

PETER THE GREAT

BY

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Translated from the French by

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P R E F A C E

‘Measure thy powers on thine undertaking—and not the undertaking
by thy powers.’

THIS bold advice, the dictum of a poet and fellow-countryman of my own, has been the almost indispensable inspiration of this historical work of mine. The figure which forms its subject—towering above the history, bound up, to this very hour, with the existence, of the Russian nation—is not one to be lightly approached.

Therefore it is that I have come to him so late, that I have worked backwards, up the course of the years, from the great Inheritress to the creator of her inheritance.

Have I dared, then, at last, to exchange glances with that great bronze giant, who, so the poets say, ‘steps down, on twilight nights, from his granite pedestal, hard by the Neva river-bank, and rides through the sleeping city’—triumphant even in death? Have I indeed—oh, mighty ghost! who, for well-nigh two hundred years, like some terrible and familiar demon, hauntest the places thou didst know in life,—have I, in good truth, happened on the magic formula which brings back speech to phantoms, and builds life up around them, out of the dust of bygone days?

I have lived those dead hours over again, in fancy. I have seen the faces, I have felt the warmth, of the beings and the things that filled them. I have laid my finger on the miracle of that legendary reign—the realisation of the fabled grain of wheat which sprouts and straightway grows into a

plant on the palm of the Hindu *Yoghi's* hand. And I have had speech with the Man of Miracles himself,—the one *unique* man, perhaps, in the history of the human race. Napoleon is the greatest of Frenchmen, or the greatest of Italians, according to the fancy of his historian. He is not France nor Italy incarnate. Peter is Russia—her flesh and blood, her temperament and genius, her virtues and her vices. With his various aptitudes, his multiplicity of effort, his tumultuous passions, he rises up before us, a collective being. This makes his greatness. This raises him far above the pale shadows which our feeble historical evocation strives to snatch out of oblivion. There is no need to call his figure up. He stands before us, surviving his own existence, perpetuating himself—a continual actual fact.

The face of the world he seems to have called out of chaos may have modified, but the principle of its existence is unchanged. The immeasurable force is there, which, these three centuries past, has defied all calculation, which has transformed Ivan's wretched patrimony,—a sparsely inhabited patch of wild steppe land,—into the inheritance of Alexander and of Nicholas—into an empire exceeding in size and population every other known sovereignty in Europe, Asia, and Africa—surpassing those of Alexander the Great, or Ancient Rome, the realm of the Khaliphs, and even the present British Empire, with all its colonies—an area of some eight and a half millions of square miles, a population of one hundred and twenty million souls! Once upon a time that force was called 'Peter the Great.' The name is changed now. The characteristics are unchanged. It is still the soul of a great people—and the soul, too, of a great man, in whom the thoughts and wills of millions of human beings appear incarnate. That force is centred in him, and he in it. I have tried, in these pages of mine, to make it throb.

Not, be sure, by mere dint of my imagination. Everything that could be drawn from documentary evidence—the only pass-key which can re-open the doors each passing hour

closes upon us—I have used. I hope I have been exact. I know I have been sincere; I may have roused surprise, disappointment, even anger. I would urge my Russian readers to weigh their impressions carefully. Courage to acknowledge what one is, and even what one has been, is a very necessary quality. For Russia, this courage is a very easy one.

I would pray my Russian readers too, and all others, not to misunderstand the nature of the object I have set before me. When Poushkin was collecting materials for his biography of the national hero, he spoke of raising a monument—*aere perennius*, which was to be too firmly set to be removed by human hand, and dragged from square to square. Some national grudge, it would appear, existed—some doubt was felt, as to the unchangeable stability of Falconnet's masterpiece. The poet's ambition, his care for his subject's reputation, common to most of my forerunners, not in Russia only, have never affected me. Peter—without any help of mine—already has the monument which, as I fain would think, befits him best. Not Poushkin's, nor yet the work of the French sculptor's chisel. The monument of which I speak was begun by his own rugged hands. His successors will labour on it, yet, for many a year. The last stone set, and that a mighty one, is the Trans-Siberian railway.

My object, as I say, has been very different. The eyes of the whole modern world have long been fixed—some in sympathy, others, again, dark with suspicion and hostility—on the mighty sea of physical and moral energy which surged up suddenly between Old Europe, wearied out with eager life, and Ancient Asia, wearied, too, with the stillness and stagnation of hers. Will the common destinies of the two Continents sink in that huge abyss? Or will its waters prove another Fountain of Jouvence? The whole world hangs over the chasm, on either side, waiting in anxious apprehension, peering into the depths, striving to fathom them. My part is simply to offer certain information to this universal curiosity and dread.

Behold! This may be the appointed hour! The dawn of an unknown day whitens the sky. A mist, where phantom figures seem to float, rises over the broad river. Hark! Was it a horse's hoof that rang on the silent stones? . . .

K. W.

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PART I
HIS EDUCATION

BOOK I—FROM ASIA TO EUROPE

CHAPTER I

THE KREML,¹ AND THE GERMAN FAUBOURG

- I. The marriage of Tsar Alexis—The choice of the bride—The crown to the fairest—The dormitory in the Kreml—Nathalia Naryshkin—The birth of Peter—His paternity contested—The struggle between the Naryshkin and the Miloslavski—Exile.
- II. The Kreml: Crypt, Seraglio, and Gaol—Ten centuries of history—Russia of Moscow, and Russia of Kief—The Norman Conquest—Vanished glories—The sons of Rurik—Jaroslav the Great, and Henry the First of France—The Mongol invasion—Utter downfall—Recovery—Muscovite Hegemony under a Mongol protectorate—Emancipation—Ivan the Great—Dawn of a new culture—European influences—Poles, Germans, English, and Dutchmen.
- III. The German Faubourg—Europe and Asia—A Muscovite Ghetto—The work of civilisation—Expansion—Thither Peter will go.
- IV. Times of trial—The last attempt at an Asiatic *régime*—Deaths of Alexis and Féodor—An elected Tsar—The rôle of the Patriarchs—The victory of the Naryshkin—Peter proclaimed—A short-lived triumph—The revenge of the Miloslavski.

I

PETER ALEKSIÉIEVITCH was born. on the 30th of May 1672—the year 7180, according to the calendar then used in his country.

Two years and a half before his birth, the ancient Kreml of Moscow had beheld a strange sight. Dozens of young girls, chosen amongst the loveliest discoverable, drawn from the most distant provinces, from every rank and station,—gentle and simple, from castle and from hut, and even from religious houses, had entered the Tsar's palace, on a day

¹ The name is thus spelt and pronounced in Russian. Kremlin is a spurious form, of Polish origin.

appointed by himself. There, crowded haphazard into the six rooms appointed to their use, they had led the usual life of Muscovite wives and maidens of that age—the cloistered existence, idle and monotonous, of Eastern women, scarce broken by some slight manual task, scarce brightened, here and there, by an occasional song. Thus, all day long they dreamt, and pined, and sighed, and yawned over oft-repeated tales and legends, bristling with wonderful absurdities. But when night fell, ah! then all the hours of weariness, and disgust, and impatient longing, were forgotten; and each young creature, her every sense on the alert, felt her soul leap and tremble with the sudden palpitation of a tremendous chance, in the feverish but short-lived sensation, nightly recurring, of an exquisite terror, and anxiety, and hope. Masculine forms loomed on the threshold of the suite of rooms, which were converted into dormitories when darkness fell. Two men passed between the narrow beds, leisurely examining the lovely sleepers, exchanging significant words and gestures. And one of these was the Tsar Alexis Mihaïlovitch—the Tsar himself—in *propria persona*, accompanied by his doctor, and seeking, amongst those unknown beauties, his chosen wife,—‘the woman,’ as the time-honoured formula has it, ‘worthy to be the Sovereign’s delight,’ the woman whom, though she were the daughter of the meanest of his serfs, he might, on the morrow, make a Grand Duchess first, and then Tsarina of all the Russias.

The custom, two centuries old already, had been borrowed from the Byzantines, partly for high political reasons, a little too, out of sheer necessity. Ivan Vassilévitch (‘the Great,’ 1435-1505), had vainly sought a wife for his son among the princesses of foreign houses. The King of Denmark, the Margrave of Brandenbiurg, had alike rebuffed him scornfully. And he would have no more alliances with his neighbours and rivals, the Russian Dukes. So he caused fifteen hundred maidens to be gathered together at Moscow—the Grand Ducal coronet should be bestowed on the fairest, at all events, if not on the most nobly born. A century later, the Tsar Michael Féodorovitch, who attempted matrimony with a foreign princess, met with no better success. The Danish King even went so far as to refuse to receive the Russian Envoys.¹ From that time out, the custom had been

¹ Zabiélin, *Domestic History of the Tsarinas* (Moscow, 1872), p. 245.

definitely established. Certain ladies and gentlemen of the Court were deputed to examine the young girls who came to Moscow, in answer to the Imperial call. Their inspection, minute and severe, extended to the most intimate details. Thus, by a process of selection, only the daintiest morsels were actually presented to the Tsar.¹

