

The Red Envelope

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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I happened to be in Tokyo at the time of what is called, in inner diplomatic circles, the Household Plot. How nearly it succeeded in embroiling the United States and Japan only five men know in detail. The first of these is Sir Arthur Sturt, the British ambassador to the mikado's court. The second is the Chinese minister. The third is myself. The fourth is Count Okuma, the astute one-legged statesman, who has been a moving power in Japanese affairs since the reform era began—or was, until the events that I shall describe occurred. The fifth is Doctor Fong, and where he is nobody knows.

I was not in Japan in any official capacity. I was there renewing my acquaintance with old scenes and persons, when Sir Arthur, from whom I had parted the night before, on the occasion of Lady Sturt's reception, and, as I thought, probably forever—since I was planning to sail for Shanghai—sent for me by a special embassy messenger.

I knew that some matter of the gravest import must have happened to cause him to summon me at eight o'clock in the morning. The cause was partly revealed, however, when, on bringing me my breakfast, my Chinese boy informed me that his majesty, Mutsuhito, emperor of Japan, was dying.

I had known of the precarious condition of his health, and that the fatal climax of his wasting disease might occur at almost any time; still, the shock seemed to have been very sudden, for when I said good-by to Sir Arthur, the evening before, his majesty was reported to be in excellent health.

I had a ricksha called and hastily made my way into the embassy compound, where the ambassador's secretary was awaiting me with a very grave expression upon his face.

"You have heard the news?" he asked. "His majesty—"

"Is dead!" I exclaimed.

"He has been dead two days," he answered.

This news was confirmed by Sir Arthur, who looked even graver as he motioned me to a chair.

"I have been told, Mr. X—," he began, "that you have a more intimate acquaintance with the court life of Japan than any man since Bertram Mitford."

"Your excellency is very kind," I began, but Sir Arthur cut me short.

"This is no time for compliments," he interrupted brusquely. "I have just been informed that the emperor's death has been kept secret these two days for the gravest reasons. You are, I believe, personally acquainted with Count Okuma?"

"As everybody is," I answered. For Count Okuma, stumping around on his wooden leg—the other was destroyed years ago by a fanatic's bomb; Okuma, the friend of foreigners, the man whose affectation of the simple life led him to carry home his own laundry; Okuma, the patron of western learning, the wildest and most astute of the complex-minded advisers of the late emperor, was the most accessible and friendly of men.

"I am informed, beyond the possibility of doubt," said the ambassador, "that Okuma has now in his pocket an ultimatum to be presented to the American minister this afternoon, at the palace."

I saw at once the meaning of the conspiracy of silence. Mutsuhito, of course, would never have sanctioned war with the United States; and Yoshimoto, his heir, and now in theory, though not in fact, emperor of Japan, was even more firmly pro-American. The interregnum, thus artificially created, was to be utilized by Count Okuma and the cabal which he had formed for the purpose of an attack upon the Philippines.

"The name of his late majesty was forged to this document, which is written on the regulation thick red state note paper," continued Sir Arthur. "Japan demands that the United States evacuate the Philippines within a week. And you see how this affects Great Britain."

I certainly did. As a treaty ally of Japan, England would be compelled to stand aside, if she did not participate in the attack, important to aid America. Her action would doubtless be construed as an alliance with Japan, or at least a participation in her treachery, and the people of the United States, stung to the quick, would certainly declare war upon England, with results incalculably evil to humanity.

And, with all respect to the valor of American arms, to hold the Philippines against Japan could be, as all strategists are aware, a military impossibility. Manila must fall long before reinforcements arrived, and, without a base, without adequate transportation facilities, how could the United States hope to throw an army of half a million men into the archipelago, to cope successfully with the war-trained veterans of Japan?

Nay, assuming a base on a nearby island, how could that country transport more than fifty thousand troops at a single voyage, and how could these fifty thousand hold out while the transports went back for more? It is the old story of the fox, the goose and the bag of oats.

On this account I have always strongly urged the abandonment of the Philippines, which will one day prove a bitter disillusionment to the United States.

Now I realized the ramifications of the conspiracy. It was for this purpose that the war syndicate, which was seeking to embroil England and America on behalf of Germany, had

taken up the latest Japanese loan at four per cent, instead of the five which the imperial government had had to pay for its last issue. The scheme was as clear as daylight.

"You understand the situation, no doubt," said Sir Arthur, who had been watching my face closely.

