

THE SATURDAY
EVENING
POST

FOUNDED BY

Benjamin Franklin

THE DOWNFALL OF PRINCE MIKE

By ALVA JOHNSTON

Born a Romanoff at the age of thirty, America's leading impostor (New York rogues' gallery No. 63,967) has now disintegrated into an honest businessman.

PRINCE MICHAEL ROMANOFF, the leading impostor of the twentieth century, has gone to pieces. The most iridescent scapegrace of our time has disintegrated into a successful businessman. This character, who was worthy to associate with the King and the Duke on Huck Finn's raft, today owns and operates Romanoff's Restaurant at 326 North Rodeo Drive, Beverly Hills, California.

Mike, now fifty-three years old, was the cousin of the late Czar Nicholas. He was the morganatic son of Czar Alexander III. He was the man who killed Rasputin and the son of the man who killed Rasputin. He was Prince Obolensky, Count Gladstone and Count de Rochemonde; Captain Dmitri, Captain Shaughnessy and Captain Chitterin; Rockwell Kent, William K. Vanderbilt and William Rockefeller. Also Prof. John William Adams, of Yale, Arthur Wellesley, Willoughby de Burke, William A. Wellington, Fleming, Brighton, Ferguson and Gerguson. The entire cast of characters has now boiled down into a restaurateur.

"Restaurateur" used to be the most abusive epithet in the prince's vocabulary. The first Hollywood exposure of the scintillating mountebank was made in 1927 by Gen. Theodor Lodijensky, an aristocratic Russian refugee who ran the Russian Eagle Restaurant in New York City and later in Hollywood. The general presented film executives, who employed the

Prince Michael Romanoff; alias Count Gladstone, Prince Obolensky, Captain Dmitri, Prof. John W. Adams, Arthur Wellesley, Willoughby de Burke, William A. Wellington.





PHOTOS BY GENE LESTER

The proprietor dines with three of his stockholders. Sad-faced Mr. Confucius, the dog who is listed in the telephone book as owner of Romanoff's Restaurant, remains disconsolate even in the presence of Bob Benchley's wit.

prince as an authority on Russia, with evidence that Mike was neither a prince nor a Russian; that he had been in jail five times in England; that he was described by the French police as a habitual perpetrator of "escroquerie," meaning "picayune fraud"; that he was known to the New York police as Harry Gerguson, of the lower East Side origin—No. 63,967 in the rogues' gallery.

The film executives called in Mike to listen to General Lodijensky's story.

The prince was amused. "I believe you're a restaurateur," he said.

The aristocratic Russian cringed as if Mike had put the brand of Cain on him. The executives squirmed. The prince dismissed them with a careless flip of his hand—a characteristic Romanoff gesture said to have originated in Peter the Great's habit of throwing beef bones over his shoulder at state banquets.

Mike became a scourge of restaurateurs when he was born into the Romanoff family at the age of thirty years. He has probably had more champagne and pheasant on bad checks than any other living man. He has been "in residence," as he calls it, on bad-check charges in Paris, Cannes, Grasse, New York, Cambridge, Kansas City, Salt Lake City, Los Angeles and many other places.

During his palmy days, the prince sold hand-painted old masters for Fifth Avenue dealers. He spent several months in the Tombs after pocketing the proceeds of a sale of art for H. Michaelyan. The dealer said later that nothing had ever hurt him like prosecuting the prince.

"He is one of the most remarkable men alive," said Michaelyan. "I believe his name will go down in history. Maybe mine will go down in history with him."

Michaelyan is a disappointed man. He has little chance of going down the ages with a restaurateur. Others who hoped for an honorable mention in the Romanoff epic have the same complaint.

There are extenuating circumstances. Mike grosses more than \$25,000 a month. He has more celebrities in his restaurant than his adopted ancestors ever had in their palaces. Nevertheless, there is a tragic side to it. It is like Casanova's sad end as a respectable librarian or Micawber's finish as a prosperous judge.