But occasionally, as in 1670, this custom became a mere formality. The dreams of the fair sleepers were doomed, this time, to disappointment; their nocturnal wiles were to be displayed in vain. The Sovereign's choice had been fixed before their arrival in the city. The Tsar Alexis Mihailovitch was thirty-eight years of age when his first wife—a Miloslavski, who had borne him five sons and eight daughters—died, in the year 1667. Of these sons, three were already dead; the survivors, Féodor and Ivan, were both sickly; and the Tsar's evident duty was to consider the question of remarriage. He considered it seriously, when his eye fell, one day, in the house of Artamon Sierguéiévitsh Matviéief, on a beautiful brunette, whom he took, at first, for the daughter of his favourite counsellor. Nathalia Kirillovna Naryshkin was only his ward, confided by her father, an obscure and needy country gentleman, to the care of the rich and powerful boyard. The fair Nathalia could never have burst on her Sovereign's dazzled eyes in any true Muscovite house, where local custom was held in due respect. The young girl must have remained invisible, behind the impenetrable portals of the *terem*. But the Matviéief household was emancipated from the ordinary rule. Artamon had married a foreigner—a Hamilton. The tempest of revolution which had overwhelmed the great Jacobite families, had cast up some branches of them, even upon the inhospitable shores of that distant and barbarous empire. Alexis welcomed the strangers, and Matviéief actually owed a portion of his master's favour to his alliance with one of them. His marriage had also given him a certain culture. He read much; he had a library, a museum, a small chemical laboratory. Nathalia had her place at her adopted parents' table—sometimes even amongst their guests. Alexis began by saying he would undertake to find the girl a husband 'who would ask for no fortune with her.' Then, suddenly, he made up his mind and spoke out. Artamon Siergué-

¹ Zabiélin, *Domestic History of the Tsarinas* (Moscow, 1872), p. 222.

iévitch was more alarmed than pleased. His position as imperial favourite had already procured him numerous enemies. Sprung from a somewhat obscure family, he had pushed himself into the foremost rank, he was at the head of various departments; he managed Foreign Affairs, the Mint, he was Court Minister, Commander of the *Streltsy*, Governor of Little Russia, of Kasan and of Astrakan. He begged, at all events, to be shielded by appearances. Nathalia had to show herself in the dormitory at the Kreml. All the rites were scrupulously observed. The uncle of one fair aspirant actually had to face the justice of the Tsar for having used fraudulent manœuvres in his niece's favour, and was put to the question, ordinary and extraordinary, by the knout, by the strappado, and by fire. The marriage was solemnised on 22nd January 1671, and on 30th May (12th June) 1672, Nathalia Kirillovna bore a son.

On that very day, Louis XIV. supplied Boileau with the subject of a famous epistle, as he watched his army, led by Condé and Turenne, pass over the Rhine. On that very day, too, at the opposite end of Europe, the Turkish army passed the Dniester, to clasp hands across space with that of the *Grand Monarque*, and take the Empire in the rear. Neither of these events awoke much interest at Moscow, where all were rejoicing over the birth of the Tsarevitch. Life there was too circumscribed and obscure to be much affected by the great currents of European politics. Obscure and doubtful, too, to this very hour, is the birthplace of the greatest man Russia ever produced. Was it the Moscow Kreml? the neighbouring country house of Kolomenskoïé, dubbed the Russian *Bethlehem*? Or was it Ismaïlovo? No absolute certainty exists. The dispute is carried further still. Peter bore no resemblance, physical or moral, to his elder brothers and sisters,—puny and feeble all of them, like Féodor and Ivan, all, even the fair Sophia herself, bearing a taint in their blood. And could Alexis, worn out by illness, foredoomed to an early death, have bestowed, on any son of his, that giant stature, those iron muscles, that full life? Who then? Was it the German surgeon, who replaced the daughter Nathalia really brought into the world, by his own son? Was it the courtier, Tihone Nikititch Streshnief, a man of humble birth, lately brought into prominence by the marriage of the Tsar Michael Romanof with the fair

Eudoxia? Once upon a time, Peter, heated with wine, sought (so at least the story goes) to peer into this shadow. 'That fellow,' he cried, pointing to one of the company, Ivan Mussin-Pushkin, 'knows, at all events, that he is *my* father's son! Whose son am I? Yours, Tihon Streshnief? Obey me, speak, and fear nothing! Speak! or I'll have you strangled!'

'*Batiushka*, mercy!' comes the answer. 'I know not what to say. . . . I was not the only one!'¹

But every kind of story has been told!

The death of Alexis (1674) marks the beginning of a troubled period, out of which Peter's despotic power rises, storm-laden and blood-stained, like the times which gave it birth.

This period makes its definite mark on the destiny of the future Reformer. From its very outset, he becomes the hero of a drama, the naturally indicated chief of an opposition party. Beside the yet warm corpse of their common Master, the two families, called out of their obscurity by the Tsar's two marriages, engage in desperate struggle.

The Naryshkins of a later generation have claimed a relatively illustrious origin, in connection with a Czech family, the Narisci, which once reigned at Egra. But the Tartar Narish, noted by the historian Müller as one of the familiars of the *Kniaz* Ivan Vassilévitich (1463), would appear a more authentic ancestor.

The Miloslavski were the Muscovite branch of the Korsak, an ancient Lithuanian family, settled in Poland. Deprived by the new comers of their rank and influence, they felt themselves alike injured and humiliated. Nathalia's father, Kiril Poluëktovitch, had risen, in a few years, to be one of the richest men in the country, Court Councillor (*dumnyi dvorianin*) and Grand Officer of the Crown (*okolnitshyî*). The bells that tolled for the funeral of Alexis rang out the hour of vengeance on his rival's ears. 'Miloslavski against Naryshkin!' For the next thirteen years that war-cry was to rule the fate of Russia, casting it into the blood-stained struggle between the two parties fighting for power.

¹ Vockerodt, *Correspondence* (published by Herrmann, Leipsic, 1872), p. 108. Solovief, *Hist. of Russia* (Moscow, 1864-1878), vol. xv. pp. 126-135. Siemievski, *Study of the State Police in Russia* (Slovo i Dielo) (St. Petersburg, 1885), p. 139. Dolgoroukof, *Mémoires* (Geneva, 1867), vol. i. p. 102.

Matviéief, Nathalia's adoptive father, beaten in his first skirmish, heads the list of victims. He was imprisoned, tortured, exiled to Pustoziersk in Siberia, where he almost died of hunger.¹ For a moment, there was some question of immuring Nathalia in a cloister; but the mother and son were finally sent to Préobrajenskoïé, a village near Moscow, where Alexis had built him a house. Thus Peter left the Kreml, never to return, save for a very short space of time, during which he was to endure the most cruel trials, the most odious outrages, to watch the murder of his own kinsfolk, to see the Sovereign's authority cast down into the lowest depths, to witness his own downfall. Then it was that he vowed relentless hatred to the gloomy palace. Even as Conqueror and all-powerful Master, he pointedly turned his back upon it. That rupture was the symbol of his life and of its work.

II

The Kreml of the present day—a crowded and haphazard collection of incongruous buildings, utterly devoid, for the most part, of style or character—conveys but a faint conception of the palace of Alexis Mihailovitch, as it appeared at the end of the seventeenth century. The fires of 1701 and 1737, and the reconstruction which took place in 1752,² have left the barest traces of the curious Italian Renaissance, introduced, at the close of the fifteenth century, by the daughter of a Paleologus, educated at Rome.³ Some vestiges still exist of the struggle of the genius of Fioravante, of Solaro, of Alevisse, with Byzantine tradition; a few churches, a few fragments of palaces, and the outer walls—more like those of a fortified camp than of a royal residence, with their far-stretching low ramparts, and their brick towers showing in slim outline, here and there, like warriors on the watch. Without these walls, on the Red Square, the only edifice which powerfully conjures up the vanished past is the Church of Vassili the Blessed. Within them, doubtless, there was the same architectural confusion,—the same violent

¹ See *History of his Captivity*, published at Moscow, 1785, by Novikoff.

² Zabiélin, *Domestic History of the Tsars* (Moscow, 1895), pp. 110-118. Oustrialof, *History of Peter I.* (St. Petersburg, 1858), vol. iv. p. 33.

³ P. Pierling, *La Russie et le St. Siège* (Paris, 1896), p. 107.

juxtaposition of the German gothic style with those of India, of Byzantium, and of Italy,—the same tangle of edifices, packed one within the other like a Chinese puzzle,—the same strange, wild orgy of decoration, of form, of colour—a delirium and fever, a veritable surfeit of plastic fancy. Small rooms, surbased vaulted roofs, gloomy corridors, lamps twinkling out of the darkness, on the walls the lurid glow of mingled ochres and vermilions, iron bars to every window, armed men at every door; a swarming population of monks and warriors everywhere. The palace rubbed shoulders with the church and the monastery, and was scarcely distinguishable from them. The Sovereign, on his throne, was like the neighbouring relic of some Saint, within its shrine. From one end to the other of that strange accumulation of buildings, sacred and secular dwellings, cathedrals and convents by the score, confused noises,—dulled and stifled by massive walls, thick oriental hangings, and the heavy air imprisoned within them,—rose and fell, their echoes intermingling in a vague harmony of sound. From within the churches sounded the voices of chanting priests; from the *terem* came the singing of the women—now and again a sharper note would echo from some corner of the palace, scene of a secret orgy, and then a shriller cry, the plaint of some tortured prisoner in his dungeon. But, for the most part, silence reigned; men whispered under their breath; they stepped carefully, feeling their way. Each one watched his neighbour, and his neighbour him. It was a crypt, a seraglio, a gaol, in one.