"I am infinitely obliged to you, my dear colleague," replied Sir Arthur, shaking him warmly by the hand.

"Do you know," he said to me, "when the minister had gone, that sort of man makes the best possible ambassador?" Directness, guilelessness are awfully puzzling for the sophisticated Japanese mind. However—here is our friend."

Doctor Fong was just entering the doorway, and, though it was years since I had seen him, I knew him immediately. The yellow, wrinkled skin looked as much like parchment, the wiry, thin moustache still drooped blackly on either side of the sensitive mouth, and the eyes, behind their heavy convex lenses, were awfully kind, and yet impenetrable.

Doctor Fong murmured my name as he shook hands with me.

"I see you have a long memory for faces, doctor," said Sir Arthur.

"I never forget anything," replied Fong quietly.

"Mr. X— is to be trusted implicitly,"

believe," continued the American minister. "At least I met Count Okuma on my way, and he looked very despondent. What a charming, enlightened man the count is! He was so friendly, in spite of his preparation, that I was almost tempted to suggest calling in Doctor Phineas, of our legation, who took his degree at Johns Hopkins. However—would you have suggested it?"

"It is always a little dubious, making suggestions," said Sir Arthur thoughtfully.

"But Count Okuma is so transparently simple—just like one of us," said the American minister. "I really wanted—however, I've no doubt these Japanese doctors are competent to handle the situation. I won't keep you, Sir Arthur, but if I hear of any developments in the situation, I shall let you know at once."

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my post of duty. You can trust me, your excellency," he added, as he bowed himself through the door.

"At five o'clock we were still in Sir Arthur's quarters. The American minister had returned twice, to inform us that Mutsuhito was at death's door. The French minister had looked in to tell Sir Arthur that, according to a palace rumor, the emperor had died early in the afternoon. At the end of the corridor the crowd of courtiers was constantly prostrating itself as one or other of the royal ladies and imperial princesses passed into the mikado's anteroom.

It was a few minutes after five when a distant murmur, like the droning of bees, made itself audible. It rose and swelled into a mourning din. The emperor was officially dead.

The sound of lamentations filled the palace. From our window we could see that a vast throng had assembled in the grounds, and, rippling from one to another, the sound was taken up until it seemed as though the entire people wailed in unison.

"Count Okuma is ready to strike. Heaven grant that Fong does not fail us," said Sir Arthur, turning to me. Then, doubtfully: "Can you assure me on your honor that I was rendered unconscious?"

Before I could assure him, a tap sounded on the door, and a page appeared. He announced that Count Okuma requested the honor of Sir Arthur's presence in his apartment.

We went down the corridor in the page's wake, until we came to the little room that Okuma occupied. It was filled with the ambassadors and ministers of the various powers.

It was furnished with a Spartan simplicity, which Okuma, who was a good deal of a demagogue, affected, hoping thereby to set an example of frugality to the rising generation, and ignorant, like all demagogues, that the people saw through his pose. There was a low Japanese couch, concealed in part by a low screen, a bronze Buddha upon a pedestal, a charcoal box, a hibachi, a writing table, a desk heaped high with papers, and a number of chairs.

I perceived that the American minister alone was absent.

Count Okuma was seated at his desk, facing us, his wooden leg thrust out before him, and an expression of remarkable guilelessness on his smooth-shaven face.

"Gentlemen," said the count, rising, "I have the deep sorrow of announcing to you the demise of his imperial majesty five minutes ago."

Immediately each of the representatives, Sir Arthur included, produced a written memorandum of condolence, which he handed to the count with a bow and a few conventional words. It was an interesting comedy, not the least amusing part being Okuma's ex-

pression of surprise and pleasure at these tokens of international sympathy with Japan.

As we were about to leave, among the others, Count Okuma called to Sir Arthur and asked him to remain behind.

"One moment, Sir Arthur," he said, with a charming smile. "It is to be my pleasure to address a communication to your colleague from Washington, who will be here in a moment, and, as our ally, it would be felicitous for you to be present."

He looked keenly into Sir Arthur's face as he spoke, and I saw that the British ambassador's expression was almost as guileless as the count's.

We waited. Presently we heard footsteps at the farther end of the passage. The American minister was on his way to the count's room.

Okuma, turning from us, began to rummage among the heap of papers upon the desk before him, which appeared to consist largely of bills and household receipts, until he came upon a red envelope, of legal size, unfasted, and evidently containing the ultimatum.