A few years ago, when his life was one exposure after another, Mike used to say that he was a social barometer—that only the phonies and upstarts couldn't afford to be seen with him. Today he is a sort of barometer of sycophancy—social climbers feel they have made the grade when they receive a curt nod or a few gruff words from the illustrious publican.

His list of backers is perhaps the most glittering catalogue of big names that ever supported a small enterprise.

Most of the backers, however, contributed only fifty dollars apiece—the price of one share of stock. Few of them expected a restaurant to develop out of it. They regarded it as one of Mike's scientific methods of making a touch. Many framed the certificate as a landmark in the art of dignified mooching. The biggest investors were Robert Benchley and John Hay Whitney, \$350 each; Charlie Chaplin and Rex St. Cyr, \$250 each; James Cagney, \$200.

Charlie Chaplin's interest in Mike is obvious. The character that Mike created and the little tramp that Chaplin created are practically identical twins. They have the same physique and psychology, the same resourcefulness, audacity, nonchalance and intrepidity.



The prince, who can smell rubber from afar, is rarely victimized by checks that bounce.

The little prince has foiled the Federal authorities as frequently as the little tramp has baffled Mack Sennett policemen. The ruling motive of both was to find a place in a social system which ceaselessly threw them out.

John Hay Whitney made his investment partly because of friendship for Mike and partly because of a driving ambition to get rid of his wealth. As soon as the shares threatened to pay dividends, he gave them back to Mike in terror. So did Benchley. By gifts and purchase, Mike eventually acquired 51 per cent of the stock.

Benchley has backed Romanoff enterprises for years. For Mike's use on one of his stowaway voyages to France, Benchley wrote a To Whom it May Concern letter, enjoining the officials of all nations not to bother the prince. The letter stated that Mike had not stowed away thoughtlessly, but was engaged in important research work on the stowaway problem.

Mike is accepted in Hollywood as the top man in his line. The fact that his line is imposture doesn't matter. There is nothing wrong with imposture in the world capital of make-believe. Clark Gable is the first actor, Myron Selznick the first agent, Louella O. Parsons the first lady, W. C. Fields the first comic, Louis B. Mayer the first magnate, Mike Romanoff the first impostor. Nobody makes invidious distinctions among their fields of endeavor.

Some of the czarlet's admirers credit him with making snobbery and title worship ridiculous in America. They consider it a healthy thing that a bootleg prince from the lower East Side should make himself more famous and sought after than any of the genuine imported noblemen.

Mike sold a little more than \$6000 worth of stock and induced a capitalist to build the restaurant. Shortage of funds caused the prince to act as his own interior desecrator. He beautified the place chiefly with portraits of himself. He got most of his tableware from a five-and-ten store, traded the furniture of his apartment for a refrigerator, borrowed a few bottles of liquor, and obtained the use of \$250 for one night, so that he could make change.

The first night was big. The high spot of the evening came when a waiter presented the first bank check from a customer to the new restaurateur. The prince,



GENE LESTER

The proprietor and his home-designed coat of arms. Neither mad nor Russian, the ersatz Romanoff pays diligent attention to business, grosses \$25,000 a month.



EUROPEAN

Mine host permits himself to be greeted by a guest, movie starlet Patricia Dane. Not easily awed, Mike sometimes snubs Hollywood's greatest stars.

who has been no mean artist in passing bad checks himself, seemed stunned to find himself on the receiving end of suspicious paper. He peered at the check like a connoisseur expertizing a dubious Rembrandt. Pinching a corner of it between his thumb and forefinger, he held it up to the light and peered at it again. His eyes became unfocused and his jaws worked. It was like the fluttering of the eagle that was hit by an arrow tipped with its own feathers. Finally Mike pulled himself together, gave a brisk nod and scribbled "O.K. MR" on the check.

