



*Keystone Photo*

THE GRAND DUKE ALEXANDER OF RUSSIA  
1866—1933

Photographed in France shortly before his death

# ALWAYS A GRAND DUKE

*by*  
'ALEXANDER'  
GRAND DUKE OF RUSSIA



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"Won't you leave a message for Mr. Balfour?" he asked almost beggingly.

"Yes," I said, "by all means. Tell him that a man of his age should use the elevator."

## \*\*\*\*\* CHAPTER THREE

### A NUMISMAT SETTLES HIS BILLS

#### I

THERE is no better cure for imaginary troubles than the necessity to fight real ones. I would have grieved for months, thinking of Balfour and Wilson and Lansing, had it not been for the management of the Hotel Ritz, my tailor, my haberdasher and my shoemaker. I owed them money. They wanted to be paid. This meant real trouble overshadowing the Russian policy of the triumphant Allies.

I could not get any money in Paris, a city where I had always been on the giving end. I could have gotten some in London but the British Government would not let me go there. So I had to think and think fast: each morning brought a heap of bills accompanied by letters, nicely worded but leaving no doubt as to the firm determination of their signatories. Had anyone entered my room at that time and seen the strange-looking charts on my writing table, I might have spent the rest of my life in an insane asylum. My charts read as follows:

1. Dorians from Heraclea at Chersonesus and Ionians from Miletus at Theodosia. About 650 B.C. Write letter to



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the fat Italian in Geneva. May cover one quarter of the Ritz bill.

2. The Goths (250 A.D.), the Huns (376 A.D.), the Khazars (about 740 A.D.). Difficult to dispose of. Perhaps Boston. A week-end letter-cable may turn the trick. May get just enough to pay for the two new spring suits.

3. Pharnaces (63 B.C.). Commemorating his investiture with the Kingdom of Bosphorus by Pompey. Shoemaker? Perhaps if that stuttering cheat in Rome is still alive.

4. The Byzantine Greeks (1016 A.D.) and the Kipchaks (1050 A.D.). In normal times would have been more than enough to satisfy the Ritz and to cover Easter in Biarritz. Now extremely unlikely. Write to London, Geneva and New York.

5. Macedonians. Eight and twelve Phœnician drachms. Probably the reign of Alexander I (498-454 B.C.). What was the name of that Englishman who wanted to pay any price for them to the heirs of Abdul-Hamid? Write a letter to our former Ambassador in Constantinople. He may recall it. If he does, I am all right.

6. The Thessalian Confederacy (196-146 B.C.). Head of Zeus crowned with oak and Athena Itonia. Never amounted to much. Ferdinand would know the address of the possible purchaser but how to get to Ferdinand? In any event, not before peace is signed. At best won't cover even the shoemaker.

7. Corinth. Probably 500 B.C. The head of Athena.

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Bellerophon mounted on Pegasus and the Chimæra. Very beautiful like all I got through Abdul-Hamid but difficult to dispose of. If I get for both at least one tenth of what I paid for them, my tailor shall be taken care of 100%.

8. Asia Minor. The electrum of Lydia (probably 700 B.C.). Lots of them but all quite primitive, the obverse marked with lines. Took me three months of work in Trebizond and God knows how much money. But that's not an argument for Geneva. Sure to sell it but will just about cover the tip to Olivier downstairs.

9. Hispania (probably 350 B.C.). The Phocæan drachm and the drachm of Emporiæ. Had no business to buy them in the first place. No one could chase the Greeks all around the world. Any price will do, if it's even the price of a wagon-lit compartment to Biarritz.

No, I was not delirious. I was merely jotting down for my own guidance various data which had to do with my numismatic collection. It seemed strange that just because a few Dorian traders, dissatisfied with the conditions existing in Heraclea in 650 B.C., had set sail for lands unknown and had settled on the southern coast of the future Russian Empire, the management of the Hotel Ritz in Paris should be paid in full for the rooms occupied by



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Grand Duke Alexander in January, 1919 A.D., but the connection between these two events of the history of mankind was obvious and logical. Had the Dorians stayed at home, there would have been no ancient Greek coins, no vases, no statues buried in the soil of the Crimea, and I would not have been interested in undertaking my costly archæological excavations, first in the neighborhood of my own estate of Ay-Todor, later in Trebizond and elsewhere along the coast of Asia Minor.

