

THE PRESIDENT OF TIGROSYLVANIA: A STORY

BY SIR SIDNEY LOW

THE International Council rose after a long morning sitting, and the hungry diplomatists scattered for *déjeuner*. They drove as a rule to the best and most expensive restaurants, for they were in Paris at the cost of their respective governments, and had no occasion to economize. But the two delegates of the new Republic of Tigrosylvania made their way on foot to the modest hotel where they lodged, and they sat down to luncheon in the unassuming apartment which served for their salon, their dining room, and their bureau.

The republic could not afford to house its envoys luxuriously. It was so small and so poor that it could scarcely have sent its representatives to Paris if their charges had not been defrayed from other sources than the National Exchequer. It was understood that Mr. Chirsky, the senior delegate, had patriotically undertaken to bear the cost of the mission himself. This statesman had quitted his native valleys early in life, and had migrated, like many of the other ingenuous youth of Tigrosylvania, to the United States, where, to a certain extent, he had 'made good.' It was not, however, from his own somewhat limited banking account that the moderate allowance of the delegation was drawn. For reasons which will presently appear an American financial group was interested in the affairs of Tigrosylvania, and it had provided Mr. Chirsky and his colleague Sathas with the means, adequate though not excessive, to lay the case of the latest

claimant for self-determination and frontier rectification before the Council of the Nations.

The two delegates ate their breakfast despondently, and lighted their cigarettes in gloom. Their cause was not prospering; they had obviously failed to impress the great men of the Convention who could decide the destinies of their country, and of many other countries. Tigrosylvania wanted its independence of the now disrupted Empire of Ausonia recognized, and that point the Council was negligently disposed to concede. A republic more or less—what did it matter? But Tigrosylvania had something further to ask. Its fiery little soul was set on annexing, from the neighboring, and likewise new-minted, republic of Latygia, the district of Gambrene. Why, exactly, it hungered and thirsted after this barren tract of mountain and woodland the politicians of Korianyi, the capital, had not convincingly explained to the treaty makers of the West.

But the shepherds and husbandmen of Tigrosylvania had been yearning after Gambrene for a matter of seven centuries. It was the cradle of the race, the home of the ancient native dynasty which had once reigned gloriously over Tigrosylvania and all the adjacent lands, the scene of the final struggle for freedom, and of that grim 'Battle of the Ravens' in which the last king, with all his heroic chivalry, had fallen overwhelmed by numbers. On winter nights, in the great rambling farmhouse kitchens,

while the beech logs glowed and crackled on the hearth, the mountaineers sang the fierce old battle song, and drank to the memory of King Arvan and his knights. There were several active political parties in Koranyi with varied and ambitious programmes, which were for the most part unintelligible to the peasants and sheep farmers; but all had inscribed 'Restitution of Gambrene' on their banners, for they knew that the electors of the glens and uplands would understand *that*.

Mr. Chirsky and his New York friends had, however, an interest which was not wholly sentimental in Gambrene. This was, as I have said, a poor and rugged tract; but there lay a buried treasure under its gaunt bosom. Certain American mining engineers, traveling through from the Ausonian copper fields, had located a rich deposit of quicksilver in the mountains of Gambrene. Quiet investigation had been made, and there was reason to believe that the mines, if thoroughly developed, would prove to be of exceptional, perhaps of unique, value, promising a fortune, indeed, for those who should be lucky enough to exploit them. The American syndicate proposed to do the exploiting; and it was Chirsky's mission, first to see that Gambrene was duly annexed to Tigrosylvania, and then to secure from the new government an exclusive concession for his clients to work the quicksilver mines. His own reward, if his efforts proved successful, was to be liberal; so liberal that he sometimes caught himself speculating whether he would buy an estate and build a castle in the land of his nativity, or content himself with a mansion and three motor cars in the land of his adoption. But everything depended on the recognition of the Tigrosylvanian claim to Gambrene by the

Great Powers; and the Great Powers were showing themselves indifferent, not to say bored.

'The fact is,' Sathas remarked sadly to his partner, 'they don't know who we are; most of them have never heard of us.'

'That is so,' replied Chirsky. 'Only to-day that young fop of an Italian attaché, the fellow with a single eyeglass, whispered to Lord What's-his-name, the Englishman, "Where the deuce is Tigrosylvania?" And the Briton answered, "I have n't an idea. But is n't it the place where Gartona comes from?"'

'Yes,' said Sathas bitterly, 'that is all they know of us. We are the country of Gartona.'