Mike astonished students of his career with his diligent attention to business. He is a perfect restaurateur, except that he has never learned the technique of measuring out his courtesy in exact accord with the customer's importance. After one has been an heir apparent, the difference between a star and an extra is negligible. The best tables and service go to the prince's oldest followers, whether they are riding high or not. One night a waiter hurried to inform the prince that Jack Benny, Robert Taylor and Barbara Stanwyck were waiting for a table. The waiter, fresh from New York, where many a restaurateur would pay \$1000 to get such a party into his place, expected the prince to rush up to them, bowing and scraping and making a tremendous fuss.

"The hell with 'em," said Mike.

Mike's neighborhood consisted chiefly of vacant lots when he opened his restaurant. Within a year the street was dotted with little temples of commerce. Jewelers, art dealers and smart haberdashers moved in, so that their shop windows could catch the eye of Mike's rich clientele. He doubled property values in his vicinity.

Living up to his responsibilities as a pillar of the community, the prince gave a party in his restaurant which produced \$2200 for Russian relief and another which raised \$11,000 for the Red Cross.

Mike left his restaurant last fall and went to Washington with some recipes for winning the war. During his stay in the capital, the prince tried to interest the Government in his schemes for counterpropaganda and counterespionage. His ideas were listened to, but he failed to get a war job which he had hoped for. It is difficult for the Government to deal with the prince. Mike's international status is that of an independent

nation with a population of one. He is a miniature commonwealth like Andorra or Monaco.

Mike made a tactical error in his approach to the Government. He had a library of letters of recommendation from American notables. They portray the little prince as a sainted and spotless character. It happens that supernatural virtue is not the best qualification for outwitting foreign agents and fifth columnists. If the testimonials had set forth the fact that Romanoff had fooled more people than Ignatius T. T. Lincoln or any of the other great international spies, his services might have been snapped up.

The Romanoff Riddle

MIKE gave a convincing specimen of his talent for exposing masqueraders. One of the popular figures in lively spots in Southern California was known as Lieutenant Commander Bernstein. When the man was at the height of his vogue as a war hero wounded in the Pacific, Mike said, "He's a phony."

People were shocked. They asked Romanoff how he came to say such a thing.

"I know a little about phonies," said Mike diffidently. "This man sometimes forgets to limp. Besides, his checks bounce."

A few days later the FBI arrested Bernstein for masquerading as a naval officer.

Even in his own phoniest days, Mike was considered an infallible authority on other phonies. On his first arrival in New York as Prince Michael Romanoff in 1922, he was in the midst of a large migration of Russian noblemen, genuine and otherwise. He conducted a sort of Herald's College in New York speak-easies, authenticating some of his rival princes, exposing others. At the period when princes were being imported from the Caucasus by matrimonial brokers for the heiress market, Mike was called on to appraise one shipment of them.

"They're perfectly genuine," said Mike. "Genuine Caucasian princes. Everybody in the Caucasus that owns two cows is a prince. It is a valid title, like your title of mister."

When one of his rivals died, Mike reported that the father of the deceased prince had inquired anxiously, "Do I inherit the title?"

Mike's face gives no clue to his origin. Amateur ethnologists have puzzled about it for years. He made a mistake when he stepped into the vacancy in the Romanoff dynasty, as there is no trace of the Slav in him; he would have been more plausible as the Great Mogul or the Akhoond of Swat. His eyes are black, his complexion leathery, his hair tightly crinkled and black, except for a sprinkling of gray, his nose long, straight and somewhat dented by knuckles and monogrammed by seal rings. His voice, a bassoon with an Oxford accent, throws no light on his origin. Neither does his carriage, which is the typical royal slouch, head bent forward, arms hanging well in front of the body, exactly as seen in the old newsreels of George V and Nicholas II.

The most useful key to the Romanoff mystery is held by the residents of Hillsboro, Illinois, a town of 5000 about fifty miles northeast of St. Louis. The prince arrived there in 1904 as one of a batch of New York orphans who were being settled in rural communities. Mike, then known as Harry Gerguson, was taken in charge by Judge Kronck, a St. Louis lawyer who had retired to a farm near Hillsboro. The judge sent him to a rural school. Here Mike adopted his first alias. The name of Gerguson sounded uncouth to Mike's fellow students and subjected him to ridicule. He changed it to Ferguson.