He took it in his hand and stood, propping himself upon his wooden leg, his whole expression that of a charming man of the world. If the momentary minute affected him, there was no sign of it in his aspect. And the footsteps were drawing nearer.

Suddenly the face of Doctor Fong appeared at the door. He bowed low, before the count; for the first time, I saw the count's expression change.

Did he suspect Fong at that moment and remember the man's grievance against him? It was one of those dramatic moments when nothing is said, nothing done, and yet one seems to feel the thoughts of others.

"Fong walked straight to the count. 'Her imperial highness—' he began, and held the vial beneath his nose.

The expression that had been on Count Okuma's face was still there, but it seemed to have been frozen there; and he remained in exactly the same position as he had occupied, slightly leaning upon his wooden leg, the envelope between his fingers.

"Good Lord! Was I like that?" I heard Sir Arthur whisper, as Fong gently opened the count's fingers and took the envelope.

I heard the slight click as the thumb and fingers came together again.

Hastily Fong slipped the inclosure out of the envelope. From the desk he grabbed up a bill or letter, which he placed inside. I did not see what he did with the document, but when he turned back, his hands were empty.

"Could your excellency find some pretext to hold the American minister at the door for a minute?" Fong asked.

Sir Arthur stepped hastily into the doorway, where the minister was just arriving. I saw Fong slip the vial back into the pocket and replace the red envelope between the frozen count's fingers. And then, as the doctor stepped back, I saw the count's consciousness return as instantly as a ripple goes across wheat. Every muscle resumed its functions at the same moment.

"Is greatly indisposed as a consequence of his majesty's translation," continued Fong.

"I greatly regret to hear it," answered the count. "I shall prostrate myself before her later in the afternoon. You are attending her carefully?"

"With the utmost care," answered the Chinaman, retiring obsequiously backward.

And it was evident that Count Okuma had not the slightest suspicion of what had happened. Sir Arthur had stepped hastily back to his side, and the American minister was in the room.

"I have the great sorrow of announcing to you, sir, the demise of his imperial majesty, ten minutes ago," said Count Okuma to the minister.

With a few murmured words of sorrow, the minister quickly produced a written memorandum of condolence, which the count placed among the others on his desk.

"Your excellency," he continued, "there is a communication of some importance which I have to make to you on behalf of the imperial Japanese government. I do so, for reasons which this communication makes apparent in the presence of his excellency, the British ambassador."

And he handed the minister the red envelope.

The American minister took the envelope and, bowing, withdrew. He hesitated at the door, and seemed despondent of addressing Sir Arthur, but the latter hurried past him to his apartment and we left together a few minutes later, as the thunder of guns announced the accession of Yoshimoto, the new emperor of Japan.

How nearly a great war between Japan and America, and another between the two English-speaking nations, was frustrated, becomes clear from the following letter, which I received from Sir Arthur in Shanghai:

"The American minister called on me at ten o'clock the morning of the day you left.

"I never heard that the Japanese were an absent-minded people, Sir Arthur," he said, laughing, "but this is too good to hold. Permit me to show you what Count Okuma handed to me last night. I telephoned to ask if a mistake had been made, but the count had been taken ill and was in bed, his secretary told me."

"And he pulled the red envelope out of his pocket and handed me—Count Okuma's laundry list! Three pairs of silk pajamas, a dozen linen handkerchiefs, and numerous other items prove that the count's Spartan simplicity is more apparent than real. No wonder that Okuma was taken ill after the discovery."

"I owe you a thousand thanks for your assistance. Doctor Fong's revenge had all the Chinese subtlety, did it not? But I often wonder whether the laundryman received a communication instructing him to abandon his premises under threat of naval intervention."

Iron Ore in Philippines.
A recent official survey of iron ore deposits in the Philippines indicated the presence of about 300,000,000 tons of ore in an area of about 40 square miles in one seacoast region.



Fong Walked Straight to the Count. "Her Imperial Highness," He Began, Holding the Vial Beneath His Nose.

MAKING THE BEST OF BEANS

Way That They Were Prepared a Generation Ago Will Be Found Hard to Improve Upon.

