

# AN ORDEAL OF ROYAL YOUTH

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“SERVIENDUM Laetandum”—to serve with joy all the children of the world—is the motto of the All Saints Nursery College at Pannal near Harrogate. One of its nurses had been chosen for the tiny infant, Crown Prince Peter of Yugoslavia, who spent his first birthday there. An enchanting baby, all smiles and happy gurgles, went to bed as excited as his little guests who had been treated to a gorgeous birthday cake, hugging a soft woollen rabbit, Harrogate’s gift.

When he was born, on September 6th, 1923, guns had boomed out over a vast territory, stretching from the Austrian Alps to the Grecian Seas. With indescribable enthusiasm Belgrade, the old Serbian capital of the young Yugoslav state, had welcomed the birth of an heir to the dynasty, which assured that essential element of continuity.

The Duke of York, who had been best man at the wedding of the royal parents, had travelled down to hold his father’s god-child over the baptismal font which was filled with water from all the great rivers of the Kingdom, to christen the youngest Karageorgevich, great-great grandson of the Black George who liberated Serbia from the Turkish yoke at the beginning of the last century, great-great grandson also of Queen Victoria.

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Of Peter I, who after the palace tragedy of 1903 ascended the throne of Serbia, Alexander was the second son. Twenty-four years old at the outbreak of the Balkan War, he commanded the first Serbian Army Corps, defeating the Turkish Army in three consecutive battles by his superb military strategy. But even greater glory he earned when during the Great War, after heroic resistance against the Austro-German steam-roller, the Serbian army instead of giving itself prisoner made, in the depth of winter, its epic retreat over the inaccessible Albanian mountain passes, the greatest story of the World War, which made Alexander’s name in leadership legendary throughout the Balkans. It was shortly afterwards in London that the first official pronouncement of the later Yugoslav State was made, when Alexander, receiving a British deputation, headed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord

Mayor of London and Sir Edward Carson, expressed his confidence in a final victory which would unite all the Yugo (South) Slav people in one State.

Of Ferdinand and Marie of Rumania, Princess Marie was "the odd number" as her British-born mother used to say. Among the brilliant Carol, the proud Elizabeth, beautiful Ileana and clever Nicolas, Marie was the most natural and the kindest. Her simplicity was proverbial. Carol once summed it up tellingly: "as for Mignon (as she was always called) if you give her a piece of India rubber and an old pencil, she will be quite content." The happiest time of her life was spent at Heatsfield College in England, until the war tore her away to nurse her country's wounded soldiers. From sunlit English lawns to contagious Balkan hospitals, such was the grim reality of a Queen's girlhood.

When Take Jonsescu, the Rumanian statesman, suggested to King Ferdinand the desirability of a closer union with Yugoslavia, he was told by a royal father, who was far too human to allow politics to interfere with the peace of mind of his favourite daughter, to consult her himself and to abide by her decision. Jonsescu went to see the Princess, but the astute diplomat did not speak about the Balkan Pact or Lloyd George's policy, not even about the King of Yugoslavia. He talked of a solitary young man in his palace in Belgrade, with no father or mother, no brothers or sisters, no wife. "Let him come to Sinaia for Christmas; he must feel lonely on such a day," said Princess Mignon.

Hence a young king travelled to Sinaia in the hallowed season of the Magi, offering as his present three kingdoms and happiness. They went out for a walk, she and Poor Sandro, as she called him, under the snow-topped trees of the vast forest, which saw the birth of an ideal love match. They were married in Belgrade amidst scenes of great popular rejoicing, in June 1922, and with three sons their union was blessed: Peter, the first born carrying a Serbian name; Tomislav, after the Croat hero; and Andrew, named after the Slovene patron saint.

Such was the background of young Peter: a great and brave father, a kind and generous mother.

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In a nursery designed and run along English lines, a Yorkshire nurse—Miss Crowther from Bradford—and a Scottish governess—Miss Marr of Glasgow—looked after his well-being. Court officials, though, shook their wise grey heads against the folly of leaving the windows of the pleasant white walled bedroom open even in winter, an unheard-of barbarity to Balkan minds.