After a few months, Mike, or Harry, quit the Kronck farm and returned to Hillsboro. Here he ran errands for meals, and slept in the Presbyterian churchyard. The idea of a boy's sleeping out in the open—an unheard-of thing in Hillsboro—excited general sympathy. Family after family informally adopted the boy, but these arrangements soon broke up, both sides complaining of intolerable grievances.

For a time Mike worked as a pants presser on Main Street. This experience is thought to have been invaluable to him in later years. Mike insists that he was a student at Oxford for three years, but other authorities say that he worked there as a presser in a clothing-repair shop, while using his talent as a mimic to acquire the British upper-class manner. At Hillsboro he attended the seventh grade and is remembered for his devotion to the Frank Carpenter geography books. He read these incessantly in class and stole them from the school library in

(Continued on Page 96)

THE DOWNFALL OF PRINCE MIKE

(Continued from Page 11)

order to read them at home. Continuing these studies in later years, he became an encyclopedia of travel. Experts who attempted to trap Mike in his tales of adventure in strange places found that it was like trying to trap Baedeker's.

Mike had a characteristic dream life at Hillsboro, but he developed no fancy lineage there. The nobility had been queered with the youth of America a few years earlier by the epidemic of little Lord Fauntleroy's. The most illustrious creatures on earth in the imagination of boys of fourteen or fifteen were the congressional pages. One day Mike bade farewell to his schoolteachers and friends, saying he was on the way to Washington to accept an appointment as a congressional page. He turned up a few days later at Litchfield, ten miles from Hillsboro, where he remained until he was haled into court for punching the superintendent of schools in the nose. He was then sent back to a New York orphanage. In 1910 the Hillsboro paper announced that he had turned into the son of the late Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone.

On March 20, 1923, Harry came back to Hillsboro with a monocle, Malacca stick and Oxford accent, and delivered a platform lecture on the war. He was a British lieutenant and had another man's military papers to prove it. A few days later the St. Louis newspapers announced that St. Louis was entertaining royalty and printed pictures of Prince Michael Romanoff.

Hillsboro people recognized the face in the papers as that of little Harry Gerguson, or Ferguson, and the prince was exposed by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

On October 20, 1936, the little prince stopped at Hillsboro on his way to Hollywood. Running true to form, he was a greater celebrity after exposure than before. He received one of the highest local honors—that of standing on the platform in front of the courthouse and giving out the cash prizes on Trade Day.

In Search of an Accent

Mike was nineteen years old when he graduated from the New York orphanage. Having observed that the Oxford accent was the heaviest social artillery a man could have, he crossed the Atlantic on a cattle boat in order to acquire it. He spent years in England doggedly polishing himself. In 1915 he tried himself out prematurely on English society under the name of Willoughby de Burke and landed in jail. Ordered out of England in 1921 for impersonating and marauding, Mike became a spot of color at the Ritz bar in Paris, where he was taken up by wealthy Americans. Bad-check trouble in France caused him to migrate to the United States.

On his arrival here, he was detained at Ellis Island. The authorities thought that, although Mike had been in a New York orphan asylum at the age of three, his birthplace was Vilna. He was ordered deported for moral turpitude on his statement that he had spent eight years

in a German prison for killing a German baron in a duel at Heidelberg. A little later the prince disappeared from Ellis Island; the Romanoff legend has it that he swam across New York harbor with a silk hat on, but the immigration men said he stowed away on a ferryboat.