It was, of course, true. Nobody had heard of Tigrosylvania. But everybody had heard of Felix Gartona, the supreme singer with the voice of gold, whose fame resounded through the hemispheres. He was a magnificent personality as well as a divinely gifted artist, handsome, versatile, accomplished, magnetic, who lived and moved about the earth in an atmosphere of brilliancy and success. Wherever he went he was sure of a regal welcome; and he was as much the idol of the crowd in Buenos Ayres and Cairo as in New York, Paris, London, and Madrid. Society adored him no less than the multitude; for he was a great gentleman besides being a great artist, a sportsman, a scholar, a virtuoso, a critic, a man of fashion. Kings and presidents and prime ministers were proud of his friendship, several princesses and duchesses were understood to have laid their hearts at his feet, and, when he chose to entertain, the best people in Europe and America were his guests for the asking.

He knew so much of so many countries that he had almost forgotten

his own. He had not visited it since he had left, a boy of sixteen, to begin his marvelous ascent to fortune and celebrity; and for over thirty years it had scarcely entered his thoughts. The existing generation of Tigrosylvanians had never seen him or heard his voice, for there was no opera in Koranyi. But they were extremely proud of Gartona. They recognized that he had conferred exalted honor upon the country, and had indeed acted as a resplendent advertisement for it. But for him many would never have heard its name. As it was, when men in clubs and smoking rooms disputed over Gartona's origin, whether he was an Italian, a Slav, a Hungarian, and so forth, some knowing person would exclaim triumphantly: 'No; you are all wrong. I happen to know that he is a Tigrosylvanian.' And it was odds but that somebody, like the diplomatist at the conference, would burst out with: 'And where the deuce, then, is Tigrosylvania?'

Of these things the astute Chirsky was well aware. He looked at his colleague in silence for a moment, and then spoke with emphasis.

'There is only one chance for us; we must play the Gartona card.'

'What do you mean?' asked Sathas.

'It is very plain; Gartona must be our president. The Provisional Government must commission us to lay the invitation before him. He is in Paris now. I shall wire to Koranyi at once.'

'You don't suppose he will accept,' said Sathas doubtfully.

'See here, sonny,' said Chirsky, relapsing into the American tongue, 'he's got to accept. I'm going to have him doing the patriotic stunt in Koranyi inside the next ten days. When the newspapers and the Allied Council hear of him as president I guess they will

begin to sit up and take notice of little old Tigrosylvania.'

It was a sagacious estimate of enlightened public opinion. When it was announced that Gartona had appeared in Koranyi, had entered the city amid a scene of indescribable enthusiasm and had been immediately and unanimously elected president by the National Convention, the new republic assumed a fresh and vivid interest in the eyes of the civilized world. The President's Inaugural Proclamation, thoughtfully handed to the news agencies in an admirable French and English translation by the Tigrosylvanian delegates, was printed by the most influential newspapers in Europe, and cabled *in extenso* by several American correspondents.

The journalists were particularly touched by the eloquent passage in which President Gartona asked for reunion with the fragment of Tigrosylvania Irredenta consecrated by such imperishable memories. This fine piece of patriotic rhetoric, backed by the romantic personality of the great tenor, found a ready response everywhere. Editors and leader writers looked up Tigrosylvania in the *Encyclopædia*, and published articles, bristling with facts and statistics, proving that there could be no guaranty of stable peace in Europe unless the legitimate claims of Tigrosylvania were satisfied. Resolutions to the same effect were moved in the American Senate; and several members of the English Labor Party telegraphed to President Gartona that they were contemplating direct action to compel the reactionary capitalist government of their country to support the aspirations of the republic.

The name and fame of Gartona caused the little state to be on every-

body's lips. Maurice Barrès wrote some delicious prose on *L'âme Tigrosylvanienne*; Maeterlinck was rumored to be contemplating a mystical drama called *La Princesse de Tigrosylvanie*; Sir Sidney Lee lectured on 'Tigrosylvanian Influences on Shakespeare and King Edward the Seventh,' and Sir Israel Gollancz called a special session of the British Academy to establish a Professorship of Tigrosylvanian in the University of London; Mr. Le Queux's novel, *The Yellow Hand in Tigrosylvania*, was announced; and Lieutenant-Colonel John Buchan's publishers allowed it to be known that the new (and ninth) sequel to *Greenmantle* would be found to have a Tigrosylvanian background. In fact, as Mr. Chirsky remarked to his typist, a young compatriot he had brought with him from New York, Tigrosylvanian stock was just rocketing.

