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"I'll not tell you!" stormed the statesman. "You've had enough information out of me for the best interview you need ever expect to get, so be off!"

"Certainly, if you wish it," smiled Paget; "but I'll be off with your trousers."

"You're a perfect fiend!" gasped Lord Averingham, giving way. "We are going to tax silk, beer, whisky, matches, and some things which have not yet been decided upon."

With a leap, he snatched the trousers, which Paget held out to him, and turned to go.

"I'll give you your other boot if you'll answer one more question," called out Michael.

For a moment the young journalist thought he would receive no reply.

"Well, what is it?" asked the Prime Minister, with a smile hovering about his lips. "I must admit that you've had the best of me, but I can take a joke against myself."

"What are your hobbies?" asked Michael.

"Sun baths on the bank of his river," laughed Lord Averingham, as he caught the other boot. "Good morning!"

And before Michael could stammer his thanks the Prime Minister had gone.

THE REWARD.

"And, sir," concluded Michael, as he related the story of his interview to Sir Arthur Benson, "I consider that Lord Averingham is one of the greatest sports that ever lived, for he took, what I consider to be rather a rotten practical joke, in quite good part."

"Good for you, my boy!" said Sir Arthur. "You've done well—in fact, better even than I expected. I knew you had it in you all right, but I had to put you to the test. You've come through it with flying colours, and"—the great newspaper magnate paused, and then continued, laying great stress upon his words—"and Harper, the chief news editor, is retiring at the end of this month. You are to take his place!"

"Me sir!" gasped Michael, in amazement.

"Yes, and the salary's a thousand a year! Congratulations, Paget! I consider you a great find!"

But Michael's heart was too full of mingled surprise and delight to do more than mumble a few inarticulate words of thanks, as he stumbled out of the room.

That evening saw Michael Paget and a little lady artist friend of his seated together in a corner of a little restaurant tucked away in a side court off Fleet street.

Michael was telling her of his wonderful luck.

"And so, Doris," he said, as he took her left hand and toyed with the little diamond ring on her third finger, "we shall soon be able to change this for a plain, gold band."

The girl nodded joyously.

"Your scoop's going to enable you to scoop me up—eh, Mike?" she said.

The End.

A BOLT FROM THE BLUE.

The spring poet tore at his tangled hair;

In his heart was a wild unrest,
For he longed to sing like the lark in the air,

But his Muse had given him rest,
He had tried the old themes of "bud-ding leaf,"

Of "blossom on branch and spray,"
But his Muse sat dumb—not even a brief

Inspiration would come his way.

He heard a throbbing away overhead,
And he turned his eyes up on high,
Where above a gallant aeroplane sped

Like a bird in the azure sky.

"O fair ship of the air," he wildly cried
"Would my spirit might soar like thee!"

Oh! let inspiration fall, that my tied
And manacled Muse may go free."

Now "the man up above" was a
"frightful Hun,"

Of poetry little knew he.

A big bomb he carelessly dropped for fun,

As he clucked with "Hunnish glee."

It hit the poetical cranium whizz!

Caused his Muse to awake with a jump,

And (maybe 'twere inspiration!) slack!

It certainly raised a big lamp!

The poet arose and solemnly vowed,
As he wiped the tears from his eyes,
His Muse could "go hang" before he allowed

It again to seek help from the skies.
The moral is this: If you wish to upset
Such a thing as poetic aplomb,
You must bring to your aid something deadlier yet

Than a gentle aerial bomb!

—R.A., in "N.Z. at the Front."

MURDER OF THE TSAR.

FIRST COMPLETE STORY.

BOLSHEVISTS' GUILT.

The true story of the martyrdom of Nicholas II., ex-Tsar of Russia, and of his wife and family can at last be told.

It is based upon evidence obtained by a properly constituted legal investigation. The signed depositions of eye-witnesses are in the writer's possession, but he does not disclose the identity of the deponents, who are still in the power of the Soviets—the murderers.

At Ekaterinburg, on the night of July 16, 1918, the Imperial family and their faithful attendants—eleven persons in all—were led into a small room in the house where they had been imprisoned and shot to death with revolvers. There had been no trial of any kind. Before their death the captives were subjected to ill-treatment amounting to horrible torture, mental if not physical. After death the bodies were taken to the woods and completely destroyed. These acts had been pre-meditated and the murders elaborately prepared.

The actual arrangements for the crime began some weeks before the advent of anti-Bolshevist forces. Neither fear of rescue by the White nor plots to release the captives—the existence of which is doubtful—can be reasonably alleged in explanation of the slaughter.

The official statement issued by the Moscow Government on July 20—four days afterwards—spoke of the shooting of Nicholas as an act of necessity, but categorically affirmed that the ex-Empress and the children had been conveyed out of the city. These deliberately concocted reports of the safe removal of the family were intended to circumvent any investigation—and did so at first.

—The Tsar's Loyalty.—

It is established beyond doubt that the ex-Tsar fell a victim to his loyalty. He had refused offers from the enemies of Russia's Allies proposing that he should endorse the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Attempts to inveigle him into an unholy alliance undoubtedly preceded the murder. All the Romanovs who died violent deaths were, like the Tsar, inconvenient to Germany as well as to Internationalist plaus.

The official version of the events of July 16-17, given out by the Reds before they fled from Ekaterinburg, was that Nicholas Romanov had been executed "after trial," but that the family had been removed to "a safe place." This legend became engrafted upon the minds of a great many people, and still continues to exercise its alluring appeal. Every sympathiser with the Soviets considered himself or herself bound to foster this version, since no Russian, however hostile to the ex-Sovereigns, could find the slightest excuse or pretext for "executing" a whole family of five children, who had never taken, or been able to take, the slightest part in politics. The Russians who still belonged to the German "orientation" were also—curiously enough disposed to credit any tale of a miraculous escape. They seemed to think that a restoration of the Monarchy—which formed the basis of their political creed—would be furthered by the "miracle" theory. Some of them had more practical aims.