This being so, the Kreml was more than the mere residence of the Tsar. All Russia was here concentrated and summed up,—a strange Russia, ten centuries old, and yet an infant; a long historic past behind her, yet standing, apparently, on the threshold of her history. This Russia, severed from her European neighbours, who know her not, yet has European blood of the purest in her veins, her annals teem with European traditions, alliances, relationships, ay, and with traces of a common fate, in good fortune and ill, in victory and disaster.

Between the ninth and tenth centuries, when the earliest French Kings, Charles le Gros and Louis le Bègue, are struggling painfully to defend their treasures from Norman robbers, other Sea Kings land on the Baltic shore. Yonder

the Norman, Hrolf, wrests the coast country, called after his race, from Charles the Simple. Here, on the mighty plain that stretches from the Baltic to the Black Sea, among the scanty Finnish or Slavonic population which alone disturbs the solitude, the Norman Rurik and his followers found their Empire.¹

A century and a half later, at the three farthest corners of Europe, three heroic leaders affirm the supremacy of the same race, covering it with the common glory of their conquests. In Italy, Robert Guiscard founds the House of Hauteville. William the Conqueror seats himself in England. Jaroslav reigns in Russia.

But this Russia is not the Russia of Moscow. Moscow does not exist, as yet. Jaroslav's capital is at Kief, a very different place, far nearer to the Western world. Rurik's descendants, dwelling there, keep up close relations with Greece, with Italy, with Poland, with Germany. Byzantium sends them monks, and learned men, and stately prelates. Italy and Germany give them architects, artificers, merchants, and the elements of Roman law. Towards the year 1000, Vladimar, the 'Red Sun' of the Rhapsodes, commands his lords to send their children to the schools he has established near the churches; he makes roads, and deposits test weights and measures in the churches. His son Jaroslav (1015-1054) coins money, builds palaces, adorns the open spaces of his capital with Greek and Latin sculpture, and draws up a code of laws. The five pictures preserved in the Vatican, under the name of the Capponi Collection, are an authentic proof, and a most curious specimen, of Russian art as it flourished at Kief in the twelfth century.² The execution is masterly, in no way inferior to the best work of the early Italians, such as Andrea Rico di Candia. And these are not the only signs of culture at Kief. In 1170, at Smolensk, we find the *Kniaz*, Roman Rostislavitch, busied with learned

¹ This conquest, although disputed by Slavophil historians, would seem to be an undoubted fact. See Solovief's refutation of Ilovaïski's opinion (*Collected Works on Politics* (Bezobrazof, 1879), vol. vii.), and the Studies of Father Martynof (*Revue des Questions Historiques*, July 1875. *Polybiblion*, 1875). Solovief at all events makes the admission—a consoling one to the national vanity—that the Slav tribes submitted voluntarily to a foreign *Kniaz*, whom they called to rule over them.

² This collection was presented by Peter the Great to Count Capponi, in acknowledgment of his share in obtaining the signature of a commercial treaty with Genoa.

subjects. He collects libraries, founds schools and seminaries, where the classical languages are taught. From one end to the other of the huge Empire just beginning to take shape, between the Don and the Carpathians, the Volga and the Dvina, a busy trade is already carried on with Europe—western, southern, and northern. Novgorod commands the commerce of the Baltic. At Kief a motley crowd of merchants—Norman, Slav, Hungarian, Venetian, Genoese, German, Arab, and Jew—fill the streets, and deal in every kind of product. In 1028 there were a dozen markets in the city. And these Dukes of Kief have no need to seek their wives within their subjects' *terems*. Jaroslav espouses a Swede, Ingegard, the daughter of King Olaf. He marries his sister to King Casimir of Poland; one of his sons, Vsievod, to the daughter of the Emperor Constantine Monomachus of Byzantium; another, Viatcheslaf, to a Countess of Stade; a third, Igor, to Kunigunde, Countess of Orlamünde. His eldest daughter, Elizabeth, weds King Harold of Norway; the third, Anastasia, King Andreas I. of Hungary. Three Bishops, Gautier de Meaux, Gosselin de Chalignac, and Roger de Châlons, come to Kief, in 1048, to ask the hand of the second daughter, Anne, for Henry I. of France.

Before the middle of the thirteenth century all this crumbles and disappears, leaving no trace behind. The Empire had not as yet really found its feet: it was not founded upon the rock, firm to withstand any violent shock. Dukes of Kief, of Novgorod, of Smolensk, though they were, these Rurikovitch, in spite of their union of warlike instinct with very remarkable organising powers, bore about with them the brand of their origin—a ferment of disorder and violence, from which nothing but the action of time, bringing with it long established submission to the customs of civilised societies, and the laws of a strongly organised State, could have delivered them. Time played them false. The blow came in 1224, when Baty, with his Mongol hordes, appeared upon the scene. At that moment, after some attempt, early in the twelfth century, at concentration, under Vladimir Monomachus, sixty petty princes were quarrelling over scraps of power and rags of sovereignty between the Volga and the Bug. Baty and Mangu, a grandson of Gengis Khan, forced them into reconciliation.

Centuries of endeavour and of civilising effort were thus to disappear into the dust raised by the hoofs of a hundred thousand horses. Of ancient Russia, Europeanised, indeed, by its conquerors, but in no sense denationalised,—thanks to the rapid absorption of the scanty Norman element—not a trace remained. In the following century, between 1319 and 1340, Kief and the neighbouring countries fell into the hands of the future Kings of Poland, still Dukes of Lithuania.

After the reign of Giedymine, Jagellon, annexing all the fragments of the ephemeral sovereignty of Monomachus—Red Russia, White Russia, Black Russia, Little Russia—to the new Polish-Lithuanian Empire, wielded the sceptre of ‘all the Russias,’—as the time-honoured formula now runs. And the countries he annexed were little more than deserts. At this moment the history of the Rurikovitch sovereignty seems utterly closed.

But it springs up afresh, eastward of the huge space marked out by Fate as the dwelling-place of an innumerable population, and the scene of an immeasurable development. In the upper basin of the Volga, on the banks of the Moskva, in the midst of a sparse Finnish population, a poor village, overlooked by a strong fortified castle, had, since the twelfth century, been the home and appanage of one of the descendants of Rurik. Destroyed, more than once, in the course of incessant warfare with its Rurikovitch neighbours, swept by the wave of invading Mongols, this village raised its head again and again, increased in size, and, in the beginning of the fourteenth century, already formed the nucleus of a fresh agglomeration of Norman, Slav, and Finnish elements. Taking docile submission to the yoke of the Asiatic conquerors for his rule, the *Kniaz* of Moscow ended by making that yoke serve as an organising instrument, useful alike for internal government, and external expansion. Humbly, patiently, adroitly, he undertook the duties of an intermediary—welcomed by one side for his usefulness, endured by the other as a necessity—between the conquerors and the conquered; stooping to play the part of tax-collector for the common master, of police agent, of executioner, if need be. Extending and strengthening, by slow degrees, the superiority thus dearly bought, the wily *Kniaz* succeeded each other, until the day should come—long waited, carefully prepared—when one should be strong enough to break the

infamous compact, which had served him and his forebears as a tool for their own emancipation.

Thus well-nigh two centuries passed. Two centuries, in the course of which the neighbouring *Kniaz*—of Péréiaslav, Riazan, Vladimir, Ouglitch, Halitch, Rostov, Jaroslav, Souzdal—became one by one, little by little, first of all vassals, and finally mere chief subjects, *boyards*, of the *Kniaz* of Moscow, whose power swelled visibly, while the Mongol Hegemony, worn out and broken up by internal discord, steadily declined. At last, somewhere about 1480, the period of probation drew to a close, and astounded Europe suddenly became aware that, between herself and Asia, there lay a new Empire, whose chief had formally declared its independence, having driven the Golden Horde beyond the newly traced frontiers of the immense territory under his rule, wedded at Rome, with a Greek Princess from Constantinople, and taken the double-headed eagle for his emblem. His name was Ivan, known by his subjects as ‘Ivan the Great.’

But this new sovereignty was not that of Kief, and, but for the dynastic origin of its Head, it would seem to have nought in common with that which constituted the power and glory of Jaroslav and Vladimir. The Grand Duke of Moscow might indeed dub himself Sovereign of ‘all the Russias,’ but the provinces he thus claimed, and called his own, were not in his keeping. They belonged to Poland. The country he actually held was quite independent, so far as three-fourths of it were concerned, of that conquered by the ancient Normans, and, everything, or almost everything, both in his Empire and his Capital, was of newer origin, and essentially different in character. Europe, so to speak, had no place there.

The flood, receding from this soil, had left behind it, like a heavy clay deposit, all its more stable elements—form of government, customs, habits of thought. No germ of culture remained, and for the best of reasons. Save for the traditions of the Byzantine-Russian Church, preserved by Greek monks and nuns, the state and the society which had struggled into organised existence, under the tutelage of the successors of Baty, were essentially Asiatic, and genuinely barbarous. State and society alike, during their long separation from Europe, had known nothing of the great school in which the

intellectual and moral unity of the West was shaped ; of the feudal system, the Crusades, chivalry, the study of Roman Law, out of which the modern spirit has risen, stepping backwards from its first springs ; of the great struggle between the religious and the temporal powers, in which the spirit of freedom took its birth. When the Metropolitan of Moscow (only recently—1325 or 1381—called into existence) refused the amalgamation with Rome, decided at the Council of Florence, and accepted by the Metropolitan of Kiev, the city, voluntarily and deliberately, broke with the Western World. The obscure and remote Eastern schism, condemned by the Pope, withdrew itself beyond the pale of Christianity. When men had grown weary of disputing over it, they were to cast it into oblivion.

