



Princess Achille Murat (Miss Catherine Daingerfield Willis.)

AN AMERICAN PRINCESS.

THE HISTORIC ROMANCE OF THE VIRGINIA GIRL, WHO MARRIED THE SON OF THE
DETHRONED KING OF NAPLES—MME. MURAT'S LIFE IN FLORIDA AND IN
EUROPE, AND HER FRIENDSHIP WITH NAPOLEON III.

WHEN Louis Napoleon was a thin, rather shabby young man going about the world trying to make people believe that his castles in Spain would some day become veritable palaces in France, the most enthusiastic and sympathizing listener he found was the American wife of his cousin, Achille Murat. During the year she and her husband spent in London, the visionary, thin faced young Bonaparte was their constant guest. "When I

am emperor, Cousin Kate," he would say, "you shall have a chateau and everything you want in return for your kindness to me now." And she, accustomed to children's dreams, would say, "Yes! yes!" to it all, little thinking that the fairy tale would come true.

Catherine Murat was the daughter of Colonel Byrd Willis, of Willis Hall, near Fredericksburg, Virginia, and his wife Mary Lewis, the niece of General Washington. When she was fifteen she married a Scotch

gentleman named Grey. At sixteen she was a widowed mother. Before she was twenty three her father removed to Florida, where Tallahassee was then known as one of the social centers of the United States, and it was here she met Achille Murat, eldest son of the exiled King of Naples. He at once declared himself, in the fashion of that old day, as a suitor for her hand. The

wife, and his slaves, would have driven most women mad. He had a mania for cooking everything he could lay his hands on and trying to eat it. He has left a pathetic note that "alligator soup will do, but turkey buzzard is not good." Upon one occasion he induced the slaves to eat cherry tree sawdust, and nearly killed them all. Once his wife spent the day with a



Prince Achille Murat.

young widow looked at him with anything but favor. Though he was the nephew of one of the greatest emperors in history, he was also the grandson of an innkeeper, and the blood of the Murats was not considered to rival the blueness of the fair Virginian's. She shrugged her shoulders, and said that he "had no breeding." She herself was a beauty who had the manners of a queen, and who was accustomed to a queen's homage. But the prince's devotion conquered her at last, and they were married and went to their plantation home.

It was a lucky thing that beautiful Kate Murat had a sense of humor and grew to love her husband devotedly. The experiments which he tried upon himself, his

distant neighbor, and came home to see her husband, smoke begrimed, dirty, stirring clothes in a boiling kettle over a fire in the yard. He greeted her with enthusiasm.

"Oh, Kate," he said, "I have discovered a new dye, and I have made all your clothes a lovely pink!"

She found that in that witch's caldron was every gown she possessed except such as her maid had been able to hide from him. But madame did not storm. She sat down and laughed until she was exhausted.

Achille was the image of the great Napoleon, and the incongruity of his freaks was a source of continual amusement to his wife. He hated water. One day he was

showing William Wirt over his sugar plantation, when he slipped and fell into a vat of syrup. He climbed out ruefully, a mass of dripping stickiness.

"Oh, dear! Kate will make me wash!" he said disgustedly.

But eccentricities were not all of the heir to the throne of Naples. In spite of them, he was a brave, noble, and accomplished gentleman. He and his wife went to Europe for a few years, and there they made a notable addition to the family gatherings of the exiled Bonapartes. While in Belgium his likeness to the dead emperor drew old soldiers about him, and they formed a regiment which the King of Belgium was obliged to disband, as it menaced a neighboring state. There was a momentary chance that Achilles would come at least to the steps of the French throne.

They tell a story of Mme. Murat in Belgium, that one day she went with a couple of friends to ride on a particularly mettlesome horse. It ran away with her, but she would not acknowledge that her physical strength was unable to control it. She let them admire her horsemanship, and think that it was a fashion in America to ride at breakneck speed.

After their return to America Achilles studied law, and went to live in New Orleans, but he lost money in speculation and returned to Florida, to serve with distinction in the Seminole war. Through all that trying campaign his wife followed him, sharing his dangers. It is said that once he was so ill that she feared he would die, yet it was impossible even to have a light at night for fear of an attack by the Indians. She sat by him till dawn, in total darkness, putting her hand now and then before his lips to see if his breath still fluttered through them.

The prince died in 1847, and his widow settled at Tallahassee, in the quaint story and a half cottage which is pointed out to tourists today as her home. Two years later came the *coup d'état*, and Louis

Napoleon was at last on the throne, with his memory all alive for "Cousin Kate."

After the emperor's marriage she visited at the Tuileries, and the offer of the "chateau" was renewed; but Mme. Murat had a plantation and two hundred slaves in Florida, and she felt that her duty called her there. At the state dinner given in her honor, the empress absented herself that the emperor might take "Cousin Kate" on his arm and give her the seat beside him. It was said by those who thought little of Eugénie's manner as an empress that the place had never been so well filled as it was by the American princess.

Back in Florida, Mme. Murat took up the busy old life of the mistress of a great plantation, but she found time for endless outside work. It was mainly due to her exertions that Mount Vernon was preserved to the nation. Her life was a full and peaceful one until the war came and brought ruin. Her slaves looked to her for help and support, and she could not turn them away. She let them live on her plantation, selling her jewels for her livelihood, until she was reduced to her last penny. Then the kindness of the young American princess to the dreaming boy Bonaparte came back in the most approved fairy tale fashion. He had feared that she had met with reverses, and he sent her ten thousand dollars, telling her that the same sum would come as an annuity as long as she lived.

Not long after this she paid another visit to France, where she told the emperor the story of her suffering South, and asked why he had not come to its aid.

"Cousin Kate," he said, "you had my sympathy, but if I had done one thing to aid slavery, I should have had a mob in the Paris streets."

After a round of visits, Mme. Murat again returned to America, where she died the following year. The two simple graves in the old Episcopal graveyard in Tallahassee are among the few relics of royalty on this side of the world.

Elisabeth W. P. Lomax.





LOVE stayed her flight, long ages back,
When ranging down below,
And, pausing, whispered to the earth:
"Henceforth I come and go.

I come to set man's heart on fire,
To fan within the flame
That makes him yearn for deathless
things,
And win immortal fame.

I go to win him higher yet,
To make him feel the whole
Of this dull earth is not enough
To satisfy man's soul.

Love at the heart of all below
Will draw men to the height
From whence Love came, to where she
goes—
An ever upward flight."

Adeline Mary Banks.