Little Brother of the Rich

A few days after his escape, Mike changed into Prince Obolensky. New York newspapers printed a sympathetic interview with Obolensky on the troubles of an impoverished nobleman seeking employment. Everybody thought it a hilarious joke, he said, when he offered himself as a secretary, a clerk or a laborer. The interview won him some gaudy week ends, but no work. From there he went to St. Paul, where he was feted by railroad and lumber kings. One of his rich friends sent him to the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Harvard. He represented the university on a chess team and made a prodigious figure on the campus with his monocle, silk hat and sponge-bag knee pants, until he was expelled for falsely representing himself to have been an Oxford student. A brief period of splendor at Newport ended in exposure at Reginald C. Vanderbilt's *bal masqué*. The gilded youth of Dan Moriarity's speak-easy in New York made a comrade of Mike. Paul Mellon, son of Andrew W. Mellon, took

the prince on a visit to Pittsburgh. Old families along the Hudson adopted Mike for spells of varying length.

During vacations from the estates of millionaires, the prince lived by the sweat of his fountain pen. He seemed to have an honest conviction that he was the injured party every time he cashed a bad check; that he was doing himself an injustice by parting with his autograph so cheaply. After he had thoroughly papered New York, he went west in

1927 and papered Hollywood. He returned to Hollywood in 1931 and repapered it. He made the name of Romanoff so unworkable in Southern California that another impostor calling himself Prince Michael Romanoff, drowned himself at Redondo Beach.

Mike is probably the only impostor in history who is benefited by exposure. His victims usually like him better as Gerguson than as Romanoff. Phoenix, St. Louis and a few other places still feel shooting pains in the old wounds when Mike reappears, but he is usually presented with the keys of the cities which he ravaged.

Hotel men honor Mike because he saved them millions of dollars by forcing them to reorganize their protective system against agile fountain pens and itinerant potentates.

Mike outmaneuvered the Federal authorities for the last time in 1932. Claiming to be an American newspaperman assigned to interview Andrew W. Mellon, he stowed away on the Europa at Cherbourg and eluded the immigration inspectors in New York harbor. The little prince was unable to live without Royal Yacht pipe tobacco, which costs ten dollars a pound—a habit which he contracted, he said, from David, as he calls the present Duke of Windsor. He went to a Fifth Avenue shop for a tin of it and was arrested.

(Continued on Page 98)

IF YOUR POST IS LATE

Despite the fine job which our overloaded transportation system is doing, all kinds of transportation in wartime are uncertain. Military supplies, of course, must take precedence over civilian shipments. The Curtis magazines are shipped from Philadelphia in what would normally be ample time to reach you on the regular publication date. If your Post is late, it is from conditions beyond our control.

(Continued from Page 96)

Federal Judge John C. Knox and Assistant U. S. Attorney William B. Herlands took a sympathetic view of the case. Herlands described Mike as "a product of our public institutions" and said that he had "never had a chance." He predicted that the defendant would go straight if released on a suspended sentence. Judge Knox ordered that no further effort should be made to deport Mike, but sentenced him to three months in jail for perjury. Romanoff, in order to shield friends who had helped to smuggle him in from the Europa, had falsely testified before a grand jury that he had entered this country by way of Canada. The judge and the prosecutor personally urged Mike to mend his ways. This humane treatment took effect. Romanoff has never been in any serious trouble since.

After a couple of difficult years in New York, Mike turned farmer. John Walters, a New York broker, bought an estate called Powhatan near Fredericksburg, Virginia, and put the prince in charge of it in 1935. The farmhouse was in ruins. Sheep were living in it when Mike arrived there under the name of John William Adams. The prince, an indefatigable worker when the fit takes hold of him, repaired the house, cleared a field and made a road. His chief companions at Powhatan were a mare named Betty and a cat named Gerguson. Friends from Washington, who visited Mike shortly after Christmas, 1935, found that he had set up two Christmas trees decorated with tinsel, colored globes and artificial snow for the mare and the cat, and had made presents of a package of sugar lumps to Betty and a quart of cream to Gerguson. Word spread, however, that Prof. John William Adams, of Yale, had isolated himself at Powhatan and was writing *The Philosophy of History*.