But culture began to sprout afresh, pushing up slowly, through the thick crust of Asiatic mire. It came as best it could—from Europe always—and first of all from Poland, through the great Lithuanian lords, who had been Russians before they were Poles. Before the insurgent Kurbski, Ivan the Great's whilom helper, took refuge with his neighbours, he kept up close correspondence with the Czartoryski, Russian and orthodox still, to the backbone. Ivan himself, returning victorious from Poland, brought back, as booty and symbolic trophy, the first printing press ever seen in Moscow. The conquest of Novgorod (1475) had served to bring the new Empire into contact with the Hanse towns. In 1553 the English discovered the mouth of the Dvina. Next came the foundation of the town of Archangel, and the beginning of commerce in the Northern seas. Then fresh invasion—and the struggle for existence began once more. This time, happily, the invading wave came from a different quarter. It rolled back from Europe, passing away more rapidly than the last, and leaving something more than mere mud behind it. The Polish armies brought the whole paraphernalia of Rome in their train. Jesuits and Sons of St. Bernard—Catholic propaganda, and the learning of the schools. After the Jesuits—learned, fluent, shrewd—come the mock Tsars, likewise of Polish origin, subtle and elegant. The Court of Dimitri and Marina Mnischev is modelled on that of Sigismund, who had formed his after the counsel of his wife, Bone Sforza, whose Polish orchestra mingles its secular strains with the rites of the Orthodox Church! At the

very moment of the definite triumph of the national cause, Western and Polish influences are affirmed, even in the very victories and re-establishment of the Muscovite element in Poland, and in the West. When the armies of Tsar Alexis entered Kief, they found no sign, doubtless, of what the Mongol conquerors had found there—no trace of former splendours. Yet they found something better than the emptiness and void at Moscow. Some schools of Polish origin, a printing press too, ready to replace that of Ivan (promptly anathematised and long since destroyed), and a Greco-Latin Ecclesiastical Academy. A modest capital of civilisation, easy of assimilation, stood ready to their hand.

III

From this time forward Moscow had power to turn her back on Asia, and re-enter Europe, without crossing the frontier. That Peter, driven out of the Kreml, and into the street, as it were, by the rival faction, felt no desire to return to his ancestral dwelling, must be written down to the fact that he had found another and a more attractive home in its close vicinity. When Ivan annexed Novgorod,—that stronghold of republicanism and insubordination,—he resolved to break its turbulent spirit by changing its population. Ten thousand families had thus to be removed. Russia owns the secret of these successful administrative *coups d'état*, whereby whole masses of humanity are set in physical motion. The exiled Novgorodians departed to Moscow, where room was made for them, by sending an equal number of faithful and docile Moscovians—their very docility their punishment—to Novgorod. These new arrivals included certain Hanseatic merchants, who formed the first nucleus of the foreign colony on the banks of the Mòskva. But it soon became evident, to Russian eyes, that these foreigners profaned the place. Local patriotism found its interest, even at that date, in claiming that Moscow was a holy city, and then, as now, the whole of Muscovy joined in this beatification. Beyond the gates of the old capital, towards the north-western corner of the modern city, in the quarter lying between Basmannaïa Street and Pokrovskaiâ Street, where, at the present day, most of the Protestant and Catholic churches stand, there

arose,—on the banks of the Iaouza, a scanty affluent of the Moskva,—a kind of Ghetto, specially assigned to the *Niemtsy*, those who did not speak the tongue of the country, and who, in consequence, were *niemož*, dumb. The Hanse merchants prospered little here, but, in the sixteenth century, Tsar Vassili lodged his bodyguard of Poles, Lithuanians, and Germans in the quarter. Vassili's successors brought in not foreign soldiers only—they sent abroad for artisans and artists, and, before long, for schoolmasters. An engraving in Adelung's curious book depicts the primitive appearance of the suburb, where the immigrants were crowded together, shut up and hemmed in, by severe and successive edicts. It was still a mere village of wooden houses, roughly built with unbarked tree-trunks,—huge kitchen gardens surrounding each dwelling. But a rapid change was working both in the appearance of the place, and in the nature of its inhabitants. Under Tsar Alexis, the only German quality about the *Niemietškaia Sloboda* was the name, or *sobriquet*, of *Niemietz*, which had clung to the suburb—a relic of the German origin of its original inhabitants. English and Scotchmen now held the foremost place, and among them—thanks to the proscriptions of Lord Protector Cromwell, there were many noble names—Drummonds, Hamiltons, Dalziels, Crawfurds, Grahams, Leslies, and, at a later period, Gordons. No Frenchmen as yet. They were coldly looked on, as Catholics, and, yet more, as Jansenists. The Jacobites were the only exceptions to this rule,—their proscribed condition being taken to vouch for their fidelity.

Later on, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes was to earn the same confidence for the subjects of the Most Christian King. The Jacobites lived somewhat apart. They were no traders, nor in any way industrious. Yet they were a powerful factor in the budding prosperity of the *Sloboda*. Their education and demeanour inspired the Muscovites with a sense of respect. The German troopers of the first period had taught the natives nothing, save the manners of Wallenstein's camp. In the professional class, soon to be added to this aristocratic one—merchants, teachers, physicians, apothecaries, traders, artists—the dominant element was Dutch; but the quality of the German contingent, mingled with it, improved. Both nationalities brought with them, and exemplified, the special virtues of their race;—a

spirit of enterprise, perseverance, piety, family affection, a common aspiration towards an ideal of order, of domestic peace, and fruitful toil. The Dutch had a Calvinist, the Germans, two Lutheran pastors; but, face to face with the barbarians, religious dissension appears to have died away. Liberty reigned in the *Sloboda*, save in the case of the Catholics, who were forbidden to have a priest. Schools became numerous. Patrick Gordon, a Scotchman, followed the proceedings of the London Royal Society. English ladies sent for bales of novels and poetry by British writers. Pleasure was moderate and decent in its course. At German gatherings, the dance known as '*Grossvatertanz*' was considered the wildest form of entertainment. There was a theatre, frequented by Tsar Alexis, where he saw a performance of *Orphée*.

Politics played a considerable part in the life of the colony. The members of the Diplomatic Corps, who all resided in it, the English, Dutch, Danish, and Swedish residents, represented the interests, or stirred the passions, of the various Protestant powers. The Dutch resident, Van Keller—rich, cultivated, cautious, and adroit—held quite a special position, before which the Muscovites themselves respectfully bowed. He sent a weekly messenger to the Hague, and the Western news he thus received made the *Sloboda* quiver to the echo of those great events which were then working out the political fate of the European world.¹ The German traveller, Tanner,² who visited the colony in 1678, carried away a most pleasing impression, confirmed and justified by an engraving dated early in the eighteenth century.

This shows us the suburb utterly transformed. Comfortable-looking brick houses, approached through flowery gardens, straight alleys planted with trees, fountains in the squares. The contrast with Russian towns of the period, Moscow not excepted, is very striking. It was not to escape the eye of Peter the Great.

In spite of Polish influence, in spite of its near neighbourhood to a country which brought Europe, so to speak, to its

¹ Vulliemin, after Posselt, *Revue Suisse*, vol. xxix. p. 323. Brückner, *Cultur-historische Studien* (Riga, 1878).

² Tanner, *Legatio Polono—Lithuanica in Moscoviam* (Nuremberg, 1689), p. 71, etc.

very gates, Moscow was still, take it all in all, what three centuries of Asiatic slavery had made it. Some signs there were, indeed, which clearly marked a beginning of mental contact with the intellectual world of the West. Certain men here and there had cast off, physically and morally, the ancient Byzantine Tartar garb. Ideas were shooting up, some originating power had shown itself, a whole programme of reform, a more extended one, as will later on appear, than that which Peter himself undertook to execute, had been sketched out.¹

The dawn of the new day was blushing in the sky; but the growing light fell only on a chosen and restricted circle. Tsar Alexis did not, like Ivan, put out artists' eyes, on the plea of thus preventing them from reproducing their masterpieces; but when Tsar Michael took it into his head to engage the services of the famous Oelschläger (Olearius), there was talk of throwing the 'sorcerer' into the river, the court mutinied, and the city was in an uproar. Another foreigner, who entertained some prominent Russian lords at dinner, saw them, to his astonishment, lay violent hands on everything on the table, and fill their pockets!² Within the Kreml, after the Poles and mock Tsars were banished, nothing changed a jot. Before Peter himself was driven out, he never saw any faces but those of his immediate circle. When he went to church, or to the bath, a double row of dwarfs, carrying red silken curtains, followed him, a moving prison, always with him.³ The child was almost stifled. At Préobrajenskoïé he began to breathe again. One day—back in the open air at last, and free to move about at will—he will wander to the banks of the Iaouza, and once he has seen the *Sloboda*, he will not care to leave it. He will call all Russia to follow him thither.

But dark times are before him yet,—the supreme test and ordeal of the Asiatic system.

¹ This point of view has led certain historians into paradoxical exaggeration. V. Klioutchewski, *Lessons in History given at the Moscow University, 1887-1889* (lithographed). I owe my knowledge of this work to the kindness of Mr. Stchukin, a young Russian savant living in Paris, to whom I hereby beg to tender my grateful thanks.

² Solovief, vol. xiv. p. 112.

³ Kotoshihin, *Russia during the Reign of Alexis* (St. Petersburg, 1884), c. 19.

