

The Bulgarian Papers

Revelations of An Ambassador-at-Large

Transcribed by H. M. Egbert from the private papers of an Englishman who for a time was an unofficial diplomat in the most secret service of the British Government.

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The late Lord Salisbury once did me the honor to allude to me as the cleverest minister in Europe.

Cynic that he was, he would, I believe, have overlooked my indiscretion at Madrid. But he died three months before that episode, to which I have no intention of alluding further. It is an axiom that a British representative must have a flawless record, and a score of years as an attaché at nearly every European capital in turn did not save me.

Naturally I was embittered, and my four years of retirement were the loneliest I had ever spent. When I petitioned Sir Edward Grey for reinstatement, even in some minor post, I had little hope that he would listen to me. When, therefore, he sent for me to Downing street you can judge of my elation.

But his first words dashed my hopes completely.

"M. X—, what you ask is impossible," he said. "I do not think you were culpable in that Spanish matter. But you were indiscreet enough to make reinstatement in the regular diplomatic service impossible."

The word "regular" seemed unusual enough to rekindle my hopes slightly. He saw that I had understood that there was something more to be said, and, taking me confidentially by the arm, he asked me to be seated.

"You can serve the government greatly," he said, "and in this way. There are great events pending. We are skirting the edge of the greatest conflagration since Napoleon's day. You know what was behind the scenes in 1909, when Austria annexed Bosnia; also in 1911, when Germany challenged France by sending the Panther to Agadir.

"There's a war spirit abroad. It's like some evil thing which civilization has downed, rising up to down civilization. This new spirit is an artificial thing. It is an organized thing. Somebody is at the back of it, manufacturing it, inciting it with the expenditure of unlimited money, for very concrete reasons of his own. I want you to use your ability and knowledge in running him down. Find out who he is and what his purpose is. Will you accept the post of ambassador-at-large to Europe?" he ended, with that charming smile which is said to be the secret of nine-tenths of his success.

I accepted the mission. And that was how I found myself in Vienna, the gossip capital of Europe. I had not been there for a number of years. I felt sure, however, that the key to the situation lay here, where everybody comes, sooner or later, and everything that is being done in other capitals comes to a correct focus.

I meant to steep myself in the political atmosphere, to get a grasp upon those contemporary events which are never recorded in the newspapers, before beginning my investigations. I knew how much turns upon the relations between a king and his consort, a crown prince and his father; an ambassador's indiscretion, a dignitary's religious conversation, or a club waiter's memory of a conversation over the port.

I was on my way to the Diplomats' club, at Koenigstrasse, of which I had always remained an honorary member.

As I passed through the district of government offices I fancied that I saw one or two persons watching me rather closely.

Presently I saw before me the two Corinthian pillars that flank the entrance to the Diplomats' club.

As I made my way into the nearly empty smoking room and took a chair at the end of the room farthest from the door, I saw the club members regarding me furtively.

Then, one by one, they rose up and went out unostentatiously, and yet with a certain appearance of concerted action.

All except one man, who, as the last to leave passed through the door, got up and came quickly toward me. I perceived a little, wizened fellow, without a trace of that hall mark of breeding which in my day had been the primary qualification for admission to the Diplomats' club. He took the empty chair nearest me, drew it up close, and, leaning toward me, said in a low tone and with a mixture of familiarity and ingratiating deference:

"We are assured beyond doubt that Dimitrieff has those papers in his pocket."

I said nothing. I have always been a good listener, and the little man seemed pregnant with mysterious revelations.

"We know why he left Sofia on Thursday night, and why he is 'in Vienna,' pursued the little man. 'It was not a matter of trying to raise that loan.'

There was something so smug and sinister about the man that I checked my impulse to suggest that he might have made a mistake in my identity. I felt that I was about to learn things which it was necessary for me to know.

"It was Mademoiselle Celeste of course," continued the little man. "We got hold of her correspondence. Dimitrieff had begged her to return to Sofia, but, since she found the Bulgarian climate unendurable, Dimitrieff has come to Vienna on the eve of war to say good-by to her. The queen's opposition made Bulgaria impossible for Mademoiselle Celeste, you know."

Dimitrieff! Dimitrieff! Suddenly I thought myself of a young military officer of Bulgarian birth, a fellow attaché with me at Berlin, a man whom I had known very well indeed when Prince Alexander and Stambuloff were the storm center of Europe during the turbulent period of the eighties.