—Clues in the Death Chamber.—

I visited the house where the victims had lived. It belonged to a certain Ipatiev, a merchant who held the rank of captain in the Engineers. By one of the ironies of Fate he bore the name of the monastery whence the first Romanov called to assume the Crown of All the Russians. The Ipatiev of Ekaterinburg was, however, of Jewish origin.

The lower floor was tenanted by Ipatiev himself, on the understanding that no strangers should be admitted. The small basement room—the scene of the murders—was sealed up. I saw it a few days later. Sokolov took me over the premises explaining step by step the enactment of the tragedy. We stood in the little room, noted the trace of the bullets, the direction of the bayonet thrusts, and the splashes of blood on the walls. The room had been a shambles, and all the washing and scouring that, according to the evidence, had followed the murders could not remove tell-tale signs. We knew from the depositions of witnesses and the mute, gruesome language of the death-chamber where each of the victims sat or stood when the assassins fired their revolvers. The bullet-holes in the walls and in the floor had been carefully cut out; human blood had been found in the wood and on the bullets.

—Discoveries in the Woods.—

Soon afterwards I was in the woods, 10 miles north of the city, where the peasants had found jewelry and other relics of the murdered family. I saw the tracks, still clear, of heavy lorries crashing through the trees to a group of disused iron-ore shafts. All went in one direction, ceasing near a pit round which

a vast collection of clues had been discovered; precious stones, pearls, beautiful settings of gold and platinum, some hacked, broken, bearing traces of fire; metal buckles, hooks, buttons, corset frames, pieces of charred leather and cloth, a human finger intact, a set of false teeth. The character, condition, and numbers of these various articles were in themselves sufficient to indicate the sex and ages of the victims and the manner in which their bodies had been disposed of.

First on the scene had been the peasants. For three days and nights they were cut off from the city by a cordon of Red Guards placed around the wood. Knowing that the Whites were at hand, they thought the Reds were burying arms. Vague rumours had reached them of the death of Nicholas II. As soon as the cordon had been removed they rushed to the spot. Woodcraft and native astuteness quickly opened their eyes. "It is the Tsar that they have been burning here," they declared. On this very spot, a year later, I found topaz beads, such as the young Princess wore, and other gems, by scratching the surface of the hardened clay surrounding the iron pit.

From one of the Imperial servants who had escaped from a Red shooting squad it became known that several dukes and the Grand Duchess Elizabeth had been murdered immediately after the Ekaterinburg shooting, and that some of the bodies had been found in disused pits. In no case had there been any semblance of a trial. It was evident the wholesale extermination of the Romanovs had been pursued, and that all theories of the miraculous survival of the children should be abandoned.

—The Empress and Rasputin.—

There is no evidence to show that at any time during the captivity was any active attempt made to rescue the Romanovs. This applies equally to the ex-Sovereigns and to their kinsmen. At Tobolsk, Ekaterinburg, Perm, and Alapaievsk the pretext for wholesale murder was always the same; an alleged attempt to escape or rescue. And from the testimony of persons who were in daily intercourse with the imprisoned family, it is clear that, had any serious efforts to procure their escape been made, they would have met with no encouragement. Nicholas II. repeatedly said that he would not leave Russia; Alexandra hated above everything the idea of going to Germany. At that time Russia offered no sure place of refuge.

The ex-Empress was the object of hatred. She completely dominated her spouse in the imagination of the people, and occupies a place apart in the evidence. Alexandra's personality is reflected in her family—Nicholas, like herself, an embodiment of all the domestic virtues, religious to the verge of mysticism, expert in dissimulation, never angry, perhaps never really feeling angry, incapable of a decision—so utterly had he surrendered himself to his wife; the daughters relegated to the background, entirely unprepared to take proper place in the world, Alexis monopolizing all the care and attention of his mother; the children ashamed of her belief in Rasputin, yet not daring to resent it.

Among the Court favourites, male or female, nobody exercised any real influence except in so far as it suited the Empress. Only one person appears to have been admitted for any length of time to the Imperial confidence. That person was Anna Vyrubova. Regarding her, Rasputin used to speak in the crudest terms to the companions of his drunken boasts. That was the origin of her infamous notoriety.

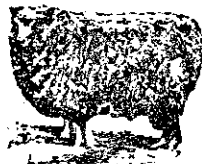
The fact is, Anna Vyrubova was Rasputin's accomplice—nothing more. She kept him in touch with everything, especially with the boy's health. It was at her house that Rasputin saw the Emperor and Empress when it became too scandalous for him to appear daily in the Palace—after the dismissal of governesses who had raised an outcry against Rasputin's familiarities with their charges.

Woman-like, the Empress regarded all things from a personal standpoint. Her malady only served to intensify her likes and dislikes. One of her particular aversions was Wilhelm of Prussia, first because the Hohenzollerns had been exalted at the expense of her own House; secondly because Wilhelm had not counted with her. Germany, ruled by Wilhelm, was ever the foe of Russia ruled by Alexandra. She could not admit the possibility of a compromise or truce with Wilhelm's Germany, any more than she would permit the Tsar to summon a Ministry composed of Rasputin's detractors and enemies. A complete and ludicrous misapprehension prevailed in Russia and among the Allied peoples about the alleged pro-German tendencies of the ex-Empress. She hated Germany with a bitterness and a fervour equalled only by her contempt and loathing for the Russians—always excepting the peasants, whom she "imagined to be endowed with all the virtues and qualities that Rasputin was supposed to possess.

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