IV

In 1682 Féodor, eldest son and successor of Alexis, died childless. Who was to be his heir? Since the death of the last descendant of Rurik (1598) the throne had almost always been won by a revolution. Boris Godunof gained it by a series of assassinations. Dimitri conquered it by Polish swords. Vassili Shuiski owed it to his election by the nobles. Michael Romanof to the voice of the people. Although some shadow of dynastic title grew out of this last selection, the accession of Alexis is believed to have been preceded by an appeal to popular suffrage.

Of Féodor's two younger brothers, one, fifteen years old, —Ivan, the son of the Miloslavski,—was sickly, three parts blind, and more than half an idiot. A communication addressed in 1648 to the ministers of Louis XIV. mentions a 'growth on the eyelids, which prevents the young Prince from seeing anything, unless they are lifted up.' The great dignitaries of the Crown pronounced unanimously in favour of Peter, the son of the Naryshkin, younger than his brother by some five years. They shrank, so they averred, from being converted from court officials into sick-nurses. Doubtless the youth of the second brother gave them fair hope of a longer period of practical interregnum, during which they might continue to wield power. They swept the boyards, who chanced to be present at Féodor's death, and the patriarch Joachim, who had given him the last sacraments, along with them. Here, as in Poland, a vacancy on the throne conferred a sort of intermediate sovereignty on the Head of the Church. Thus, in 1598, the patriarch Job ensured the triumph of Boris. There was nothing legal in what happened then, any more than in what took place now. The prelate harangued the officers and courtiers who chanced to be within the Kreml, and made a brief appeal for their votes, which were given by acclamation. The improvised electors appeared outside the palace, on the Red Staircase, before the crowd attracted by the rumour of the great events which had set the Court aflame. A name flung to the mob,—and the thing was done. Russia had a Tsar, and that Tsar's name was Peter.

Not a word of Ivan. Not an attempt to justify the

violence done, in his person, to all the laws of heredity. The *coup* was nothing, in fact, but a victory won by the Naryshkin over the Miloslavski,—taken by surprise, no doubt, and left defenceless, by the suddenness of the crisis, and the swiftness of the denouement. An ephemeral triumph, indeed, which scarcely lasted a month. On the very morrow of defeat, the vanquished faction re-entered the lists, backed by two unforeseen allies, two new political factors, destined to change the whole face of the struggle—the Tsarevna Sophia, and the *Streltsy*.¹

¹ Sumarokof, *Der Erste Aufstand der Strelitzen* (Riga, 1772), p. 10.

CHAPTER II

THE TSAREVNA SOPHIA

- I. The *terem* of the Kreml—Moscow and Byzantium—Memories of Pulcheria—By the Tsar's death-bed—Ambition and Love—Vassili Galitzin.
- II. The *Streltsy*—Their greatness and their downfall—Soldiers and Merchants—Symptoms and causes of revolt—Popular movements—Sophia and Galitzin desire to use the revolt to conquer power—The Kreml besieged—Three days of carnage—Sophia's bloodstained power—Peter's downfall—Ivan's enthronement—A twin throne—The Regent.
- III. The real Regent—An Idyll, and a domestic Drama—Dreams for the future—The stumbling-block.
- IV. The childhood of Peter the Great—Exile—Open-air life—Studies and games—The Astrolabe—The English boat—Soldier and Sailor—Préobrajenskoïé camp, and the Lake of Péréiaslavl—His companions—The first-fruits of reform—Rough models of an Army, a Navy, a Society.
- V. Youth—Marriage—Eudoxia Lapouhine—Early widowhood—Peter returns to his pleasures—Swept on by the current—The maker carried away by his work—The instrument of a party—Aristocratic opposition—Peter its leader—Betwixt two civilisations—Roman Europe and Protestant Europe—The choice—Preparation for the struggle—The convulsion.

I

IN 1682, seven of Alexis' daughters were still living. One alone, Sophia, has left a name in history. Born, like Ivan, of the Miloslavski consort, she had already reached her twenty-sixth year. I have alluded to her beauty; certain Russian writers, notably Sumarokof, and some foreigners even—such as Strahlenberg and Perry,—praise it very highly. None of them ever saw the Tsarevna. The testimony of the Franco-Polish diplomat, La Neuville, who had that privilege, is more conclusive. He spoils the romance in which Peter's childhood is supposed to have been mixed up, but that is no fault of mine. 'A shapeless body, monstrously fat, a head as big as a bushel measure, hair growing on her face, sores on her legs,'—so his description runs. The Little-Russian historian, Kostomarof, tries to

soften matters. Foreigners, he hints, might think Sophia ugly, but she may still have possessed great charm for the Muscovites of her own time. Excessive corpulence, even as in the East at the present day, was not likely to offend their taste. But the silence, on this point, of the Monk Miedviédief, the Princess's confidant and devoted servant, coupled with his persistent praise of her moral qualities, is very significant.

On this latter question, every one, even La Neuville, seems agreed. 'She is as acute, subtle, and shrewd in mind, as she is broad, short, and coarse in person. And though she has never read Machiavelli, nor learnt anything about him, all his maxims come naturally to her.'

Up till the year 1682, Sophia's life had resembled, —outwardly, at all events,—that of all Russian girls of her time, aggravated, as in the case of persons of her great rank, by the increased severity of its retirement. The *terem* of the Kreml exceeded all others in this respect. It enforced solitude, minute and complicated acts of devotion, and frequent fasting. The Patriarch, and the nearest relations, were the only visitors. The physician was only admitted in cases of very serious illness. When he entered, the shutters were closed, and he had to feel his patient's pulse through a covering. The *Tsaritsa* and the *Tsarevny* passed through secret passages into the church, where the inevitable red silk curtains screened them from the curiosity of other worshippers. In 1674, two young lords, Butourlin and Dashkof, turning the corner of one of the inner courts of the palace, came suddenly upon a carriage, in which the *Tsaritsa* was driving, on pilgrimage to a monastery. This accident endangered their necks. There was a searching inquiry, which even took them as far as to the torture-chamber. The princesses had no allotted place in any of the solemnities, which, in the case of the rest of the Court, occasionally broke the hideous monotony of a life bound by rigid and unchanging etiquette. They never appeared, except at funerals, when they followed the bier, always impenetrably veiled. The nation knew nothing of them, save their names, spoken daily in the prayers of the official liturgy. They knew nothing of it—nothing, so to speak, of human life, beyond the narrow circle within which fate had imprisoned them. Unable, on account of their rank, to

marry any subject, debarred, by their religion, from alliance with any foreign prince, they were doomed never to know love, nor marriage, nor maternity. So the law willed it.

Probably, even at that date, some compromise was admitted. Otherwise Sophia would certainly never have been able to play, and at a moment's notice, the part in which we shall shortly see her appear. On 27th April 1682, Peter was proclaimed Tsar. On the 23rd of the following month, a revolt of the *Streltsy* had overthrown his sole rule, and associated his brother Ivan with him on the throne. Everything points to the fact that Sophia was the arch inspirer of this *coup d'état*—nay, more, that, for the most part, it was her handiwork.

The *terem* of the Kreml must have felt the direct influence of Byzantine ideas, with all that historic mingling of asceticism and intrigue, which made up the life of the Lower Empire. Sophia and her sisters, watching by the bedside of their dying brother, must have called up memories of Pulcheria, the daughter of Arcadius, who seized the reins of power during the minority of Theodosius, and held them after his death, with the help of Martian, chief of the Imperial Guard. Some beating of wings against that barred cage there must have been,—body and soul alike rising in revolt, some dreams of liberty and love. Here, as elsewhere, doubtless, most palace revolutions had their source in such hidden emotions. Sophia certainly saw some male faces within the Kreml, besides that of the Patriarch, or even those of her near kinsmen, the Miloslavski,—energetic men, but dull-minded. Féodor, who kept his bed long before the end, needed a woman's care. A member of his immediate circle was ready to incite him to break the *terem* rule, by taking his nurse from within its walls, and to recommend Sophia to his notice. That man was Vassili Galitzin.

A remarkable man, in more ways than one. In contemporary Russian history, in Peter's own life-history, he marks a period. Better, because more clearly than Matviéf, he indicates that slow preparation, that intellectual and moral evolution, the extent of which may indeed have been exaggerated since—but which certainly did precede the appearance of the great Reformer, and rendered his work possible. He personifies that *élite* of which I have already spoken, amongst whom such men as Morozof,

Ordin Nashtshokin, and the Patriarch Nicone himself, had already, in preceding reigns, inaugurated a new period, an era of revolution. After playing an important part, for several years, in the government of his country, Vassili was concerned in the abolition of the *Miestnitchestvo*—an essentially Asiatic custom, in virtue of which no subject of the Tsar could occupy, with regard to a fellow-subject, any position inferior to that which one of his forebears might have occupied, in relation to an ancestor of the said fellow-subject—thus forming an insurmountable obstacle to any wise selection by merit, an endless source of wrangling, whereby the action of the Government was much enfeebled.

