



WESTERN
FRONT

PRINCESS ALICE'S STRANGE COURT

ONCE upon a time there was a princess. She lived in a big white house in the capital of a vast country and her father was famous throughout the world. The princess herself had been endowed with a charm and daring that was the talk of continents. Composers in other lands wrote songs in her honor, and foreign potentates bestowed upon her the jeweled tokens of their admiration. When her coming wedding to Prince Charming was heralded, the gifts rushed in from every nook of the globe, some of them fabulous, some humble, and not a few of the most glittering attended by the plain hope that the donor would be remembered in father's political reflections. No matter what their use or purpose the princess accepted them all—for one of the many pretty legends concerning her was that when it came to gifts she would take anything but a red-hot stove. Princess Alice (for that was her name) was married in the big white house and her splendor nearly eclipsed her consort, although he was exceedingly well favored in looks and descended from a royal breed that once paid the next-to-highest income taxes in the country. After a honeymoon that began at a nearby estate called Friendship, and turned into a triumphal tour of Europe, the couple returned to their native land with the intention of living happily ever after.

But, alas for the princess, the kingdom in which she lived was not really a kingdom at all but a democracy. It had ever been difficult for her trusting, innocent mind to grasp this harsh truth, which was thrust upon her with the ascendancy of another family to the white house she had occupied for nearly eight years. The princess did not conceal her displeasure. She complained about the way the First Lady was running the place and loudly derided her for the gaucherie of offering to send the former prince and princess tickets to admit them back into court for the inaugural ceremonies. The truth is, perhaps, that Alice was a wee bit spoiled—naturally enough, considering not only the presents and adulation but her own tested power. When ill she had only to issue a command to compel a Washington debutante to forego her own coming-out party in order to keep Alice company. She had immediately recognized the divine right of a Roosevelt to be President when father got only second place on the McKinley ticket, ("It offended my family sense of fitness," her memoirs explain), and forthwith had concentrated on the possibility of something happening to Mr. McKinley, whose assassination gave her a "sense of fulfillment." Besides, as her memoirs also make plain, *all* the Oyster Bay Roosevelts, with the exception of Franklin, have the fascinating qualities of people born to rule. And, democracy notwithstanding, Alice would continue to rule—she would establish her own court.

Here the fairytale ends. Alice Longworth's court was a salon, more vulgarly described in plainer Washington circles as a "social lobby," and there was nothing fairylike about the atmosphere. The little princess turned out to have an amazing vocabulary which featured such phrases as "turn on the heat," "get out the vote," and "pulling wires." She could go through motions that must have caused her consort, Nick Longworth, trained in Ohio politics, to stare with admiration. Not that she lost in glamour thereby. She had only exchanged her wide sashes and white *point d'esprit* for modern drawing room costume, put off her princess charm for the aura of a Madame



de Stael. Alice was Washington's mystery woman—nobody knew "how she *did* it"—who was supposed to have decided Senate votes on foreign affairs, tamed the rugged Borah, and virtually changed the course of congressional debate by sitting in the gallery and lifting or lowering her lorgnette. Besides, Alice was a wit, a scream—did you hear what she said about Hoover, about Coolidge?

She said that Hoover's face looked like a baby's bottom and Coolidge had been weaned on a pickle. At least her friends said she said so. Mrs. Longworth herself made no public statements. She granted no interviews. Her earthy political vocabulary did not go the rounds but her wisecracks did. When a heretical newspaper correspondent reported in a rather obscure magazine that Alice got her epigrams from her dentist who first got them from another patient, Mrs. William E. Borah, it simply wasn't believed. In a sense Alice was still princess, with thousands of subjects who would defend to the death any royalty who offered the diversion of wit and rebellion in the days of sourpuss Coolidge and Hoover. Her rebellions were sensational: she wouldn't give teas for other congressional wives. When Mrs. Coolidge received them at the White House and Alice, as wife of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, had to be received first, she held up the line of 400-odd women by arriving a half hour late. And when she remarked, loudly enough for the hostess to hear, "Now we must be bored over sandwiches and tea," the other guests were not too embarrassed to thrill to the thought that they could report, firsthand, another Alice Longworth Said.

IN ADDITION to all this, she was a Progressive. Well, anyway, she was Teddy Roosevelt's daughter and a friend of Borah's and she hated stuffed shirts, didn't she? Besides, in those days even Jack Garner could look liberal sometimes because he opposed Hoover. Of course Nick Longworth had to carry out the Hoover policies but the Longworth friends let it be known