

# Man whose name meant treason—with his wife: First pictures



● Maria Quisling at her husband's home, at Telemark . . . with her husband in 1944; their last picture together . . . by the lake in 1936.

I HAVE been sitting in a gilded chair, having an "English tea," and talking at length to an extraordinary woman whose existence the world has forgotten.

Tall, dark and handsome Maria Vasiljevna Quisling, the widow of Major Vidkun Quisling, Norwegian upstart leader during the war, whose surname has passed into dictionaries (with a small q) as a substitute for "j . . .," "fifth-columnist" and traitor.

He was tried for conspiring with Hitler to invade Norway in 1940 and thereafter served as puppet ruler. His CBE for protecting British interests in Soviet Russia in 1927-29 during a breach of diplomatic relations, was stripped from him.

In the small hours of October 24, 1945, he was executed before a crowd at medieval Akershus Fortress, Oslo, protesting: "It is just like Ancient Rome," admonishing the firing squad not to have a bad conscience and reasserting his innocence.

### ★ 'MOST HATED'

He had been fined £52,000. His property was confiscated. His distraught widow, whom he had urged "not to take a pension" and "not to take it too hard," was left penniless, dependent on the charity of a few friends and under constant threat of arrest: "the most hated woman in Norway."

Such was the sudden, tragic comedown which befell Maria—only daughter of Tsarist aristocrats, who survived the Russian Revolution in Kharkov—a woman who had lived two years with her husband in charge of Britain's Moscow Embassy, who had danced with King Haakon when Quisling was Defence Minister in 1931-33 and become a personal friend of vivacious Queen Maud (daughter of Edward VII).

She was the "First Lady of Norway" in 1940-45, when she queened over Gimle, "the home of the gods," as Quisling named a pre-war shipowner's £150,000 palace, where he established his official residence as "Minister-President."

"How is she doing now, as she approaches the age of 66?" I wondered, having served in Norway during the war, the liberation and peacetime, and also written the somewhat controversial biography of her husband last year — without having managed to obtain her important testimony.

"Surprisingly well," I discovered, when she at last admitted me to her home, the first writer to interview her since the war.

Instead of a downcast old lady, here was an upstanding brunette in a black satin dress, clasped at the neck and wrists with an ornate silver choker and matching bracelets. Her raven hair was neatly pinned in the ringlets of another age.

An olive skin set off her remarkable brown eyes, searching, mocking, defiant and sometimes sparkling.

Tales of her youthful beauty were obviously well founded, and she met me with

# Mrs. Quisling talks after 21 years!

the dignity of a dowager of the Tsarist school. Here was a veritable prima donna, accustomed to looking after herself and getting her own way.

Now I understand why Norwegians call her "Black Maria" with undertones of awe. Any notion that I might be intruding on a "living ghost" was banished.

"After so many years! I am glad to meet you," she said clasping my hand. "But before we sit down and talk, I want you to look at the candles."

Then she led me across the large room, crowded with objets d'art, to a huge oak table, carved with lions' heads and heraldic symbols. On it, between two flickering candles, was a large silver frame containing a colour-photo of a plump, grave man, half-face, with neat fair hair and clad in a dark-blue suit: her late husband, Vidkun Quisling, eldest son of a Lutheran priest.

"A pity it was taken in Germany and it makes him look so serious," she remarked. "But we must admit the Germans are excellent photographers. Actually he was kind and often humorous, although you can't tell that from this photograph. I keep

I pooled everything we had in 1923, when we met and married in Moscow. I was running a student choir to raise funds for famine relief, and he was serving as secretary to the great explorer and humanitarian, Fridtjof Nansen, who was organising international aid for Russia.

"We never thought of listing our individual possessions with a view to divorce, as people do today, because we were in love—and we remained in love to the end.

"As he said at his trial, 'With the exception of my wife, I have never met anybody who was willing to do what I would do, namely, lay down my life for my friends.'