In the Woman's Home Companion the cookery editor devotes a page to good old-fashioned dishes. A dozen recipes are given for dishes that were popular a generation ago. The editor says that these dishes are not on the tables of the housekeepers of today chiefly because carefully written recipes for their preparation are seldom found. Following is a recipe given for Boston baked beans:

"Pick over three cupsful of pea beans, cover with cold water and soak for several hours. Drain, put in stewpan, cover with fresh water, heat gradually to the boiling point and let simmer until skins will burst, which is best determined by taking a few beans on the tip of a spoon and blowing on them, when skins will burst if sufficiently cooked. Drain beans. Scrape a three-fourths-pound piece of fat salt pork, remove a one-fourth-inch slice, and put in bottom of bean pot. Cut through rind of remaining pork at one-half-inch distances. Put beans in pot and bury pork in beans, leaving 'her hind exposed. Mix one tablespoonful of salt, two tablespoonfuls of sugar and two tablespoonfuls of molasses. Add one cupful of boiling water and pour mixture over beans; then add enough boiling water to cover beans. Bake in a slow oven eight hours, uncovering the last hour of the cooking that the rind may become brown. Add more boiling water as needed."

RULES OF THE HOUSEHOLD

One Woman Writes Out What She Wants Done and Thereby Gets Results.

"The reason that we, as homemakers, are obliged to put up with unskilled and inefficient assistance is because we do not do our share in training the raw material," said Mrs. Good Housewife with some emphasis. "Suppose the great factories where immigrant labor is employed should be run on the system which prevails in our many homes? Suppose the employer should say, 'Oh, dear, I just hate to train a green hand! It takes so much time, and is such a bother!'"

"What sort of a product would that factory turn out? How long would that employer be able to stand the competition of other factories where a different method was used? Personally I believe in concrete rules. If a new helper can read a list of definite directions, or in the case of inability to read, have them read to her, they are fixed in her mind much more effectually than the same suggestions repeated in varying language.

"I have known girls who would require being told things over and over, learning this little list by heart, and taking a real pride in living by its simple rules."

Shad Roe Salad.

Soak the roe in cold water five minutes, then lay it carefully into a pan with one quart of boiling water, two teaspoonfuls of salt, one teaspoonful of minced onion, one-half of bay leaf, one teaspoonful of mixed whole pepper and two tablespoonfuls of lemon juice; let it simmer (not boil) 15 minutes; pour off the water, add cold water carefully so as not to break the roe; add a piece of ice, and when the roe is chilled and firm dry it in a napkin; divide it into long strips and then into slices; serve on lettuce; pour French dressing over the whole.

Salt Codfish Balls.

Mix thoroughly equal quantities of hot mashed potatoes, seasoned with salt, pepper and butter, and of salt codfish which has been picked fine and soaked in cold water for several hours. Moisten with cream or milk, add a well-beaten egg and form into balls. When cold roll in cornmeal or crumbs and fry in deep fat. Cut a circle in the top of each ball, remove a spoonful of the inside and fill the cavities with hot boiled beets chopped fine and dressed with butter and pepper. Serve at once with a garnish of crisp lettuce leaves.

Chicken Terrapin.

Boil chicken whole and remove all the meat. Then make this sauce: Melt one cupful butter, add two tablespoonfuls flour, one-half teaspoonful salt, pinch of red pepper, then add slowly one pint of milk. Add chicken in small pieces to the warm sauce. Heat again and garnish with two hard boiled eggs and parsley, cut very fine and sprinkle over the whole when ready to serve. This is delicious and surely would be splendid for Sunday night's supper.

Raised Doughnuts.

One pint of milk, one-half cupful shortening, scant, one cupful sugar, one-half cupful potato yeast, two eggs, flour for batter a little thicker than for griddle cakes. Mix at noon or before two o'clock and when light, which will be in about five hours, stir in flour until the spoon will stand upright. In the morning turn out on molding board and roll thin, cut in shape and let rise until the doughnuts are light enough to stay on top of the fat, which should be hot.

To Make Sweet Cider.

Sweet cider is among the best of winter beverages. It may be kept sweet indefinitely by bottling. Boil the cider thirty minutes, then bottle. Stand the bottle in hot water with a cloth at the bottom to prevent breaking, and boil thirty minutes longer. Boil the corks also to sterilize them. Cork tightly and keep in a cool place. It may be served hot or cold.

Jewish Bread.

Three eggs, beat well with three-fourths cupful of sugar, add one cupful of chopped walnuts, one pound of chopped dates, one teaspoonful vanilla, one teaspoonful of baking powder, five tablespoonfuls flour; bake in a moderate oven, cut in small squares and shake a little confectioner's sugar over the top."

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