In the shops of Belgrade his first favourite photograph began to appear, in traditional Serbian costume, his little fur cap tilted rakishly aside. Onlookers, thinking about the young prince, imagined how happy he must be, indulgently treated by his parents and teachers. But little did they know that there was hardly another boy of his age to be found whose life was prepared with more rigorous discipline.

When the young prince set out on his first four years of ordinary primary school training, the King told the masters, whom he had chosen from various provinces of his kingdom, that Peter had to work like all other boys, that there was to be no exception in his favour. The only exception, in fact, was his supplementary work. He spoke already English with his mother, and of course Serb-Croat with his father, for whom books were his chief hobby and who delighted to let his son learn his tongue from precious old parchments. He had to commence French, German and Russian as early as was feasible, and to be especially versed in national history and geography.

Privately educated in a small schoolroom in the thatched cottage within the palace grounds, the prince passed all his examinations in a public college; his marks were given irrespective of his exalted position, and had to be genuinely earned. For above his bed hung his father's motto, written in the King's own hand: "A prince must work as hard as any other boy."

With the basis of a sound national education laid, Alexander desired to send his son to England, to enter a preparatory school for some years. He wanted his boy to become "a good mixer", as he used to confide to Sir Neville Henderson, the British Minister at Belgrade (now ambassador at Berlin) and a great personal friend of his. He complained that none of the prince's comrades ever pulled his hair or boxed his ears. Thus in September 1934 a dark, good looking boy in flannel suit, shorts and bare knees, arrived at Victoria Station. He was the heir to the throne of Yugoslavia, accompanied by his English tutor, tall, athletic sunburned Mr. Parrott—a former master at Edinburgh Academy. They stayed at a London hotel, doing their morning constitucionals in the park, exploring the sights without anyone knowing of their identity. A few weeks later Peter entered one of the most exclusive preparatory schools in England: Sandroyd School, at Cobham in Surrey.

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Three weeks later, in the afternoon of the 9th of October, fell the shots which reverberated throughout the entire world with an echo not heard since those other fatal shots at Serajevo, twenty

years before. This time a terrorist's bullet assassinated the King of Yugoslavia, perhaps the last monarch in Europe who may be said to have been truly King in the old tradition of kingship. Only a few minutes before he had landed at Marseilles for a state visit to his French ally, whose Foreign Minister succumbed by his side.

At the time of the crime the august victim's little son was playing on a Surrey playing field. Happy and cheerful, he had put away his books at the close of that afternoon, little suspecting that when his class should reassemble the next morning his desk would be empty, because overnight its occupant had become King. A news agency telephoned at six in the afternoon the tragic news to a thunderstruck headmaster, who wisely decided not to tell the boy yet. But Scotland Yard's special branch at once threw a rigid cordon round the peaceful school where Europe's new monarch, still unaware of his tragic destiny, slept his last untroubled sleep on English soil.

He was awakened at the usual hour the next morning, and told that he was going to London. The police around the large motor car did not surprise him; he had been accustomed to large motor cars and to police cordons all his young life. In the car, which shot with the fastest possible speed across adverse traffic lights, so that the occupants would not notice the sensational news placards, his tutor told him that his father had met with a serious accident. "Ah, I know, a motor accident," Peter remarked, and Mr. Parrott left it at that; it seemed a good explanation for the time being.

Queen Marie of Rumania, waited for him in London. Together they went to Victoria Station. There a vast crowd of silent onlookers saw a pathetically small boy in a grey overcoat and a brown felt hat, holding tightly to the hand of his grandmother. He looked rather puzzled when grave-faced men in black bowed deeply to him, as, standing on tip-toe he helped with his hand under her arm his grandmother into the train. "Poor little chap," said a man aloud, when his school tuck box was solemnly carried behind Europe's youngest monarch. It was the only sound in that vast station, under that dim roof, solemn this moment as if it were a cathedral.

Another cordon of police rigidly excluded the public as the royal party boarded the cross-channel steamer "Coté d'Azure" at Dover. Peter seemed bewildered when his grandmother told him to have a last look at "that lovely country"—England. But, still unaware of the deepness of the tragedy, he soon chatted cheerfully to the captain on the bridge, and his eyes lit up with boyish

glee when he saw the dark blue royal train, a luxury flat on wheels, waiting for him at the Calais quayside.