"I wanted to follow him to the grave, but his last message from the condemned cell persuaded me to live, and so I was confronted with the problem of how to keep body and soul together.

"I was hounded out of the flat we had owned for ten years before the war; besieged by inquisitive people in the homes of friends who took pity on me. I was reduced to the tiny pension allotted to Army captains' widows and had to close my banking account.

"The Press screamed for legal action against me, although I was always 'non-political.' When I eventually got my husband's ashes back and interred them in his beloved mother's grave, the Norwegian Press defiled the cemetery with their cameramen and reporters.

"Such was the hateful atmosphere in which I had to start trying to retrieve my property. I still haven't got back two of my masterpieces. But the sons of two Norwegian Ambassadors, under whom my husband served, have identified the rest of my pictures, one by one, as having hung in my home before the war.

### ★ FEW FRIENDS

"I am now living on these, selling them one by one. Oddly enough, one of my chandeliers was auctioned along with six Louis XVI chairs, which belonged to Churchill, in Copenhagen in March."

It also took years for her to get her pre-war flat back, and her financial status was not cleared until 1965. "And official Norway says I haven't been persecuted," she laughed.

"I have hardly dared cross the street to the grocery," she continued. "When I fell and injured myself so badly last year that I had to go to a nursing home, the other patients immediately took sides for and against me. Everywhere I go, my married name starts trouble, and I have

only half a dozen friends in Norway I can trust. I haven't dared to go abroad.

"But now that I'm financially independent, I want to 'get away from it all' to the sun—to regain my strength and recover my nerve so that I can use my later years fighting to restore my husband's reputation.

"People may say that I, as a loving wife, am prejudiced. But I know that he was a good man, and I have unpublished papers to help prove it. I shall fight, fight, fight!"

In her excitement she had raised her voice, and she whispered: "We mustn't attract attention. I have to let off part of the flat and the tenants might get suspicious. People are always spying on me. That's why I keep the blinds drawn."

We then moved into the dining room, hung with two pictures of the Rubens school, and a twin painting to one by Sebastiano Ricci (1659-1734) in the British Royal Collection. We sat at a long table on embossed leather chairs.

### ★ WORK IN RUSSIA

Towards the end of a surprisingly convivial evening, she recalled some words uttered by her husband at dinner in the Norwegian Legation in Moscow, just before Christmas, 1929, on the eve of his departure to start a political career after 12 years in Russia.

"I must save Norway and her people from catastrophe when the Great Powers collide there. I have worked for your people. Now can't I work for my own? Will you stop me?"

She continued: "What could I say to that? I wanted him to stay in diplomacy, where he had been so successful, and did my utmost to persuade him to do so. I never pandered to him, as is said.

"But I could not stand in his way in 1929—not after he had saved tens of thousands of Russians, including many Jews, from starvation.

"Now it is my turn to defend my husband's memory."

She even dares to have her hated name on her front door—the only place you will find it displayed in Norway.

● But to millions of Norwegians—and millions of others elsewhere in the world—Quisling, Nazi stooge leader in Norway throughout the War, is still A QUISLING, says the Sunday Citizen. And all Lars Quisling's protestations cannot alter that.

BY RALPH HEWINS

it in this place of honour, on his working desk which we brought from Russia, because it's the only likeness which shows his flesh tints. This makes it animated."

We spoke in Norwegian, each with the accents of our respective countries, but the atmosphere was very Russian, very "ancient régime." Two life-size portraits of Catherine the Great hung to my left.

On the inlaid table between us stood a magnificent golden goblet supported by rearing black horses. Icons, crucifixes, small oil paintings, including a Dubigny and a Teniers, jostled with engravings and photographs.

The place was a museum—and I'd thought she was brckel! Sensing my astonishment, she said: "It took me 12 years to get these treasures and the rest of my personal possessions back. The toughs in the Home Front (as she termed the resistance movement) seized everything in 1945. My collection of pictures was dispersed all over the place and many were carelessly damaged, regardless of their value.

"The trouble was that my husband and