He thought of organising a regular army. According to La Neuville, he carried his plans for the future further yet, and had dreams—far beyond anything Peter dared attempt—of freeing the serfs, and making them peasant proprietors. Father Avril himself, in spite of his having been detained in Moscow, and prevented from going to China, during the period when the future Regent was all-powerful, pays homage to his liberal-mindedness. The other boyards, in their hatred for Catholicism, overruled their colleague's decision.¹

Galitzin spoke and wrote Latin with elegance and ease. He was constantly in the German suburb, and was in close relations with its inhabitants; he received Gordon the Scotchman at his own table, and was himself attended by a German doctor, Blumentrost. The Greek, Spafari, who constantly appears in his circle, and who, by his favour, held a prominent position in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Posolskii Prikaz*), was quite a modern type of courtier-like diplomacy, and cosmopolitan experience, who had travelled the whole of Europe, and into China, who drew out plans for the navigation of the great Asiatic rivers, and corresponded with Witsen, the Burgomaster of Amsterdam.

Galitzin's palace, within and without, bore every resemblance to an important European dwelling, full of valuable furniture, Gobelins tapestries, pictures, tall mirrors. He had a library of Latin, Polish, and German books. This library was later to contain the manuscripts of Krijanitch, a Servian, and apostle of reforms, to whom Peter, very probably, may have owed his inspiration. He had three thousand houses built in Moscow, and even built a stone

¹ *Voyage en divers pays de l'Europe* (Paris, 1692), p. 314.

bridge,—the first ever seen in the country,—for which a Polish monk supplied the plan. He had a passionate affection for France, and caused his son constantly to wear a portrait of Louis XIV.¹

His fall, and Peter's accession, ensuing on it, are honestly held by La Neuville, to be a catastrophe for civilisation. He did indeed still cling, to a certain extent, to the era he was striving to abolish. He was not free from superstition. He put a peasant, whom he suspected of trying to cast an evil spell on him, to the torture.² He was accused, in later days, of having tried to gain Sophia's favours by means of a love-philter, and of having caused the man who prepared the potion to be burnt.³ But Peter himself was not altogether free from weaknesses of this kind. Take him altogether, this man, who was to end by being one of the young Tsar's adversaries, began by being his worthy forerunner.

Born in 1643, Vassili Galitzin was thirty-nine years old when Féodor's illness brought him into Sophia's company. He was married, with tall children of his own. With him there stood, beside the dying man's pillow, Simon Polotski, a Little-Russian priest, a man of great knowledge for those times, Silvester Miedviédief, a learned monk, a bibliographer and court poet, and Hovanski, a soldier, much favoured by the *Streltsy*. Thus a political group, the elements of which may have previously drawn together, and fused in the dark shadow, was here assembled. Miedviédief was the soul of the combination, but Galitzin held the foremost place by Sophia's side, and held it by the power of love.

The Tsarevna was twenty-five, and, to La Neuville's eyes, looked forty. Naturally hot-blooded and passionate, she had never, as yet, felt the full current of life; and when, at one and the same moment, her mind and heart awoke, she cast herself into the stream fearlessly, furiously,—surrendered herself utterly to the mighty flood which carried her along with it. Ambition came to her with love. She naturally associated the man without whom success would have had no charm for her, with her ambitious projects. She incited him, more than he her, to scale the heights of fortune they might share together. Personally, he appears to us timid,

¹ Solovief, *History of Russia*, vol. xiv. p. 97. Avril, p. 296.

² Jeliaboujski, *Memoirs* (Tazykop edition), p. 21.

³ Oustrialof, *History of Peter the Great*, vol. ii. pp. 48, 344.

suspicious, irresolute—he soon gives signs of dizziness and distress. He would even draw back at the supreme moment, but for Miedviédief and Hovanski. Miedviédief spurs the conspirators onward, inspires them with his own passion, his own feverish love of combat. Hovanski supplies the formidable weapon he needs, for the successful carrying out of his designs.

II

In 1682 the *Streltsy*—called into existence by Ivan the Terrible and his companion in arms, Adashef—had but a short record and a somewhat tarnished glory behind them. Yet, such as it was, they had contrived to turn it into a capital, on which they lived in liberal fashion. Free men, all of them, soldiers from father to son, they formed a privileged military class, in the midst of the general servitude, and their very privileges had won them an importance quite out of proportion with their natural business and service. They were lodged, equipped, and paid by the state, in times of peace, while other free men were forced to serve unpaid, and at their own charges, even in time of war. They had a special administration of their own, and a separate commandant, who was always an important boyard. In times of peace they kept order in the streets, did patrol duty, furnished sentries, and guards of honour, and served as firemen. One regiment of picked men (*Stremiannyi*), ('the spur regiment') attended the Tsar whenever he went beyond the city walls. In war time the *Streltsy* formed the vanguard and the backbone of his army. There were twenty regiments at Moscow, eight hundred to one thousand men in each, distinguished by the colour of their uniforms—red, blue, or green kaftans with broad red belts, yellow boots, and velvet fur trimmed caps,—and a varying number in the provinces. Their military duties not filling all their time, they went into trade and manufactures; and, seeing they paid neither licence nor taxes, they easily grew rich. Hence many well-to-do burgesses of Moscow prayed for leave to be inscribed upon their lists, but they were an exclusive set, and would have no intruders.¹

It was to them that Boris Godunof owed his victory

¹ Oustrialof, vol. i. p. 17, etc. Berg, *The Reign of Tsar Féodor* (Petersburg, 1829), vol. ii. p. 36, etc. Herrmann, *Geschichte Russlands* (Gotha, 1846-1860), vol. iv. p. 1, etc.

over the *Samozvaniets* Dimitri; under Tsar Michael, they captured Marina Mniszech and her last partisan, Zaroutski; they took Smolensk from the Poles under Alexis, and defended Tshiguirin against the Turks, under Féodor. During the long internal and external crisis of the seventeenth century, they constantly took sides with the regular power, they conquered Rasin, the rebel Cossack, and practically saved the monarchy; but the troubles of that time reacted on them, set up the ferment of agitation in their ranks.

Idleness completed the work of corruption. These natural champions of order had, for some time before the period of which I write, been making common cause with insurgents of all kinds, even giving the signal for riots. Riots, among the lower classes, had indeed become the order of the day. Official greed and corruption, and all their consequent abuses, had revolted the popular soul. Here, too, in this half-formed society, face to face with a rotting State, the way was prepared for Peter's coming. Though with less cause for complaint, the *Streltsy* raised their voices above those of all other grumblers. Their soldierly qualities, as was soon to be proved, had become, and were to remain, less than indifferent. But they were terrible brawlers. A day of tempest was to convert them, ere long, into the fiercest of ruffians. Alarming symptoms were evident among them before Féodor's death. The regiment of Siemion Griboïédof rose against its colonel, accusing him of peculation;—of stealing their pay and forcing them to work on the building of a country house of his, on Sundays. Thanks to the weakness of the Government, standing between a dying Sovereign, and heirs still in their childhood, the contagion spread. When the Naryshkins came to power with Peter, they found sixteen regiments in a flame. Sorely puzzled, they sent for the exiled Matviéief, the founder of their fortunes, the experienced statesman; and, pending the arrival of their saviour, they sacrificed the colonels of the regiments. The *pravieje*, a punishment reserved for insolvent debtors, was applied. Before the assembled troops, the incriminated officers were beaten with rods on the fleshy parts of their legs, until they disgorged all their really, or presumed, ill-gotten gains. This torture lasted many hours, but did not kill the colonels. But all discipline was destroyed, and the wild beast thus unmuzzled in the ranks of this

Pretorian Guard, only waited the appearance of an easy prey to make its spring and use its claws. Sophia and her councillors offered it the Naryshkin party.

The stroke was prepared, the insurrection planned, swiftly and boldly,—cynically too, almost openly. The Tsarevna's uncle, Ivan Miloslavski, denounced in later years by Peter as the chief author of the shameful deed, and hunted by him with savage hatred to his grave, made himself desperately busy, spreading lying tales, fanning the flames of rage. There was a story that the Naryshkins had poisoned Féodor, that they were ill-using Peter's elder brother, the dispossessed Tsarevitch, that one of the family desired to mount the throne. A Naryshkin, followed by a troop of armed men, was seen ill-treating the wife of one of the *Streltsy*. He was an agent of the Miloslavski in disguise. Feodora Rodinitza, a confidant of Sophia's, went about the streets, slipped even into the soldier's quarters, sowing venomous words, and coin, and promises, broadcast.

But the conspirators awaited their pre-arranged signal, Matviéief's arrival. The *Streltsy*, perfect in their part, welcomed their former chief, and lulled his suspicions to rest. On May 11th, 1682, a deputation from the twenty regiments brought him bread and salt. 'Honey on a dagger's point,' said, later, the son of the unhappy old man, condemned, doomed to his death, at that very moment. Four days later, at dawn, the alarm sounded in all the *Streltsy* quarters, the twenty regiments flew to arms, and the Kreml was besieged. The gay-coloured kaftans had been put aside for the nonce, and the *Streltsy* all wore their red shirts, with sleeves rolled elbow high,—fell sign of the work for which they had risen so early. Soldiers they were no more,—judges rather, and executioners. They had drunk deeply before starting, and wild with brandy, even before they grew mad with carnage, they yelled in fury, brandishing their halberts. They believed, or feigned it, that Ivan and Peter himself had been assassinated, and professed to desire to avenge their deaths. In vain were the Tsar and the Tsarevitch brought out to them, safe and sound, on the top of the Red Staircase. Desperate efforts were made to appease them, but they would hear nothing, recognise no one; louder and louder they yelled, 'Death to the assassins.' The head of their own *prikaz* (office of management,—*department*), the aged

Dolgorouki, came out upon the steps to call them to order. Instantly two or three bolder spirits climbed the stairway, clutched the old man, and threw him into space, while others held up their pikes to catch him as he fell. '*Lioubo ! Lioubo !*' 'that's good, that pleases us,' shouted the mob. The massacre had begun. It lasted three days. Sought out one by one, hunted through the palace, tracked into the neighbouring houses, into churches,—the councillors and relatives of Nathalia, Matviéief, all the Naryshkins, shared Dolgorouki's fate. Some were slowly tortured to their end, dragged by their hair across the squares, knouted, burnt with red-hot irons, chopped up piecemeal, at last, with halbert strokes. Nathalia made a desperate struggle before giving up Ivan, her favourite brother. He finally surrendered, of his own free will, at the prayer of old Prince Odoievski, sacrificing his life for those of his family, which the savage *Streletsy* undertook to spare. After having partaken of holy communion, in one of the churches within the Kreml, he issued forth, clasping like a shield, in that supreme moment, a sacred Icon. Instantly the image was dashed from his grasp, and he sank in the sea of blood and fury which still beat against the walls of the old palace. It raged further yet, dashing over the town, lapping round private dwellings and public edifices, wandering hither and thither in search of the supposed accomplices of an imaginary crime, sacking and murdering everywhere as it went. The rioters even fell upon the city archives, and here we may discern a political intention—the desire to endue their excesses with a popular character,—an impression existed at the time that their object was to destroy all documents bearing on the institution of serfdom.