It was in Paris, on Yugoslav territory, in the residence of the Minister at Thiers Square, that his mother met him to reveal the whole dreadful truth. They were alone together for half an hour. The Queen broke down completely, for the first time since her terrible ordeal, and hugged her first born in her arms.... "Petrushka, what will they do to you next?"...she sobbed... "Mamma, but *why* did they do it, *why*?" asked the boy again and again.

Dazed, he left his mother's room. When an officer in the corridor addressed him as "Majesty", he looked round and mechanically answered "His Majesty is not here". At lunch a courtier showed him to the head of the table, to take precedence over the two Queen-Consorts, his mother and grandmother. He looked at his place with dimming eyes, and suddenly realizing the significance cried out appealingly "Mother, I cannot be a King, I am far too young".

At Ljubljana, the Slovene capital, which the Orient Express reaches shortly after crossing the Yugoslav frontier, the Mayor offered his young Sovereign the traditional bread and salt of welcome. In Belgrade all the dignitaries of state had foregathered at the station. Old generals, veterans of many wars, were in tears when they saw their eleven-year old King descend from his saloon carriage. Slowly he passed the guard of honour. "God bless you, Heroes", said the small voice, "God bless your Majesty" was the soldiers' response. A smile came over his grave face when, on leaving the station, he found tens of thousands lining his three mile route to the place roaring their "Zhivios" to their new monarch, the royal orphan of the nation. But at the palace the young King forgot all ceremonial, he raced up the grand staircase where he had seen his small brothers, and falling over the last step, he hugged them consolingly to his tear stained face.

The funeral of his father was the greatest demonstration the Balkans had ever seen. The young king in the uniform of the Sokols—the Yugoslav Gymnasts Association—a brown coatie slung over a crimson silk shirt, his red and black cap with the brown cock's plume leaving a dark fringe of hair falling over his pale forehead, walked slowly and collectedly past the row of field marshals and generals, towering above him with their hand at the salute, down the long line of glittering gold-laced diplomats bowing to his tiny form. He took the salute, standing alone beside his father's coffin which he accompanied to Oplenats, that sacred spot where the founder of his dynasty first raised the standard

of national liberation, and saw his father laid to rest in that mausoleum dedicated to Saint George, which his grandfather had built and which his father had adorned with the most precious frescoes from the Serbian monasteries of the Middle Ages.

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That evening Peter took possession of his father's apartments, in which nothing was to be changed; sleeping in his father's bed, working at his father's desk in the royal study, from which the wide bay windows show an uninterrupted view over the lovely wooded hills of the Choumadia.

His mother wished for his English school days to be resumed. She feared that he might grow up amidst intrigue and flatteries and crushing court formalities; she desired him to have some memory of boyhood to look back on. It was also Peter's own dearest wish. He often talked about his all too brief English school days, questioning visitors from England eagerly. When Lord Dickinson's sister, who lives in Belgrade, heard that the King was sad because his Sandroyd chums had not yet written to him, she passed it on to a great-nephew at the same school, and their communal Christmas letter kindled cherished memories.

Though his uncle, Prince Paul, was prepared to support a temporary return to England, the other regents objected against the dangerous constitutional precedent of absentee Kingship. The King, though young, was already the symbol of the nation; his place was in the bosom of his people. Apart from strong popular feeling, even the constitution forbade the King to be abroad for more than very brief visits.

Thus young King Peter settled down to life in Belgrade. As he grew older, the routine of his days changed. He now rises at seven and says his prayers. Breakfasting on tea and marmalade, instead of on Belgrade's usual coffee and rolls, is a taste acquired in England. Then he goes riding on Susie, his favourite pony. At eight-thirty his lessons begin, whenever possible in the open air. There are four lessons of forty minutes each, a short recreation and a concluding lesson of seventy minutes, all given by teachers of the Belgrade lycees, as he is following their curriculum. Professor Zhivanovich supervises his studies, whereas Senator Givanovich is his Governor at Large.

A vegetable and fruit luncheon is served at one. Then he reads in his father's study: songs and stories of his own country; Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson and Mark Twain as English favourites, La Fontaine and Daudet in French, Tourgenieff in Russian. At four he takes tea with his family. At five he has



an hour's gymnastics with fifteen other lyceens, drawn from all classes. At seven he dines with the Queen, to spend the rest of the evening with her: listening to a concert or to theatricals (in which he is encouraged to take part) or else watching a talkie in the place's private cinema, which can hold twenty-five guests. Recently Miss Marjorie Lockett was chosen to supply a number of English talkies, extracts from topical news reels, science and sport shorts, for the film plays as prominent a rôle in the King's education as in his leisure.