I had followed the careers of most of my former friends through the newspapers. I knew that Nicholas Dimitrieff had risen high in his profession of arms, and that a Nicholas Dimitrieff was now war minister of the belligerent little state that was the chief partner in the newly formed Balkan league against Turkey. The thought that this might be my old friend silenced all my scruples about listening further.

I was not surprised that Dimitrieff had succumbed to the fascination of Mademoiselle Celeste, a woman of Russian birth, who had recently made a tour of the Balkan principalities.

So Dimitrieff had rushed off to Vienna upon the eve of war, to see her, carrying important papers with him. How like Dimitrieff of old days! I remembered a certain escapade out of which I had once helped him, his protestations of eternal gratitude, and a very warm feeling toward the man whom I had not seen for so many years swept over me.

"He is staying at the Hotel Metz, under the name of Ivanoff," the little man continued. "The tailor has seen him, and feels confident that he can duplicate the dress coat. The grease is arranged for, and the hotel valet has been instructed that you will buy the discarded coat."

"How do you know for certain that he has those papers?" I asked, trying to conceal my loathing for the little spy.

"Our agent sat in the same compartment with him during the entire journey from Sofia to Vienna. Now, our man observed that Dimitrieff constantly put his hand to his pocket during the journey, as if to satisfy himself that the papers were there. Undoubtedly he is carrying them in his pocket."

I tried to keep my face impassive. In my day diplomacy, subtle though it might be on occasion, never resorted to the substitution of dress coats. However, it seemed to me incredible that Dimitrieff would leave the papers, which were evidently so valuable, in the wrong pocket.

The little man leaned forward and spoke immediately into my ear.

"The alternative plan of attacking Dimitrieff was considered," he said, "but it was felt to be impossible. Apart from the certainty that Dimitrieff is armed, one cannot assault a minister of a foreign state in the streets of Vienna, even though he is traveling incognito."

"No. You are quite right," I answered.

"We sounded Mademoiselle Celeste without her knowledge, but we found that she could not be influenced, being a fellow Slav. However, if she shares the psychological nature of women, she will do everything that is necessary without the least suspicion that she is aiding us. Do you stay long at Vienna, mein herr? It was my intention to go to Agram, and I should have started at noon, had not word reached me that you were in the capital."

"I cannot tell you," I answered. "My plans are—well, indefinite."

"Of course," answered the spy, smiling. "And where shall the dress coat be brought tomorrow morning?"

I gave the fellow my address at the Hotel Ramilles. I also gave him my own name, which he undoubtedly considered a nom de plume, for his smiles and winks became so outrageously familiar that I left him.

But I wondered who I was supposed to be as I strolled up the Koenigstrasse.

That the Austrian government had urgent need of certain documents vital to Bulgaria I had no doubt. That the diplomats of the dual monarchy had resorted to a particularly shabby trick to obtain them was evident. Of course, the little spy was a go-between. But those other men in the club—

I could never enter the Diplomats' club again. The atmosphere there was intolerable. If the new diplomacy was represented by the type of man who seemed to predominate there, I would prefer to associate with low-grade commercial travelers.

I made my way toward the Hotel Metz, with the object of warning Dimitrieff.

The hotel clerk informed me that Herr Ivanoff was out. He had gone out early that morning. He could not say when he would return.

I found a seat in the reading room

commanding a view of the stairs, and waited. Picking up a copy of the day's Tageblatt, I learned from it that Mademoiselle Celeste was not to sing in "La Sonnambula" that night. There was a new understudy of Freschetti's, whose voice was supposed to be wonderful, and she was to make her debut.

I felt sure, as I read this item, that Mademoiselle Celeste and Dimitrieff would go to the opera.

It seemed clear enough that Dimitrieff would put on the substituted dress coat, and that, after he had gone out again, the theft would be effected. Yet it seemed wholly improbable that he would forget to put the document into the pocket of the coat he wore, and the plot was darker to me than ever.

Five o'clock struck, and as I strolled out into the hall I saw Dimitrieff enter by the front door.

Even after the lapse of years I could not be mistaken in Dimitrieff. The boyish figure had grown stout, the little, jaunty, upturned mustaches had become gray. Dimitrieff was lined and care-worn—but this was Dimitrieff. I had known him too well to be mistaken.

Forgetting everything in my pleasure, I stepped to his side. "Nicholas!" I exclaimed.

And memories of the old days in Berlin, surging over me, choked my voice. I saw his face through a filmy mist, and I could say no more.

"You don't remember me?" I managed to add, as I saw him staring at me, while his hand remained limp at his side.

"Quite well enough!" he answered, and his face was an angry red. "I know you as well as I want to, Louis Weisknopf, and I recognized your spy in the train."