And Sophia? Historians have essayed to clear her from personal responsibility.¹ This is all against the evidence. Never was the maxim, *Is fecit cui prodest*, better applied. Many vanquished there were, in those terrible days. One conqueror alone appears, Sophia. So thoroughly does she control the movement that she stops it, dams it up, the instant she is so minded. A few words from Tsikler, a mere lay figure, suffice to restrain the most furious of the rioters. This Tsikler will be seen, on the very morrow of the convulsion, in the Tsarevna's immediate circle. The

¹ Aristof, *Disturbances at Moscow, during the Regency of Sophia* (Warsaw, 1871).

most important posts, too, fall to her former friends Hovanski, Ivan Miloslavski, Vassili Galitzin. After the hunt the quarry is divided. She takes her own share as a natural right. Peter still remaining titular Sovereign, she holds his power, as *de facto* Regent, till more come to her. Finally, she gives those who have done her such good service their reward. To the *Streltsy*, ten roubles each for their pains, and, though the goods of their victims, which they claim, are not given them openly, means are found to afford them satisfaction, by putting the property up for sale, and reserving them the right of purchase. They are tenderly treated, for they will soon be needed afresh. And on May 23rd they are at the Kreml again, clamouring to have Ivan associated with Peter on the throne, which, thus divided, will be more easily held in subjection. Measures have been already taken to have the Patriarch and a few boyards at hand, there is talk of Joseph and Pharaoh, of Arcadius and Honorius, of Basil and Constantine. Michael and Philaretus, whose sovereignty left unpleasing memories behind it, are entirely overlooked. There is another mock election, and the famous double-seated throne is set up. Even this does not suffice. Ivan, infirm, an idiot, must have precedence. More rioting, yet another sham elective assembly. This time Sophia casts off the mask completely. When Ivan is proclaimed chief Tsar, the rioters are feasted, and the Tsarevna does the honours. Their hands, like their shirts, are bloodstained still, but she pours wine for them with her own. They prove their gratitude by returning on the 29th of May, and conferring on her the title of Regent.

III

She has gained the summit at last; but her sole object in reaching it, at the price of so many crimes, has been to taste the delights of power with, and through, the chosen one of her heart. All others must bow before him. Her will is that *he* should command. During her seven years of regency the real master of Russia—the real Regent—is Vassili Galitzin.

The Tsarevna's virtue, like her political honesty, has found defenders; but the amorous Princess has herself undertaken the task of enlightening us upon the point, and

giving the facts their true historical values. Five years have gone by. She reigns at the Kreml, and Galitzin is bringing a disastrous Crimean campaign—she alone believes it to have crowned him with laurels—to its close. Within a short time he is to be with her at Moscow, and she writes—*'Batiushka, my hope, my all, God grant thee many years of life. This is a day of deep gladness to me, for God our Saviour has glorified His name, and His Mother's, by thee, my all! Never did divine grace manifest itself more clearly. Never did our ancestors see greater proof of it. Even as God used Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, so has He led us across the desert by thy hand! Glory be to Him, who has showed us His infinite mercy by thee! What can I do, oh my love, to fitly recompense thy mighty toil! Oh my joy, oh delight of my eyes! Dare I really believe, oh my heart, that soon I shall see thee again, who art all the world to me? That day will be a great one to me, which brings thee once more to my side, oh my soul! if that were possible I would recall thee now, in a few moments, by some magic invocation. Thy letters all come safely, by God's mercy. The news of the battle of Perekop arrived on the 11th. I was making a pilgrimage that day, on foot, to the monastery of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (Vozdvizhenski). Just as I neared the convent of St. Sergius, thy messenger joined me. I hardly know how the rest of my journey was accomplished. I read as I walked along. How shall I prove my gratitude to God, to His Blessed Mother, to the merciful Saint Sergius, worker of miracles? Thou biddest me give alms to the convents, I have loaded them all with gifts. I have gone on pilgrimage to every one, on foot, as to the first. The medals are not ready yet. Have no care for them; the moment they are ready I will send them. Thou wouldst have me pray? I do pray, and God, who hears me, knows how I long to see thee, oh my world, oh my soul! I trust in His mercy, which will grant me to see thee soon, oh all my hope! As for the army, thou shalt decide as thou wilt. For myself, I am well, thanks, doubtless, to thy prayers; all here are well. When God shall permit me to see thee again, I will tell thee all, oh all my world! thou shalt know my life, my occupations; but do not delay, come,—yet do not hurry over much, you must be weary. What shall I do to reward you for everything, and above all*

others? No other would have done what thou hast done; and thou hast spent so much pains before thou couldst succeed.¹

SOPHIA.'

This letter, though not precisely modelled on the style of Mlle. Scuderi's heroines, is none the less conclusive. If La Neuville is to be believed, Sophia would have made no difficulty about bestowing the reward of which she held her hero worthy. But there was an obstacle to this expression of her transports of gratitude,—an obstacle called the Princess Galitzin; and, unluckily, the hero refused to do what was necessary to get rid of it,—‘feeling naturally bound to her in honour, besides that he had received a great dowry with her, and that his children by her were far dearer to him than those he had by the Princess (*the Tsarevna*), whom he only cared for on account of her fortune.’ Yet, the chronicler proceeds, ‘Women are ingenious, she (Sophia) contrived to persuade him (Galitzin) to induce his wife to become a nun, which done, according to Muscovite law, any husband, on the excuse of the physical impossibility of his remaining in celibacy, could obtain permission to marry again. The good lady having freely consented, the Princess counted fully on the success of her plans.’²

She was reckoning without another barrier, which rose suddenly between her and what had looked like the approaching realisation of her dearest hopes.

IV

As may well be imagined, the son of Nathalia Naryshkin played a merely passive part amidst the terrible convulsions which more than once shook the heavy diadem of Ivan the Terrible on his young brow, and filled his eyes with bloody visions. Flattering legends have indeed pictured him, as startling the world, by a courage beyond his years, braving assassins, and driving them back under the fire and majesty of his glance. At the same time his opening genius, no less precocious, threw the exploits of Pic de la Mirandola quite into the shade. He is described, at three years old, as commanding a regiment, and present-

¹ Published by Oustrialof, vol. i. p. 383.

² Despatch from the French Agent, La Vie, dated Nov. 10, 1718, quoting Peter's own words, in confirmation of these details (Foreign Office, Paris).

ing reports to his father. At eleven, under the tuition of a Scotchman, Menesius, he has sounded all the mysteries of military art, and has adopted personal and generally innovating views, concerning several. I value legends, but I do not shrink from the necessity of contradicting them when they seem historically incorrect. In this matter they are completely so. Physically, and intellectually, the great man's development would, as a matter of fact, appear to have been somewhat slow. The colossus had some trouble in getting on its legs: at three years old, he had not parted from his wet nurse; at eleven he could neither read nor write. The baby strategist and his regiment (*Pietrof-Polk*), on the subject of which another, and in most respects well-informed, historian, in what is otherwise a curious study, complacently dwells, are a pure and simple fiction.¹ I go further: never, even at a more advanced age, does Peter give signs of great natural courage. He is far too nervous, too easily excited; his first appearances on the stage which was to ring with the sound of his exploits, had nothing heroic about them. Courage, like wisdom, came to him late, and both were the result of one and the same effort of a will strengthened by repeated trials. The terrible experiences, the anguish, the terrors, which assailed his youth, left an indelible mark on his character and temperament;—an evident proneness to the easy disturbance of the physical and moral faculties, by any violent shock,—an instinctive recoil of his whole being, in face of danger,—an inclination to bewilderment, and loss of self-control. His will takes the upper hand at last, and nature, once conquered, is all the better servant; but there the nature is, always, and unchanging. Hence, Peter will all his life be a timid man, and for that very reason, a violent one as well,—with a violence not invariably conscious, and frequently calculated, like that of Napoleon, but absolutely unreflecting, breaking away, momentarily, from the control of his reason and his will. This defect, to which I have already referred, this brand of the cripple, he will carry with him all his life, graven in his flesh;—the fierce expression of his harsh imperious features twisted by a sudden convulsion. It has been said that an attempt to poison him thus left its mark; whether the poison were physical or moral matters little, its effect is the im-

¹ Zabielin, *The Childhood of Peter the Great* (Moscow, 1872).

portant matter. The venom instilled into the poor child's veins, when the *Streltsy* drew his little feet through his uncle's blood, seems to me the most probable of the two.