Peter has the serious looks of his father, coupled with the same simplicity of manner. As he was rather sensitive, particular care was taken to strengthen his self-reliance and to develop his physical stamina. It was not difficult to turn him into an outdoor man, as he delights to shine in sport. His playing field near the palace lies in a sun-bathed valley surrounded by steep wooded slopes. In the actual palace gardens is a large swimming pool where he swims and dives, plays water polo, and in winter skates and plays a sort of improvised ice hockey with his comrades. He likes hurdling and jumping, at which he is good, and all ball games. American boys presented him with a complete football outfit, and the Duke of Kent gave him a cricket bat as a birthday present. He is keen on cross-country running, even if the weather is far from inviting; hence the splendid impression which he made on sportsmen when he carried the Olympic flame—on its way from the temple of Zeus to the Olympic stadium at Berlin—through the streets of Belgrade.

He loves long tramps in the Alps, with his tutor, sleeping out scout-fashion in the woods. Taking up skiing last year, he complained to his cousin, Crown Prince Michael of Rumania, that his feet didn't seem to go where his legs wanted them, and that he felt like Charlie Chaplin. This summer he spent his first camp alone with his friends on the shore of Lake Bled, spending the rest of his holiday in the Dalmatian castle of Milocher, between the sun-baked white rocks and the dazzling blue water of the Adriatic. He is a keen trout fisher, who throws a pretty fly, with the ability to improve on his fishing story every time he tells it, which does credit to the simple fishermen who have taught him his prowess, both of facts and of fancy.

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Intelligent and studious, he plies his teachers with questions of often philosophical profundity.

Once talking to his great-aunt, the Infanta Beatrice, he asked what revolution was. "When people go mad," came the easy

explanation. "Was it not during a revolution that Spain sent King Alfonso away?" came his further query. Rather flushed, the Infanta repeated "I told you, Peter dear, the people went mad." Peter considered this for some little while, to remark finally: "Well, it seems to me that if people drive away a King, he must have done something that he should not have done."

Though he is very musical—he remembers a tune easily—and a gifted artist, with a great sense of perspective and harmony of colour as the Christmas cards show, which he paints himself for his relatives, his trend undoubtedly is towards mechanics. As a very young boy, he delighted his father by repairing a bell before the electrician, who was summoned, could appear. He constructed his own radio and aerial, getting all European stations. General Goering—who spent his honeymoon in Yugoslavia—presented the King with a magnificent model electric train, capable of seating child passengers, with twenty stations, hundreds of signals, points, switch lines and several bridges and tunnels. He has also a model electric launch, in which he pilots his brothers and their pet dogs across the artificial lake at Dedinje Palace. When he boards a ship, his first visit is invariably to the engine room.

Recently he has developed a new airmindedness, and spends hours examining model aeroplanes. It was his own idea to present a Cup as a permanent trophy for an annual international competition of model aeroplanes, which will be contested for the first time in England this year.

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Being of an economical turn of mind—he is very careful with his clothes in case his younger brother may have to wear them when he has outgrown them—he recently wanted to start earning money. "To give away," he said. A carpenter's shop was installed in the palace, and the King told the master carpenter that he had to teach him to turn out "good stuff" because he wanted to get a decent price "notwithstanding bad times". The Queen allows their sale to privileged friends.

As the years go on and he grows older, his Christmas lists throw an interesting side light on the development of his character. In 1933, just back from England, he asked for a membership of the Junior Book Club; in 1934 for his own aeroplane, or if this was too expensive, a motor bike. In 1937 a trip through Yugoslavia "so that I may get to know all parts of my country". When the Newcastle branch of the British Legion presented him last year with photographs of the graves of Yugoslav soldiers who



died in 1918 in that city, punctual Peter insisted that the relatives of these soldiers should be traced, so that the photographs might be passed on.