It was stranger still that the only thing which enabled me to pay my bills in Paris and assured me of a short breathing spell should be precisely that which had always been considered "raving insanity" and a "costly toy" of an Imperial ne'er-do-well. Looking over my charts, I remembered the words of my father: "Just think, Sandro, of the opportunities you are missing. Why, if you would invest but a fraction of what it costs you to dig in the Crimean soil into sound preferred stocks and government bonds, you would double your annual income and never be in need of cash. If you don't like stocks and bonds, buy oil lands, buy copper, buy manganese, buy real estate, but for Heaven's sake stop spending good money on these bore-some old Greeks."

What would I have done in January, 1919, if I had followed the advice of my practical father and abandoned my archæological excavations in the 1900's? Stocks and bonds? I had bunches of them left in my safe-deposit vault

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in St. Petersburg but even the Bolsheviks who stole them could not have disposed of them at any price because the concerns that issued the stocks had been destroyed by the revolution. Oil lands? Copper? Manganese? Real estate? I had all of that but there was no way to persuade a tailor of the Rue du Faubourg St.-Honoré that he should exchange a pair of flannel trousers for the deed to my apartment houses in St. Petersburg or to my oil lands in the Caucasus.

It pays to be insane, I said to myself with great feeling. No matter how little I was going to get for my Phœnician drachms, my Athenas and Bellerophons, I was going to get something, perhaps enough to keep faith with my creditors and laugh at the people who used to laugh at me. And on top of it, I still had my memories. No Soviet in the world could take from me the pleasure and the thrills of my archæological adventures.

My two summers spent in Trebizond where I lived surrounded by as queer a collection of humans as anyone might wish to meet. Nearsighted, gray-haired German professors brought by me from Berlin, who went about without reading a newspaper for eight months at a stretch and who were blissfully unaware of the latest changes in the world of politics but who could have guessed the reasons of the fall of the Thessalian Confederacy just by looking at a gold coin given to me by Czar Ferdinand of Bulgaria.



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Ferdinand and Abdul-Hamid. The only two really colorful figures produced by the Near East in the twentieth century. Not great rulers but men of individuality. Ferdinand who wanted to be the Little White Father of all the Slavs and who had no peer in the art of diplomatic deceit. Abdul-Hamid, the "bloody" Sultan, who thought that either the Turks must eat the Armenians or the Armenians would wind up by swallowing the Turks. I never discussed politics with these two. We talked on subjects that cultivate friendship. Numismatics. French cuisine. The contradictions in the Old Testament. Only once did Abdul-Hamid volunteer his opinion on what the Russian Czar was facing but on that occasion he spoke as a learned historian. His argument was that no dynasty, whether European or Oriental, had ever been known to survive for more than three hundred years. "Nineteen-thirteen! From then on things will become dangerous for your family," he said in his excellent French. I thanked him for the warning and we proceeded with our usual exchange of gifts. I got several Macedonian coins, he a huge assortment of Crimean pears, peaches and grapes. According to the European and American editorial writers, he was a monster, a bloodthirsty tyrant, a sadist. I personally knew him as an elderly gentleman who bowed to no one in his knowledge of numismatics and his appreciation of baby-lamb pilaff and stuffed eggplant. To me as to all people who prefer Life to Liberty an entertaining monster

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is a worth-while friend, a sentimental bore a mortal enemy. Both Abdul-Hamid and Ferdinand were highly entertaining, even if the former did slaughter a great many of his subjects and the latter did sell out the Great-Cause-of-Democracy to the Kaiser.

I wished I could gather the numismatic collectors in my room, open my trunk and say: "Now listen carefully, gentlemen. You see this beautiful Alexander the Great coin? It was found by me in August, nineteen-hundred-three, in a grave on the spot where ancient Chersonesus stood. The summer was frightfully hot and we had to do most of our digging at night. We would sleep from sunrise to sunset, have our breakfast at seven in the evening and then we would begin to work. For the first time in ten years, since the day of my cousin's ascension to the throne, I was able to ignore the existence of St. Petersburg and its courtiers, politicians and revolutionaries. People who helped me were either hired Tartars who spoke practically no Russian at all or the great experts from Berlin. They cared little that I was a Grand Duke and a member of the Imperial Government. Tartars liked me because I liked to listen to the singsong of their prayers. German professors liked me because I gladly conceded that they knew everything while I myself knew nothing. At four in the morn-



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ing when the moon would disappear behind the mountains we would open a bottle of brandy, not Hennessy, not Martel, but Greek brandy, prepared in the way our Dorian friends used to distill it twenty-five centuries ago. Nights were awe-inspiring and so was the brandy. When we finally reached the bottom of that grave after six weeks of work I wanted to cry. I had hoped we would dig for a month more. Gentlemen, how much am I bid for this beautiful Alexander the Great?"