And then, with a curt nod, he stepped into the elevator.

I went out into the street and paced the sidewalk. I felt dismayed and hurt, but I could not be angry with Dimitrieff. I had never in my life been addressed as Weisknopf before, and it began to dawn on me that it must be in the capacity of Weisknopf

A double as I would have appeared after a life devoted to chicanery and petty malpractice, culminating, with advancing confidence, in large dishonesties and fraud. I measured up the man with a single glance.

"There, but for the grace of God and the honor of my father, sits myself!" I muttered.

For I knew that similar types mean similar souls, and was not I, too, engaged in reading and practicing upon men? With lesser ideals I would have become a second Weisknopf.

For, of course, this man was Weisknopf, the Austrian government's unofficial agent and spy. We two were virtually engaged in the same profession.

I felt that in defeating Weisknopf I was defeating my baser nature.

I turned my gaze away, fearful of attracting the attention of my double, and at that moment Mademoiselle Celeste and Dimitrieff entered the box opposite.

Every pair of opera glasses in the house was at once turned upon the famous singer. It was just like the rash old Dimitrieff I had known to have come in public to the opera house, where he must have been recognized by a score of people.

I saw my double fix his glasses upon the pair. I felt sure that some trick was in preparation. And I resolved to watch every action of Dimitrieff and the singer with the utmost care.

Dimitrieff removed Mademoiselle Celeste's cloak, sat down beside her, and pulled his waistcoat down. They looked at each other and smiled.

A white thread was hanging from the lower part of Dimitrieff's waistcoat over his black trousers. Woman-like, Mademoiselle Celeste plucked at it till it came away in her hands; then she rolled it into a tiny ball and flicked it into the stalls beneath.

The first act was nearly ended when, above the music and the singing, I heard a smothered outcry come from the direction of Dimitrieff's box.

The curtain rolled down, the lights went up, and Dimitrieff, in the box opposite, was raving like a lunatic as he



"Unless You Return Me My Papers I Shall Blow My Brains Out in Your Presence!"

that I had engaged the conversation of the spy, and also the attention of those who stared at me in the street on my way to the club.

What was to be done now?

That question was solved in a moment, for, as I turned, half irresolute, I saw Dimitrieff's stout figure emerge from the door of the Hotel Metz and enter a waiting taxicab.

I hailed a cab that was crawling by. "Follow that taxi!" I said to the driver, and got in.

Five minutes later the two cabs drew up in front of the opera house. Dimitrieff descended, and, watching from where I sat, I saw him go to the box office. It was not until he had reentered his cab and driven away that I made my descent.

"I want a seat near my friend's box," I said. "The gentleman who has just purchased one."

"That is Mademoiselle Celeste's box," answered the ticket agent, looking at me with an amused expression. "There are no vacant seats anywhere near."

"In which row is mademoiselle?" I asked.

"The dress circle, mein herr. It is the herr director's private box, but no doubt your friend and Mademoiselle Celeste will occupy it alone. It is not possible to secure a seat here—"

"Give me a seat in the dress circle, immediately opposite, then," I said.

I surveyed the audience from my seat in the crowded dress circle that evening. The opera house was packed; the crowd was eager, as only a Vienna audience can be, to hear and pass its verdict upon the understudy. It was about five minutes before eight, the hour appointed for the raising of the curtain, when I dropped my program, with an exclamation of surprise which it was wholly beyond my power to resist.

Seated in the center of the dress circle, but about three rows farther back, I saw my double.

tried to free himself from mademoiselle's restraining hands.

I looked at the face of my double. Louis Weisknopf was sitting back in his chair, watching the episode with supreme satisfaction.

I made my way quickly to the aisle. Looking back as I neared the exit, I saw that Mademoiselle Celeste now occupied the box alone. The opera glasses were leveled upon her in batteries, and I guessed what her mortification must be, for all her apparent unconcern.

Quickly as I walked, I was not quick enough to catch Dimitrieff in the foyer. As I entered it, I caught a glimpse of his stout figure dashing wildly for the street. Apparently too frantic to think of taking a taxicab, he tore through the crowds, and I pursued him.

I presumed that Dimitrieff had already missed the papers; I guessed that Mademoiselle Celeste's complicity, whatever it had been, had been an innocent one.

Tagging after the fugitive, now fifty yards in the rear, now sighting and again losing him, I ran, till suddenly an unexpected incident ended the chase.