With her sons the Queen Mother always speaks English. Playing with her boys, sitting on the floor of the nursery, she learned to overcome her great grief, for she and her murdered husband had lived an ideally happy married life. Peter conducts himself as the protector and mediator of his brothers, of whom he is very fond. One day the two younger boys, who were playing in the palace garden, suddenly came running to their mother, with excited flushed faces, and said that they had just heard their father. The Queen gently asked them what they meant. "Mother, we have both clearly heard someone riding on horseback underground. It must be father, riding from his grave to meet us." The Queen was much upset by this curious fantasy and began to weep, pressing the children to her heart. Thus Peter found them, and has since asked his brothers not to mention their father again in the presence of their mother, although they often talk of him among themselves.

Crown Prince Tomislav is the *enfant terrible* of the royal family. His father one day caught him disputing with street urchins through the palace railing who could spit farthest. It is said that pious Serbs when praying for "good King Peter" add "and may God be kind to his naughty brother". At a public function suppressed titters revealed his Royal Highness the Crown Prince following his mother with exaggerated strides, apparently trying to see how near he could come to treading on the Queen's train without actually doing so. Travelling incognito as Countess of Avala, the Queen brought her *gamin* last January to Sandroyd School, and he may later go to Eton, following the footsteps of his uncle, Prince Nicholas of Rumania.

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Until Peter II reaches his majority—on September 6th, 1941,—a Regency Council headed by Prince Paul is discharging in his name his constitutional duties.

Serb of the purest race, Prince Paul's character is blended by an early education in Petersburg, long residence in France and English University training—he was an undergraduate at Christ Church in Oxford. Of a distinguished modesty he always had the close confidence of his cousin, the late King, who in his will nominated him not only as Senior Regent but also as sole executor of his vast estate. He had been a favourite too of Alexander's father,

King Peter I, whose love of literature and liberal leanings made him translate John Stuart Mill into Serbian. At the house of his mother's sister, the Princess de San Donato at Florence, Prince Paul frequently met the famous historian Guglielmo Ferrero, with whom he discussed sociological questions.

There are two sides to the Serb character: one impetuous, generous and brave; the other sensitive and poetic. King Alexander reverted to the first, Prince Paul and Alexander's son are more the expression of the latter. Married to a sister of Princess Marina—both his boys were born at White Lodge in Richmond Park—it was at their villa on Lake Bohinj that the Duke of Kent first met his bride. Ever since that event the Slovene peasantry take a deep proprietary pride in the British Ducal couple!

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King Peter as yet seldom appears publicly, unless it be a "slava" (the traditional Serbian celebration of a patron saint's feast day) of his Brigade of Guards. Visiting heads of state bestow their grand crosses on him, and he gets telegrams from all his brother Sovereigns on his birthday. He acts already as godfather to every tenth child born in one family. And once a year the new army recruits solemnly swear allegiance to him, with hands raised aloft.

At last year's Christmas celebration—which is always thirteen days later in the Orthodox calendar than in the Western Church—the ceremony of the yule log was revived. Along the winding palace road appeared a procession of guardsmen. When they stopped at the palace door, the King threw the traditional measure of wheat and maize over them before receiving from their hands the tree cut in the neighbouring forest. He nearly let the heavy log fall, flushed deeply, then pulled it bravely up to his chest to carry it unaided to the fireplace, where a blinding host of sparks flew up as he threw it on the fire, good omen for peace and prosperity.

From the battered bastions of the Kalemegdan fortress, underneath which walls the Romans and the Huns, the Turks and the Magyars fought their battles throughout the centuries of history, one has a marvellous view of modern Belgrade, grown within a generation from an unseemly peasant town to a modern European capital. Along the liquid silver ribbons of Danube and Sava its myriads of lights form a glittering diadem embedded in the deep velvet of the wooded hills, with the white expanse of the royal palace on the top of Dedinje as its crowning jewel.

By ten o'clock every evening the windows grow dim, the palace becomes silent, for the young King has retired to his room where his father's great equestrian portrait watches over the sleep of the son, who inherited a vast kingdom of fifteen million subjects. Yugoslavs, looking up to the palace under the starlit clarity of a southern night, muse that Peter II probably dreams, not of problems of state yet, but about a piece of work left unfinished in his workshop. But deeply attached to patriarchal traditions, they rightly consider the family circle in which their boy King is prepared for his great calling to be the most solid basis for the future security and prosperity of the State.