dictatorial ambitions, especially the Croats. These camps are still in existence, but are now filled with "communists." Why shouldn't he have had the same ruthless intention to obliterate his own brother, who more than anyone stood in the way of his ambitions?

There was no love lost between the two brothers since their teens. George is now 51. Alexander was only a year younger. When their father, Peter I, came to the throne in 1903 after his predecessor, King Alexander Obrenovich, and his wife Draga were murdered in the royal palace at Belgrade, George became the rightful heir to the Serbian throne. At the time he

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was 16.

Alexander was inferior to George in many ways. He felt this inferiority and therefore hated his older brother. George was a reckless youth with a keen mind. He was sincere and outspoken. He had all the better characteristics of his ancestor Kara-George, the Black George, who early in the 19th century led insurrections against the Turks and established the present dynasty. George was an excellent horseback rider and marksman. His sporting achievements made him famous. He was loved by his rugged people who always admired a fearless and red-blooded he-man. He was on the way to becoming a much-worshiped king.

Alexander watched his brother's popularity with envy. He was inherently weak, untrustworthy, a schemer. His life's ambition was to be adored in place of George.

George's reckless nature occasionally led him to actions which in spite of his good qualities marked him to outsiders as eccentric. One winter day, while the Sava River at Belgrade was full of ice floes, he ordered a detachment of cavalry men to swim across with horses and war equipment. He never expected anybody to do what he could not do himself. He plunged into the icy water first. Many of his men drowned or died of exposure as the result of this mad prank. It was a scandal which was officially hushed up, but Alexander saw to it that it became known.

This was only one episode. As a good marksman George often indulged in the innocent William Tell game of shooting cigarettes out of his soldiers' mouths. Once, unfortunately, he missed the cigarette and the news of the killing leaked out, thanks to Alexander. In spite or rather because of his exploits the Serbian people adored George more and more. Others called him mad.

George's pranks played into Alexander's hands. Alexander, all the time

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intriguing against his brother, found some ready listeners whom he convinced that George was really crazy and not fit to be the Crown Prince. He even won his father, King Peter, to his side. Soon every move of George's was being shadowed by detectives and his mail was being opened. George felt that he was watched, but he could not prove it. He accused everybody of spying against him. He flew into rages and threw the royal crockery about. These palace scenes did not help him any.

The final blow came in 1909. George suspected one of his personal servants of going through his desk and reading his private papers. In order to prove his suspicions George intended this time to catch the man red-handed and therefore he did not say anything about it. Instead, one morning he announced that he was going out for a prolonged walk. However, he did not leave the palace but stealthily returned to his study after a while. And there he caught his servant leisurely going through the papers in his desk. Enraged, George fell upon the man, trounced him soundly, then grabbed him by the collar of his coat and threw him through the door and down the stairs. The fall on the marble stairs caused the servant's death.

George was accused of willfully killing the man in a fit of his usual rage. George repeatedly asserted that he had no intentions of killing his servant. He was justifiably enraged, he said, as anyone else would be if he found out that his own trusted servant was a spy. He only wanted to punish the man. The death was purely accidental.

As the result of this incident George was forced to renounce the throne, stating that he did so "indignant at the unjustified and unjustifiable insinuations to which an unfortunate accident has given rise in certain circles of public opinion." These "circles of public opinion" were centered around Alexander, whose ambition

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was now partly fulfilled: he became the Crown Prince of Serbia. Five years later, just before the outbreak of the World War, Alexander, because of his father's illness, became the Prince Regent of Serbia.

During the Balkan Wars and the World War George excelled in bravery, although, it must be admitted, Alexander himself was no coward. George led his cavalry into the fiercest charges and was wounded twice. His men adored him and were ready to die for him. This, of course, again was a thorn in his brother's side. Hence, soon after the War Alexander made his brother's life unbearable at home. He would not let him live in the royal palace nor did he give him any quarters suitable to his royal station. Disgusted, George left his country, which had become the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

All this chicanery made the impulsive George still more irritable and unpredictable. He spent most of his time in Paris. His unsettled state was best demonstrated by his manner of dining. He would go to a restaurant and order a meal. After the soup he would become impatient waiting for the next course. He would pay his bill and go to another place to continue his meal. He would do this from soup to nuts, so that he often ate one meal in several restaurants.

His erratic nature was more clearly shown in letters which he wrote from Paris to his friends in Yugoslavia. (Letters sent by him or addressed to him were censored in Belgrade and therefore these letters were never addressed to the person intended.) In his letters the handwriting was uneven. Often it looked like a child's scrawl. His sentences were abrupt and disjointed. The language was a mixture of Serbian and bad French. The letters did not show any evidence of insanity, although they did present a highly irritable nature, especially when George wrote about his brother, whom he never forgave the stealing

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of the throne.