For a man in a laborer's clothes, carrying a huge pot filled with a greasy compound of tar, collided briskly with Dimitrieff, and in an instant the Bulgarian was staggering off the curb, half drowned in the filthy mixture.

Before he could recover himself the workman had taken to his heels, and while Dimitrieff was wiping the stuff from his eyes, I was at his side. He looked up and recognized me.

So wild was his rage that he could say nothing articulate, but stood glaring and stammering, while I, recovering my breath, and too wise to make myself known at the moment, hastily wrote my hotel and room number upon a card and thrust it in Dimitrieff's hand.

"I shall be at your disposal at nine

o'clock tomorrow morning," I said quietly.

When I was alone in my room I lit a cigar and tried to puzzle out the situation. But the more I racked my brains the more perplexing it became.

I could understand the main feature of Weisknopf's conspiracy; the substitution of the dress coats. Very likely Dimitrieff had worn the coat which had been "planted" upon him, in place of his own. But how could he have been so foolish as to have left the document behind him?

And, save as a method of insult, the meaning of the pot of grease, to which the little spy had alluded, was absolutely unintelligible.

The one chance of solving the mystery, and, at the same time, of aiding Dimitrieff, lay in the possibility of the Hotel Metz valet calling upon me with the suit in the morning. I remembered that it had been the spy's intention to call on Weisknopf at Agram. This made it just possible that the spy, assuming his mission to be completed, would not come into touch with Weisknopf in time to permit of a revision of the plans already made.

That they had been made with considerable attention to detail, and were, therefore, difficult to readjust in time, was clear from the single incident of the pot of tar. Dimitrieff's exit from the opera house, and the very line of his flight, must have been telephoned to the man who was in readiness with the compound. Perhaps there were several of the confederates with pots of tar, along different routes, waiting for Dimitrieff.

I had discarded every possible solution in turn before I went to bed.

I was awakened the next morning by a ring at my telephone. The hotel manager called to me that the valet was below, waiting to attend on me.

Then I flung on my dressing gown, and the valet from the Metz, entering after a discreet knock, doubtless saw before him the man whose appearance had been described to him by the little spy.

"The suit, mein herr," he said apologetically, placing the greasy garments across the back of a chair. Scoured though they evidently had been they represented the dreadful havoc of what had come fresh from the tailor's shop on the preceding morning.

I handed the man two English sovereigns and dismissed him.

When he had gone, I set about my examination of the greasy garments. I was still engaged upon this interesting work when the telephone bell rang once more.

"Herr Ivanoff has just gone up to your room, mein herr," explained the clerk. "He was in a hurry, and said he had an appointment with you."

"Quite right," I answered, and I could not resist a chuckle. For I had solved the mystery in its entirety.

The dress coat and its accompanying garments were hidden under the soft cover when Dimitrieff entered.

It was a very different Dimitrieff. The man seemed utterly broken. His face was haggard from the effects of a sleepless night, his eyes bloodshot, and his hands trembled dreadfully as he essayed to close the door.

He succeeded in accomplishing this act after two failures; then he came forward and suddenly flung himself upon his knees before me.

"Herr Weisknopf, have mercy upon me!" he stammered. "I came because I thought you might be willing to make some bargain, having given me your card last night."

"Nicholas!" I began, feeling the same choking in my throat.

"You know how much this means to me!" Dimitrieff resumed. "I will do anything for you if you will return me the papers. I will not ask whether you have had copies made. I will advance your interests in Sofia, do anything except betray my country, if you will preserve to me the semblance of my honor."

Dimitrieff rose from his knees, and, with a dramatic gesture, pulled an army revolver from his coat pocket. "Unless you return me my papers I shall blow my brains out in your presence!" he shouted wildly.

I took the weapon from his hand as simply as one would disarm a child.

"In that event," I answered, "you will blow out the brains of the stupidest, simplest, finest and most forgetful donkeyhead that ever came out of Bulgaria." Unconsciously I was falling into the Slav tongue. "For the twentieth time, Nicholas, hast thou no memory for old friends—from Berlin—from America?"

Dimitrieff knew my voice. He stared at me, and slowly memory came struggling back. Then, rising, he leaped at me and flung his arms about my neck, and a violent smack on either cheek indicated that recollection was complete.

"Thou, who hast got me out of more scrapes than my own brother!" he cried, holding me at arm's length. "It is thou!" he shouted. "After a quarter of a century! God forgive me for thinking thee whom I did! Now I shall blow out my brains in earnest. Ah, but—"

His expression saddened. The volatile Slav remembered the greater issue, which he had forgotten. "Thou dost not know—" he began.