All this had its reflex on the Great Council of the Nations. The Big Seven (or whatever the exact number was) decided that the Tigrosylvanian question could no longer be deferred, and arranged a speedy settlement. The independence of the republic was recognized, amid a shower of congratulatory telegrams to the president from monarchs, ministers, and musicians; and Gambrene was declared an integral and inseparable part of the territory of the new state. The Latygian envoys, and a young gentleman from Oxford, who had been the expert of the Allied Council on this subject, and had presented it with an elaborate memorandum showing conclusively that the whole economic and strategic situation in Europe would be jeopardized by the proposed transfer, were annoyed. Everybody else was pleased; especially Mr. Chirsky, who sent a cautiously worded but jubilant dispatch to his American employers suggesting that

the time to mobilize their financial forces was at hand.

Six weeks later, as President Gar-tona sat in his study at the Executive Mansion in Koranyi, he was conscious of a distinct sense of *ennui*. The excitement of playing a leading part on the great stage of affairs had buoyed him up for a time, and for the first month he had been really amused by the new game and by his own rôle of ruler and nation builder. But the novelty had worn off, and the great singer faced with dismay a routine of dull business transacted amid thoroughly uncongenial surroundings. There was no more diplomacy to be done, and the internal politics of Tigrosylvania did not seem worth the trouble of understanding. What on earth did he care whether the United Democrats or the Intermediate Socialists formed a ministry, or whether an import duty was levied on potatoes or on pigs? Was he to pass his life confabulating with the voluble agitators and unshaven land owners who were the party leaders in Koranyi? He looked out of his window on the cobbled street, the shabby shops, and the mean little *Grand Hôtel de l'Europe*, and he sighed for Pall Mall and the Place Vendôme and the light and glitter and scents and sounds of the brilliant capitals which knew him so well. He remembered that but for the summons of Tigrosylvanian patriotism he would by this time have signed a contract to appear in the biggest series of operatic productions ever projected in New York, at the largest salary ever paid to any artist, except, of course, Charlie Chaplin.

A servant brought His Excellency the latest batch of foreign journals. His Excellency, from old habit, passed over the political articles, and turned mechanically to the musical and dramatic columns. There was a full ac-

count of a new opera in Paris, with enthusiastic praise for a young Italian tenor of the highest promise. 'He seems destined,' wrote one judicious critic, 'to console us for the retirement of the incomparable Gartona, who has dedicated his genius to the cause of his romantic country. Signor —, it is true, lacks Gartona's experience, and his consummate mastery of all the technical resources of his art. But his voice is not perhaps inferior even to Gartona's in purity and compass; and there is a freshness.'

His Excellency threw down the paper with a red spot on his olive cheek. Then he summoned his private secretary, an intelligent young man who had been his guide and confidential adviser during the past agitated weeks.

'Michael,' he said abruptly, 'I am going to resign.'

The secretary gazed at him in astonishment. 'Resign, Excellency!' he said. 'But why? Is not everything going well? Do not all parties give you the most loyal support?'

'To the devil with your parties and your loyalties!' burst out the irritated potentate. 'I must go! I cannot stand this God-forsaken hole any longer. Do you wish me to die of boredom?'

'Assuredly not, Excellency. But I had thought that the consciousness of your high mission —'

'My mission,' said the *Maestro* with a glance toward the journal on his table, 'my mission is — elsewhere. I have had enough of playing with this box of toys. My world, the great world, the world where I am truly a king, is calling me. Come, Michael,' and he laid his hand on the young man's shoulder, 'you are a good lad, and all this business of Tigrosylvaania's destiny is real enough to you, I know, and to some others. Well, I have done my part; I have made them aware of our country, and given it a start in life.

Now you must manage without me and let me get away. How can that be arranged with the least trouble? You must find me the proper excuse.'

The secretary pondered.

'It would perhaps be best to have another revolution. The attachment to Your Excellency's person is profound. But Your Excellency's Prime Minister is unpopular.'

'I am not surprised,' said the president. 'The old ruffian's manner cannot be called ingratiating.'

'There would be no difficulty,' continued the secretary, 'in effecting a combination of the Possibilists and the Central Conservatives which would carry a vote of censure on the Cabinet in the Chamber. A demonstration could then be organized which would demand a revision of the constitution. It would be easy and comparatively cheap. I presume Your Excellency is prepared to go to some small expense in the matter?'

'Anything you want in reason, Michael. But there must be no bloodshed or open disorder.'