The mystery about the newcomer continued until George White's Scandals hit Richmond. Knowing everybody in the show, Mike went to Richmond for one of his big nights. The press agent of the Scandals told reporters that the prince was in town, and the Powhatan farmer was unmasked as the celebrated Romanoff-Gerguson.

Mike quit Powhatan in 1936. Arriving in New York, the prince said he was en route to Hollywood to make a pile of money, so that he could retire to his Virginia estate. Two friends gave Mike sixty dollars one night on his promise to take a bus westward the following day; the following day the two friends discovered Mike in the Canadian minister's box at an international polo game. Other friends gave him fresh money and a broken-down auto, and Mike made his way to Hollywood by slow degrees.

Return From Elba

The first man he met there—Leo Morrison—lent him ten dollars and took him to the Clover Club, where the cream of Hollywood welcomed him deliriously. It was Mike's return from Elba. He was such an attraction that the management instructed a croupier to let him win small sums in return for honoring them with his visits. This was Mike's livelihood for months. After the Clover Club was closed, one of the leading night spots offered the prince seventy-five dollars a week to bring a party there four nights a week in order to give color to the place. Mike and his parties were free to eat and drink what they liked, but the little prince rejected the employment as too confining.

Mike gradually established a good credit rating for himself in Hollywood. Frankly admitting that he had been a dangerous risk in the past, he asked Jim Oviatt, a leading clothier, to trust him with the meteoric wardrobe which is considered necessary to a meteoric

career in Hollywood. Oviatt turned him into a sparkling bird of paradise, and later told everybody that no other customer had ever been so punctual in his monthly payments. Dave Chasen let Mike eat and drink on the cuff for months at a time, but the prince turned up periodically with a surprisingly good check and settled his account. From time to time Mike confounded old friends by repaying personal loans. His improved credit helped Romanoff when he opened his restaurant in December, 1940.

Some students of the prince's career resented his transformation into an honest burgher, but the sordid truth is that the prince always had a bourgeois streak. Every now and then he used to disappear from New York, return with the proceeds of some obscure transaction and celebrate Restitution Day by paying back loans, squaring bad checks and reveling in middle-class integrity. He was a share-the-wealther when he had it. A friend who housed and fed Mike during tough days in New York is Frank Getty, now a publicity magician

El Morocco, where he drank double healths to Great-great-great-aunt Catherine until he had faithfully disbursed all the spending money except thirty dollars, with which he tipped his waiters, chauffeur and footman. Going home, he found that the management had plugged the keyhole to his door for nonpayment of rent. He spent the rest of the night in his old Winter Palace, the subway.

Mike is definitely bourgeois today on the subject of bad checks. All the humor has gone out of the No Funds stamp. His \$25,000-a-month gross is painfully reduced by bouncing checks and moribund signatures. Mike has a lofty contempt for the present generation of frauds and mountebanks. They have never learned their trade, according to Mike; anybody can read them like a book. One day when he was haranguing about the incompetency of the current crop of phonies, the prince was asked what advice he would give to a young phony just starting out.

"I would advise him to stay out of it," said Mike. "There's too much competition."



in Washington. On one of his trips abroad, Mike arrived in Paris with twenty dollars in the toe of his right shoe. The first man he met was Getty, who had gone broke writing the great American novel. As soon as Mike learned this, he took off the shoe and split fifty-fifty with his former patron.

The finest example of Mike's punctiliousness in money matters took place on the night of the opening of the United Artists picture, *Catherine the Great*, in New York, February 13, 1934. Monroe Greenthal, the U.A. publicity chief, felt that the *première* of the movie about the great Romanoff empress would not be complete without the great Romanoff impostor. Mike agreed to appear if the picture company furnished him with the following inventory—a stunning blonde, \$150 for a night's spending money, a Rolls-Royce with a liveried chauffeur and footman, the footman to wear a tan stovepipe hat, tan coat with gold buttons, scarlet vest and knee-high tan boots with buff tops. All the items were furnished. After the *première* the prince took his consort, one of the reigning Powers models, to the Stork Club and

The prince dislikes to take dead beats to court. A defendant most of his life, he still hates plaintiffs. Occasionally, however, he gets tough by proxy through a hardboiled headwaiter.