"Tush, Nicholas!" I answered, raising the sofa cover. "Here are your plans for the Bulgarian army's war mobilization."

"The scheme, as I understand it now, was a very ingenious one, Nicholas," I said, as we paced the railway station arm in arm. "Let it warn you never again to pit your Slav unsuspectingness against the craftiest group in Europe."

"You are not to blame for having put on the substituted dress coat, for there are tailors who can fit any man

to perfection by averting themselves at his figure, and doubtless the suit coat had been opened on the train and your dress coat fully examined as to cut and lining. But you ought to have looked at the pockets before putting your document inside.

"It is an axiom of mathematics that an addition of probabilities does not produce an improbability, and everything that transpired was in accordance with this law, and based upon an intimate knowledge of human nature. It was probable that you would not perceive the little thread which hung down from the interior pocket of your coat—at least, until it revealed itself against your black trousers, when you sat down in the opera box.

"It was probable, even then, that Mademoiselle Celeste would observe it before you did. It was probable that she would pluck it away. Any woman would do that.

"When the thread was pulled, the elastic bottom of the coat pocket came open and the papers dropped into the lining. When the thread was pulled away from the material the pocket went back into position again.

"When your coat was ruined by the tar it became obvious that, instead of packing it in your suit case, you would leave it for the hotel valet.

"Thus everything is explained. And so Bulgaria goes to war next week and smashes the Turk, whereas, had the paper been lost, the Turk would smash her, and Austria would profit by the breaking down of the Balkan league, which now bars her march south to the sea."

"Yes," said Dimitrieff briskly. "It is characteristic of Austria to attempt by fraud what she would never dare to attempt by force of arms."

"Some day she will resort to arms. Don't doubt that," I answered. "Be ready, Nicholas. And now a question. What in the world has happened to the Diplomats' club? I went into our old quarters on the Koenigstrasse—"

"What!" shouted Dimitrieff. "Why, my dear boy, the Diplomats' club has been on the Ringstrasse for fifteen years at least. The old quarters are occupied by the Tlecker club—international speculators and shady hangarons. That's where Louis Weisknopf hangs out—Weisknopf of the syndicate."

"What syndicate?" I inquired.

"A new amalgamation of great interests, formed to unify the world's landed interests, wheat fields, and mines; to gain possession of all the wealth of the world and guard it against confiscation. They're in power in several countries now, and they are convinced that the future lies with the Teuton, and are backing Germany and Austria for all they are worth."

"So that explains why Weisknopf is in league with the government!" I mused. "I've been out of diplomacy so long that I've got everything to learn over again. But I'm beginning to see daylight now. And, incidentally, I have accomplished the main part of my mission. They're plunging for war, Nicholas!"

"Within two years," answered Dimitrieff. "Before the Triple Alliance treaties expire in 1915, and not before the Kiel canal has been deepened, in 1914. That's why we are going to settle up with Turkey first. Here comes my train. You'll be in Sofia some day! Au revoir, and a million thanks to you."

I watched the train bear him away with mingled grief and gladness; grief for the parting, gladness that I could still remain a member of the Gossips' club.

MADE THEM ALL STAND UP

Particular Appeal That Induced Male Passengers to Yield Their Seats to Woman With Mission.

For once youth and good looks were nowhere. Middle age was triumphant. The victor was hatless and she carried a large market basket. The car was so crowded that she had difficulty in pushing in with her basket, but she finally managed it. Moreover, she found space to balance it on the back of a seat. Then she looked out at the station clock. That gave her a fright.

"Half-past five, she said. "Good gracious! And I've got to have Jim's supper ready at 6:30."

One corner of the basket was partitioned off into a little nest, and into that nest she tossed her green beans as she struggled them. Before half a dozen beans had left her fingers every man within seeing and hearing distance was on his feet begging her to take his place.

Well-dressed men, shabby men, were for the moment on a level. To them it mattered not in the least that good looks had to stand, but that a woman who wished to have her husband's supper ready on time should have to stand in a car while preparing a part of it was unthinkable.

Fine Combination. "What makes you think Dasher will succeed as a painter?"

"He has the soul of an artist and the perseverance of a book agent."

Suburban Life. "I fear my mint bed isn't getting enough shade."

"Ask that fat policeman to stand near it while he gabs with the cook."

Summer Resort Note.

Hotel Clerk—The guest in No. 10 says he had a nightmare last night.

Proprietor—Well, charge it on his bill—ten dollars for fever—Judge.

Linoleum and oil cloth can be thoroughly cleaned with buttermilk and they have been washed with water.