

A True Fairy Godmother

by N. V. Khvostova, Addis-Ababa 1958



The following incident from the life of the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna took place in 1914, before the War. The Imperial Family was spending the summer in Livadia. The Empress used to like very much to take walks by herself; and for this reason, she would drive out of Livadia in an open carriage; after going a few miles she would get out of the carriage and walk on foot in the company of one of her ladies in waiting. Always modestly dressed — in a plain summer dress, sandals and without a fancy hat — she would sometimes go down to Yalta, drop by some church in order to pray unnoticed by others.

This she also did on the day about which I am now going to recount. The Empress stopped by the Autsky Church, prayed for a while and put some candles by the holy icons. In the church

there stood a group of very poorly dressed people who had come to baptize a child. The priest had already put on his vestments, but the people evidently were awaiting someone and thus he did not begin the service. The Empress had already intended to leave when the priest approached her and asked her to take the place of the terribly late godmother. The Empress kindly agreed, and taking the child in her arms she stood together with the child's father, a poor shoemaker. To the question directed to the Empress concerning how she would like the little girl to be called, she answered simply: "Alexandra". And then, in the course of the service she performed everything that is required of sponsors, i.e. together with the shoemaker she walked around the font three times, holding the child in her arms, in accord with the Church typicon.

After the baptismal ceremony, the Empress jotted down simply in the metrical book of the Autsky church: "Alexandra Romanova". In parting, she shook the hand of everyone who had come for the christening, and having asked the address of her goddaughter, she set out on foot. The next day, an imperial coach drove up to the poor house of the shoemaker, the father of the newly-baptized, which was on the outskirts of Yalta, and the lady-in-waiting who had accompanied the Empress the day before brought Shurochka (little Alexandra) an entire trousseau and for her parents a gift of 500 rubles from the Most-august godmother.





Up to the Revolution the Empress, no matter where she was living, not only remembered her goddaughter, but also took care for her and for all her many brothers and sisters, the children of the poor shoemaker. Of course, when the Revolution broke out, one can surmise that Shurochka — the Imperial goddaughter — as everyone called her, and her whole family had to suffer much on account of her father's spiritual relationship to the Russian Empress.

This is, of course, far from being the only incident told me by the eyewitness of it, my sister-in-law, who was that lady-in-waiting who had the good fortune of accompanying the Empress and being present with her at the baptism of the shoemaker's child. The Empress Alexandra Feodorovna was the incarnation of modesty and of feminine angelic goodness, and her good deeds she strove to do unnoticed by others.

Oh, how I would like to have been a mouse in the corner — to see the look on that shoemaker's face when the imperial carriage pulled up in front of his house the next day!

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