Mike has changed with the times. He no longer conspires to re-enthroned the Romanoffs. He is satisfied with Stalin and is letting him stay. The little prince was furious when Ambassador Litvinoff, on a trip to Los Angeles, dined at Chasen's instead of Romanoff's. He never opened champagne faster than when he entertained Soviet officers on a mission to Southern California.

Mike has never wholly abandoned the ermine, however. New people often ask him if he is really a prince. He replies, "There's been a good deal of discussion about that." He denies vehemently he is or ever was Harry Gerguson, and he hit a former New York Times cinema critic in the jaw for addressing him as "Mr. Gerguson." A Hollywood producer with a seventeen-jewel, \$7500-a-week brain recently told a friend that he had learned Mike was a genuine Russian prince.

"How did you learn that?" he was asked.

"Mike told me so, confidentially," said the producer.

The prince trifles a little with his former greatness. Over the entrance to his restaurant he erected a plaster shield with a coat of arms consisting of champagne glasses, corks, a cocktail bar sinister and other emblems of his current vocation.

When he had a touch of influenza, he called on Dr. Lee E. Siegel, saying, "The little monarch is ailing."

"What was that?" asked the physician.

"The prince is ill," said Mike.

Although he could jest in this way, he dismissed the trained nurse in a royal rage because she was no court beauty.

The Royal Purple

Mike will probably never quite get over being a Romanoff. His imposture was so thorough that he imposed on himself. When he had a room to live in, it was decorated with photographs of Nicholas II and his family. In one of these the Czar and Czarina were surrounded by relatives; Mike used to point to a small, blurred, unrecognizable figure, saying, "Don't I look ridiculous?"

Once when he was in Jim Moriarity's speak-easy just off Fifth Avenue, immigration officers arrived with a warrant for Mike's arrest. Moriarity told the prince he could escape through the kitchen.

"A Romanoff escape through a kitchen!" exclaimed Mike.

"Your uncle, the Czar, did," said Moriarity.

Honoring this precedent, Mike darted out through the kitchen.

He once obtained work as assistant gardener at an estate on the Hudson River, where his Oxford accent and lordly manners created a mystery. In about a week the mystery was solved. The laundry maid carried Mike's silk undershirt to the mistress of the house; embroidered on it was the Romanoff coat of arms. The little gardener was badgered into a confession that he was Prince Michael of all the Russias and promoted to a guest chamber, where he remained for months. Later he was clearly demonstrated to be a fake, but his hostess had become so charmed with him that she insisted on his staying anyway. His voluntary departure at a later date excited general regret.

When Mike was unconscious of everything else, he was still conscious that he was a Romanoff. The classic Romanoff line was uttered in the Great Northern Hotel in New York, where the late Jack Thomas, author of *Dry Martini*, Stanley Sackett and others had taken Mike at four o'clock one morning after a speak-easy evening. The prince seemed to be dying. His friends thought a bottle of milk would save him. As he was being propped up in bed to drink it, Mike seized the bottle and smashed it against the wall. "What the hell!" he shouted. "Grade B milk for a Romanoff!"

The Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Company purchased the movie rights to Mike's life in 1932. Several scripts were written but the picture was not made, partly because the prince's career violated the unities and partly because a good comedy finish was difficult, in view of the Hays rule that transgressors must be punished in the last reel.

Harry D'Arrast, the famous director and one of the prince's oldest friends, wrote a version with a tragic ending based on Mike's invincible belief in his own royalty. In this version Mike turns up in Russia and is captured by Soviet soldiers. As he is led before the firing squad, he is told, "If you will only say, 'I'm Harry Gerguson,' you will go free and be welcomed as a comrade."

The prince shakes his head scornfully and is executed.