I never delivered this speech. I simply wrote a letter to a dealer in Geneva and received his answer by return mail. He knew my collection and he did not doubt its authenticity. But he wanted me to understand that we were living in "hectic times." He hoped I would appreciate his position. Nothing would have pleased him more than to pay me what my beautiful coin was really worth. It was breaking his heart to be obliged to propose an inadequate price.

It *was* an inadequate price. It represented about five percent of the pre-war catalogue price and less than one hundredth of one percent of what it had cost me. I accepted this bid by straight telegram. My tailor was sitting downstairs in the lobby, waiting and hoping.

Ten years later I saw in the *London Times* that among the different numismatic "items" displayed at a private exhibition was "one of the rarest Alexander the Great coins which formerly belonged to a member of the Russian Im-

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perial Family and which was acquired by Mr. — in Geneva for the staggering sum of——"

There was a difference of two naughts between the price mentioned in the *London Times* and the price received by me in 1919. The blow was hard but it failed to shake me. I had learned a lot during the ten years that intervened between the two transactions. I am grateful to that dealer in Geneva: there was nothing to prevent him from paying me even less than he actually did.

The bulk of my collection was sold at public auction, partly in Switzerland, partly in England. I was in a frightful hurry to lay my hands on some cash and, although I was not present, my anxiety must have been obvious to the bidders. One of them wrote me a long letter, assuring me that he was going to take good care of the souvenirs of my archæological past. Everybody was happy. The management of the Ritz. The maître d'hôtel of the restaurant. The haberdasher. The tailor. The shoemaker. Even myself. I am still a numismat at heart. As my publishers would say: "Once a numismat . . ."

For the time being I have to be satisfied with reading the catalogues and subscribing to the trade magazines. But should my bankers advise me some day that going through my account they had stumbled upon a balance in my favor, I would be in the market again. It is the best investment—in case of a revolution.



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Bills settled and a few francs left in my pocket, I breathed easier. For a while I did not have to sneak through the lobby with the feeling of having robbed the stockholders of the Ritz. I thought I should catch up with my reading and decided to divide my afternoons between the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Chambre des Députés. There were no books to be obtained in the latter establishment but parliaments intrigued me. I had never heard the great political orators because the appearance of a Grand Duke in Westminster or in the Palais du Bourbon might have caused distress to our ambassadors abroad and unfavorable comments at home. Our own Parliament in St. Petersburg, the Duma, while an excellent place to study the Russian capacity for endless talking, had been a rather poor exhibit of that constructive liberal leadership which, according to the High Command of the Allied Armies, was destined to preserve the freedom of such formerly abused nations as the French and the British. We did have lots of liberals drawing their yearly parliamentary salary from the Imperial Government and they did use the words "constructive" and "leadership" but their speeches invariably dealt with the illnesses of Peter the Great and the lovers of Catherine the Great which provided interesting reading for students of the eighteenth century but left the

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country right where it had been at the moment they mounted the tribune.

An acquaintance of mine, a French banker through whom I was buying airplanes and machine guns during the war was recently elected deputy from his native city and this made it easy for me to secure an admission card to the Palais du Bourbon. On the day of my first appearance in the parliamentary gallery he suggested we lunch together, in a small restaurant in the Rue de Bourgogne where most of his colleagues took their meals. The place was stuffy but friendly. In addressing each other, the majority of deputies present used the singular of the second person, an altogether delightful custom which made me think of Guards' Barracks and the backstage of the Imperial Theatres.

"Passe-moi du sel."

"Eh bien, qu'es'que tu penses de cette affaire en Angleterre?"

"As-tu vu Loucheur?"

I expected they would burst into song any moment but the food was too good for music.

