

BEHIND THE SCENES

With Rulers and Leaders of Wartime Europe

By the Princess Radziwill

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THE EMPRESS EUGENIE

At the very beginning of the war the Empress Eugenie transformed her beautiful home at Farnborough Hill into a hospital for convalescent French and British officers, and notwithstanding her advanced age, she has given up most of her time to the administration of this hospital, and herself attended to the wants of its inmates. The empress will be 92 years old next month, and not only has she retained her wonderful vitality, but she has kept all interest in everything which goes on around her. She firmly hopes that the allies will come out victorious, and that it will be granted to her to see Alsace Lorraine restored to the beloved France over which she reigned for 18 years, and which she loves so fondly.



Princess Radziwill.

The empress is an exception among women, insofar as her troubles have not hardened her; but on the contrary have left her with indulgence and an utter forgetfulness of the injuries done her. She is still beautiful, because such perfect loveliness as hers can change, but never disappear, and the perfect features which won for Mademoiselle de Montijo an imperial crown have retained their pure lines, whilst the white hair only adds to the softness of her face and expression.

The Hospital.

The empress used, before the war, to spend the winter months at the lovely villa which she built for herself at Cap Martin on the shores of the blue Mediterranean. At present all her interest remains concentrated in the hospital into which her splendid English home has been transformed. It has not been an easy matter for her to adapt it to the needs of such an establishment, as it has entailed the stowing away of many of the art treasures that made out of Farnborough a real Napoleon museum. The empress had spent much time and money in arranging these treasures to their best advantage, and all those who had the honor to be admitted within the precincts of Farnborough House agree in saying that it would be difficult to find a more beautiful

abode than this cottage, for such she calls it, where the last empress of the French found a refuge after her story life. It combines all the ideas inseparable from English comfort, together with the stateliness inherent to the old French chateaux.

The long corridor which runs all through the house has its walls hung with old Beauvais tapestry, which is quite wonderful and was part of the gifts which Napoleon III bestowed upon his bride on her marriage. It used to adorn the walls of the empress' boudoir in the Tuileries, but happily had been removed for the summer months before the war broke out, escaping thus the destruction of the palace, and it was later on returned to Eugenie by Mr. Thiers and the French government, being considered her private property.

In the same gallery in which now hang these beautiful panels, can be admired a priceless collection of Sevres china, which Napoleon III, who had assembled it, used to say was the most complete one in Europe, containing specimens from the earlier days of this renowned factory. Among this china figures a breakfast set that had been presented to Queen Marie Antoinette after the birth of the first Dauphin, and which she had in her turn given to her confidential friend and attendant, Madame Campan, before leaving the Tuileries on the fatal 10th of August, 1793. The latter had somehow succeeded in saving this relic of her beloved mistress, which she afterward presented to her favorite pupil, Hortense de Beauharnais, the daughter of the Empress Josephine, and the mother of Napoleon III.

Marie Antoinette.

Speaking of Marie Antoinette, it must be noticed here that the Empress Eugenie always had a veneration for her memory, and herself collected all the souvenirs she could get hold of of this unfortunate queen, whose fate she is said to have dreaded for herself. A curious incident can be related concerning this superstition of the consort of Napoleon III. When her engagement to the emperor became known, all the dressmakers and jewelers of Paris hastened to offer her their different wares. Among the many beautiful things which were brought to her for inspection, was a splendid bridal veil of rose point, which had been worn by Marie Antoinette at her own wedding, passed afterward in the possession of her only daughter, the Duchess d'Angoulême, and bequeathed by the latter, together with many other treasures, to her great favorite, the duke of Guiche, later duke of Gramont, who by a curious irony of fate was to be the last foreign minister of Napoleon III.

The duke thought it not worth while to keep such an expensive thing, and hearing that the emperor was about to be married, contrived that this historical veil should be shown to the fair Spaniard about to take Marie Antoinette's place on the throne of France. Eugenie, however, much as she would have liked to buy it, found it too expensive, and reluctantly refused the offer. What was her surprise when, a few days later, the emperor sent her this relic of the beheaded queen, asking her to wear it on her wedding day, which she did, notwithstanding the prophecies of people who said that it would not bring her luck.

"The Curse of the Lace."

We know that it did not, but a curious thing connected with this lovely piece of lace is that many years later the empress made a present of it to her favorite niece, the duchess of Alba, that the latter wore it at some great court ceremony in Madrid, and immediately afterward sickened from the disease from which she never recovered. The duchess was more superstitious than her aunt, and being convinced that the veil had brought her bad luck she left directions that it should be buried with her, notwithstanding its value. This was done, so that the tiny, cowlike lace, which had been seen in the chapel of the castle of Versailles on the day when the young Austrian archduchess had pledged her faith to the future Louis XVI, and which later on had adorned the head of the Empress Eugenie on her wedding day at Notre Dame, fulfilled its last function in covering the dead features of her niece when the latter lay in her coffin.

People in the confidence of Eugenie say that by her will Farnborough, together with the treasures which it contains, is bequeathed to Prince Victor Napoleon's son, the small boy who is heir to all the glories of the Bonapartes. The empress is very fond of this nephew by marriage, and also of his wife, the Princess Clementine of Belgium, whom she treats with motherly affection and who on her side is most attentive to the widow of Napoleon III. Thanks to her, the aged sovereign can have at times the illusion that she is not quite alone in the world, an illusion for which she is grateful, though she does not speak about it. Eugenie lives entirely in the past, so she says at least, but one may feel inclined to doubt the latter fact when one sees her play with the little princess and the tiny boy who represent the future of the Napoleonic dynasty.

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