'There would be none. But if Your Excellency persists in your regrettable decision these incidents would enable you to retire with dignity. Without any expression of resentment or chagrin you would point out that you feel your career of usefulness in Tigrosylvaania is closed, and that the new system should come into operation under a new chief.'

'Settle it as you please, my good Michael,' said the president; 'I will leave it to you. But remember — no bloodshed; and don't spend more than you can help. This confounded presidency has cost me already more than it would take to bring out a couple of unsuccessful new operas in the middle of August.'

Mr. Chirsky, who was still engaged

in winding up the affairs of the Tigrosylvanian Delegation, called on the ex-president soon after his arrival in Paris to offer respectful condolences on the premature ending of his reign. But Gartona was quite cheerful.

'Don't apologize, my dear Chirsky,' he said. 'I do not regret my experiences in the presidential chair. It was tiresome while it lasted, and I am glad it is over; but it will be quite an interesting reminiscence.'

'You have the satisfaction, at least, sir,' said Chirsky, 'of having conferred lasting benefit upon the country we both so deeply love.'

'Poor little Tigrosylvania! Yes, I hope I was of some use. And by the way, Chirsky, I was able to do another service to our somewhat impecunious Fatherland just before I resigned. I don't suppose you know it, but there are rich quicksilver deposits in Gambrene. The agents of an influential English financial syndicate made us

Land and Water

an offer; and ten days ago I signed the concession for them to work the mines for fifty years.'

'You signed the concession!' gasped Chirsky.

'Yes; and I took the precaution to see that the agreement was properly endorsed by the late Cabinet, and submitted to the Allied Economic Council, so that it cannot be annulled. I did not want Tigrosylvania to lose the very handsome royalty which these Englishmen have agreed to pay to the state. Must you go? You are not looking well; working too hard, perhaps. Politics is such a worrying business! If you are in New York next winter come and see me at the Opera. Very likely most people will have forgotten by that time that I was ever president of Tigrosylvania; but I dare say you will remember it.'

'I daresay I shall,' muttered the disconsolate Chirsky to himself as he stumbled out of the room.

THE AMERICAN CRITIC

BY VINCENT O'SULLIVAN

THE tendency is to depreciate the critic. How many epigrams in all lands have been broken over his back! He is not recognized generally as an artist; your Jules Lemaitre or Saintsbury is put on a level with the drudge who 'reviews' ten books at ten lines to each on the same day. Yet good criticism is among the rare things of art. It would take time to number all the qualities which go to make a good critic. In every generation you will find about one first-rate critic for six excellent poets and a dozen respectable novelists.

In the United States at present there is a vast deal of what may be called academic criticism. Considerable knowledge is often at the base of it; it is not eccentric, it is well behaved, it is prudent, it is the output of a citizen who has a reputation for decorum to keep up, it is written and punctuated carefully, and published luxuriously. It is not easily to be distinguished from a mass of the same kind of writing published in other lands. The worst thing about it is that it is vacuous by dint of respectability. Its bland impersonal presentations, sometimes haughty, urbane at times, often irritable, and always dogmatic, have absolutely no effect on the poets and novelists of the United States. Some of them may read it, some of them may even believe in it. But influence them it does not. It could n't. It is too lifeless.

Among all this criticism there is one critic. His name is H. L. Mencken. He may provoke animosity, he may

rouse protestations even vehement, but he is read, he is attended to. With foundations perhaps solidier than any solemn professor of them all, he is not solemn. He is not bored: whether or not he approves of the American welter, it does not bore him. He attacks his material with gusto. A criticism by him is as absorbing as a well-planned short story. Just as much art goes to it. Besides, he is genuinely American — only out of the states could just that accent, that way of looking at things, come. Such weeklies as the *New Republic* and some of the other critical papers published in America have nothing specifically American about them. They might be the work of the staff of the London *Spectator* or *Nation* transported to America and set to writing on American topics. But Mr. Mencken does not derive from England or from anywhere else but the U.S.A. He is as peculiarly American as pumpkin pie or a Riker-Hegeman drug store. In this sense he is the first American critic, except Poe. For Lowell, E. P. Whipple, W. C. Brownell, and so many others, what are they, after all, but products of European, and chiefly English, culture, who have continued the European tests on the American body, even as Henry James did so mistakenly?

Mr. Mencken tests America by America. To say truth, he treats Columbia rather rough. He takes liberties with her. Oh, Lord, yes, he takes all the liberties in the world. Her house is his own, you see. If he