"And now I am going to introduce you to the greatest orator of the Socialist party," said my friend and pointed toward a white-haired, shortish fellow who was bathing in a big plate of bouillabaisse at the opposite table.

"Be careful. He may not care to meet a Grand Duke. Few Socialists do."

"Are you joking?"



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"Not at all. I mean it."

"But what about me? Am I not sitting with you at the same table?"

"Are you a Socialist?"

"Most decidedly."

"A man of your wealth?"

"What has my wealth to do with the fact that only candidates of the Socialist party can be elected deputies in the part of the country I come from?"

"I see," I said, "my mistake."

The great orator turned out to be a man of the world and we discovered we had mutual friends. He asked me whether I had seen the old Duchess — of late. I had.

"Charming woman, isn't she?" I volunteered.

He made a grimace. He thought she was frightfully common.

"Always was and always will be," he explained. "You know, of course, that hers is only a Napoleonic title. Her great-grandfather was a baker in the days of the Directoire."

We all agreed that it was unfortunate. Anxious to learn his opinion about the outcome of the Versailles Conference, I mentioned my efforts to see Clemenceau.

"He is too busy now," said the orator, "fighting the British about that African oil."

African oil? It puzzled me.

"Oh, you know," he exclaimed impatiently. "What do

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you call that place where the British exploit the poor negroes? The richest oil lands in the world. English papers are full of it."

"You don't happen to mean Mosul?" I asked timidly.

"That's the name. I am going to speak about it this afternoon in the Chamber. My party won't permit the British to continue their shameless exploitation of the ignorant colored people."

Mosul was in Mesopotamia. There were no negroes there. Only Arabs who would have been greatly surprised to discover that Mesopotamia had moved from Asia to Africa. However, these were but irrelevant details. What counted was the sentiment.

Our luncheon over, we crossed the street toward the gates of the Chambre des Députés. At the sight of my two Socialistic friends the guard-on-duty straightened up and presented arms.

"Good-looking lad," I remarked.

"A typical French soldier," said the great orator. "Best in the world. No nation has an army like ours. Always ready to fight for the freedom of mankind."

I was anticipating with something more than mere pleasure the promised speech on the conditions existing in the Mosul area. I hoped it would help me to learn the program of Democracy, perhaps be inspired by its noble spirit. Disappointment awaited me. No sooner did the handsome President of the Chamber call the deputies to



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order when a disturbance began. A tall, thin gentleman on the extreme right of the house crossed toward the left, approached one of the members of the Socialistic opposition and hit him in the eye. The whole thing happened in less than ten seconds. A free-for-all fight followed immediately. Fists, canes and ink-wells were used.

"What is the meaning of this disgraceful scene?" asked the President when the adversaries retired to their seats.

"That scoundrel," explained the tall, thin gentleman with a gesture toward the left, "told my friends that I was a dirty boche."

"Both gentlemen will apologize to each other and to this assembly," said the President.

"I am not in the habit of offering apologies to a skunk," replied the tall, thin gentleman, throwing back his head, just in time to dodge a heavy leather-bound volume.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," begged the President, "do not force me to call in the sergeants-at-arms."

But the deputies were not listening to him. Black and red ink were flowing freely down the white fronts of their shirts.

The President sighed and put on his silk hat.

"What will the hard-working men and women of France say when they hear of this behavior of their legislators?" he exclaimed, turning toward the members of the government. This was unanswerable. We all rose to go.

## \*\*\*\*\* CHAPTER FOUR

### RUSSIA ON THE SEINE

#### I

"PRETTY poor horsemanship I call it!" said a gruff Russian voice back of me.

"Which one of the three do you mean?"

"Oh, all three of them. Isn't it disgusting?"

I smiled noncommittally. We were standing in the window of Fouquet's second floor, watching Foch, Haig and Pershing ride at the head of the Victory Parade. There was nothing particularly disgusting about the manner in which the three elderly generals sat their mounts but, searching hard as we were, we could not discern the presence of the Russian colors in the rich collection of standards floating above the heads of the triumphant victors, and this, naturally enough, provoked the ire of my compatriot.

"Be a sport," I said. "After all, whose fault is it that we stopped fighting just at the moment when these people needed us most?"

He sneered and pointed toward the battalion of the Portuguese.