In a letter to a friend, dated August 17, 1921, he plainly wrote what he thought of his brother:

"Drago:—

I received your letter, which was very readable and clearly written, and I was able to read it well and understand it. It is handy to write on large sheets of paper. More can be written and bigger.

What he once in a while says and promises to do this or that—don't take it to be a finished matter, because he changes and is unstable, as he had told you that he will buy some horses in London in September, that's all untrue and unreliable, just cock-eyed business. There is no man who keeps his word less or changes his mind more than he. He is slick, but not smart.

In regard to what he says that 'savage' is not dum-dum, this too is a lack of understanding. How can he assert such a thing, when he had never tried it on wild game! Only there could its action be tested. But he has right to speak neither of horses nor about any other sport, for he is neither made for it, ergo he can't, nor has he the right to give a competent opinion."

Such uncomplimentary evaluation of his brother was not only the result of George's grudge; it was really a frank description of Alexander's character by a man who knew him more intimately than anyone else. Alexander's unreliability was proven many times later, especially after his attempt to play dictator of Yugoslavia.

When old King Peter died in 1921, Alexander became king. George was permitted to come to the funeral, but had to follow the hearse far behind the royal family. And during his visit in Belgrade no decent accommodations were provided for him. He had to stay with friends.

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What finally caused George to lose his freedom in the bargain was Alexander's marriage to the Rumanian Princess Marie. George did not think much of this match and was not reluctant to say so.

On January 18, 1922, he wrote this letter to another friend of his in South Serbia—the italics are his:

"Personal and confidential.

I have nothing special to tell you, except concerning Shandor's marriage which does not enthuse me a bit because of the following reasons:

I. *Political*:—it is no marriage, for the Vlachs (Serbs) are like walnuts

walnuts like

hazelnuts, and hazelnuts

like sheep droppings, and

sheep droppings like

all other dung.

in short, *ce n'est rien* as a political connection.

II. *Familiar*:—the whole world knows that her mother is a *notorious woman! c'est suffisant!*

He would have done much better had he taken an Englishwoman from some virtuous home, if nothing else at least we would get the sympathy of a whole great nation, and secondly—we would not have that degraded family ancestry which in this case is obvious! *Il sera plus tard: le cocu magnifique!*

But there is also something else, and that is: I shall not go to the wedding if no proper lodgings are offered to me as well as all that belongs to my station in life, and I have already informed the proper person, that I will not take any responsibility for this enormous scandal, and I shall announce it publicly why I was not at the wedding. I'll drop a public letter which will explode and throw a stink up to the moon for shame and disgrace, in which I

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will tell, that for me, his brother, no home was found since November, 1918! ! ! *et c'est pour cette raison que je ne suis pas venu* to the wedding! and everyone will approve of my action.

On the other hand, if he finds decent lodgings for me, I shall attend the wedding.

Voici mes derniers intentions.

What's new otherwise? With regards,

George."

The jingle about sheep droppings is a Serbian folk saying implying self-ridicule. George put it in his letter for no particular reason except to say that Alexander was as good as dung, or, to put into American vernacular, full of it. He always called him Shandor, which is a Hungarian pet name for Alexander, but it has a bit of a derisive meaning when used by Yugoslavs. The whole letter was apparently written in haste and without much consistency. At the end of it George regrets his threat not to come to the wedding. He expects to attend it in spite of Shandor and the "*cocu magnifique*" if decent accommodations are offered him.

George was not invited to the wedding, which took place in June, 1922. He was enraged. He freely aired his views about the Rumanian royal family and his brother. He began to spread the rumor that Alexander was impotent, which is still believed by some people in spite of the three children which this marriage produced.

After all this George made the mistake of coming to Yugoslavia not long after the wedding. He was promptly arrested and locked up in a fortress in the interior of Serbia. Later he was transferred to the villa near Kragujevac where he still whiles his time away studying and solving problems in higher mathematics. He is considered to be a genius in mathematics. However, no one is permitted to see him nor to communicate with him. He knows too much about the Jugo-

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slav royal family and is not afraid to talk.

Most of the people in Serbia, who disliked Alexander but were devoted to the House of Karageorgevich, hoped that George would regain the throne. He is still a great hero in their eyes. They all admit that he was perhaps a bit off because of his uncontrollable temper, but they also admire a sincerity which Alexander definitely lacked. Alexander more than any other member of his family has undermined the reputation of his house among his own people. Among those who have some respect left for the Karageorgevich dynasty George still has some helpless but stanch supporters. Prince George himself still claims the throne of Yugoslavia, but no one knows it. ●