He was frightened, as any child in his position would have been frightened; he hid himself, no doubt, in his mother's skirts, and once more, without a shadow of regret, he left the dreary palace, peopled with horrible nightmares. For Sophia's triumph condemned him to fresh exile—both him and his,—put him outside the law, at least, and, happily for him, outside the common rule. Exile, for this ten-year-old Sovereign who was to grow up such an extraordinarily turbulent man, meant room to stretch his limbs, air to breathe, health for body and mind; exile here stands for freedom.

He makes the most of it. He does, indeed, return to the Kreml, on days of high ceremony, to take his seat on the twin-throne, specially ordered in Holland—still to be seen in the Moscow Museum—but these are but transitory appearances. The rest of the time is spent at Préobrajenskoïé, free from all the servitude and constraint of etiquette and sovereignty, and nothing could suit him better. It must not be forgotten that he is connected, on the maternal side, with a hotbed of relative independence. When Nathalie first arrived at the Kreml, her half Scotch habits caused a scandal. Did she not even dare to lift a corner of the curtain that screened her carriage window? On his mother's side, too, he is linked to a centre of European culture, but fate has willed his separation from the Greco-Latin-Polish School, the influence of which has hitherto prevailed in Russia. The representatives of this school, led by Miedviédief, all belong to Sophia's party. One of his tutors, Zotof, who also belonged to it, was forced to flee, and never was replaced. Left to himself, the child follows his own fancy, leaning instinctively to foreigners. Thus he learns many things, but hardly anything of military matters. He will never be a great soldier, his mind is too practical, I would even say too *bourgeois*. He is described, at an early age, as having laid the *Oroujennâia palata*, the court arsenal, under contribution. But this seventeenth century Muscovite arsenal is only military in name. It really is a sort of Eastern bazaar; Peter sends there for watches, which he amuses himself by taking to pieces, and horticultural imple-

ments, the use of which he has explained to him. People have chosen to exaggerate the extent of his boyish curiosity.¹ Let us take any child—a fairly gifted one, of course—with a bright intelligence, let us suppose him absolutely removed from the ordinary course of systematic education, and at the same time perfectly free to satisfy the needs of his awakening intelligence, and his naturally active imagination. His instinctive desire for knowledge will evidently turn in a great variety of directions. Peter is an *αὐτοδίδακτος*, as a diplomat in his service, writing to Leibnitz, later expressed it.²

It does not in the least follow that he was a precocious student. His exercise-books are still in existence; at the age of sixteen, his writing was bad, his orthography lamentable, and he had not progressed beyond the two first rules in arithmetic. His tutor, the Dutchman, Franz Timmermann, had some trouble, himself, in working out a sum in multiplication by four figures. It should be added that in his lessons, arithmetical problems alternated with theorems of descriptive geometry.³

We who have a regular process of scholastic training, invariably and systematically graduated, shrink from seeing an order of intellectual progress to which we are accustomed, and which may after all be merely arbitrary, thus inverted. But such inversions are frequent, in less precise and rule-bound intellectual spheres than ours.

It is a mere chance, too, which interested Peter, at this early age, in a class of studies which have but little charm for most very young minds. In 1686 his attention was accidentally drawn in conversation to a wonderful instrument brought back by Prince James Dolgorouki, from a journey abroad. With this instrument, he heard, distances might be measured without moving a step. Nothing of the sort had ever yet been seen in the *Oronjennaia palata*. And forthwith the astrolabe was sent for. Alas! Dolgorouki came back empty-handed, the instrument had disappeared from his house—stolen, no doubt. Luckily, the Prince was

¹ Nastrof, *The Early Education of Peter I. (Russian Archives, 1875)*, vol. ii. p. 470. Comp. Pogodin, *Early Years of Peter the Great* (Moscow, 1875), p. 17, etc.

² Baron Urbich, 16th Nov. 1707, in Guerrier's *Leibnitz in seinen Beziehungen zu Russland* (Leipzig, 1873), vol. ii. p. 71.

³ Oustrialof, vol. ii. p. 439, *Cabinet of Peter I. (Imperial Archives)*, section i. Book 38.

upon the point of starting once more for the countries where such wonders grew. Sophia and Galitzin were sending him to Louis XIV., to ask his help against the Turks. The Most Christian King gave the Ambassador the reception he might have expected, but the astrolabe was purchased. When it reached Peter's hands, he was sorely puzzled, not knowing how to use it. Somebody mentioned Timmermann, and the Dutchman, who had been building houses in the German quarter, became mathematical tutor at Prébrazenskoié.

Peter had neither time nor wish—nor, with such a master, had he the means—to make great progress in this branch of knowledge. In his case, the astrolabe was evidently, and simply, the accidental manifestation of that instinct of touching everything, which is at the bottom of all childish natures. Doubtless, the excessive prominence, in his character, of this itching curiosity, is in many ways unusual, and denotes not only a particularly formed and serious-minded nature in the child himself, but also the existence of very special external circumstances which influenced his mind. His ultimate destiny made it necessary that, in the surroundings amongst which he was placed, the things which should most powerfully attract his intelligence, ever on the alert for new sensations—the most attractive, the most *curious* things—should also be the most useful and instructive points in the new world, full of wonders, with which the circle of his own existence was beginning to find contact.

For, it is clearly improbable—all legends notwithstanding—that at ten years old, or even at sixteen, the future reformer should have realised the advantage Russia would find, one day, in being governed by a Prince who could ply *fourteen* different trades. *Fourteen* is the number hallowed by tradition; but Peter never learnt fourteen trades. He did study and practise a few, such as turning and dentistry, without apparent profit to any one at all. By this dispersal of his attention, in spite of the breadth of an eminently comprehensive intelligence, he ran the risk of superficiality—and he did not escape it. In later years, following the example of his peers, and converting his natural inclinations into reasoned aptitudes, he will perceive that to say to his subjects (a lazy, ignorant, and awkward-handed nation), ‘Do this or that, bestir yourselves, learn!’ has less effect on them, than the

powerful example of his own action. On principle, therefore, but also and always by taste, by instinct, by temperament, and in obedience to the pressure of the atmosphere around him, he will go on bestirring himself, gathering up here and there, pell-mell, and at random, every sort of knowledge, every kind of facility, working everywhere, and on every undertaking, with his own hands. And these same influences, again, drive him, early in life, into the only line in which he succeeds in becoming a good practical, if not a master-hand, at the same time providing him with an inexhaustible source of pleasure, if not of positive and enduring benefit, to himself, and to his country.

Every one knows the story,—amplified and adorned, of course, by the tellers,—of the old English boat, found in the village of Ismailof, in a store of cast-off possessions, once belonging to the great-uncle of the young hero, Nikita Ivanovitch Romanof. The legend, ingenious to the last, will have it that Peter, as a child, had such a horror of water, that he grew pale and trembled at the sight of a brook. This may, perhaps, have been the mere symbolic expression of the natural difficulty felt by a landsman, an inhabitant of the hugest continent in the world, about entering into intimacy with that distant, invisible, unknown, well-nigh unattainable, element. Peter will give Russia a fleet before he gives her a sea. The whole character of his life-work—precipitate, abnormal, paradoxical—is seen in this one trait. When the old half-rotten wooden skiff, the Ismailof boat, attracted the child's attention, it overcame his instinctive repugnance, and confirmed him in his vocation as a sailor.

No sufficient attempt has been made to explain the presence of this boat, in a village close to Moscow, in the very centre of *terra firma*. When, some time later, Peter established a shipbuilding yard some hundreds of versts away, on the lake of Péréïaslavl, he merely followed a course which had been already traced out, before him. That strange thing, a navy without a sea, was his creation, but it was not his invention. Properly speaking, indeed, he never invented anything; this will be seen, as the series of his manifold realisations is unrolled. Attempts had been made in this direction, even under the reign of Tsar Alexis; a yacht, *The Eagle*, having been built at Diedinof, on the banks

of the Oka, with the help of foreign carpenters, brought in for the purpose. Struys notices this yacht fully in his *Travels*.¹ The idea was floating in the air, confused as yet, but clearly directed towards the desired goal.

The Ismailof boat, like the astrolabe, at first appeared a mysterious object in Peter's eyes. The peasants, in old days, had seen it sailing against the wind,—wonderful indeed ! It was soon launched on a neighbouring pond. But how to sail it ? Timmermann was completely at a loss. Luckily the artisans, Dutchmen too, who had worked at Diedinof, had not all disappeared. A few were living in the *Faubourg*. Thus, Peter had two more teachers, Karschten-Brandt and Kort, carpenters both. They advised the removal of the boat to Péréiaslavl, where there was a huge sheet of water. Peter took their advice, and set himself eagerly to work under their teaching ; but as a matter of fact, his principal occupation at that moment was that of playing truant. He did indeed learn some useful things, but chiefly he acquired habits, and inclinations,—some of them deplorable. He gained health, too, and vigour, iron muscles, a physical temperament of extraordinary toughness,—save for, and in spite of, his nervous attacks, the outcome of his hereditary stain,—and a moral organisation, of marvellous suppleness, robust, enterprising, except in those occasional moments of weakness.

He made himself friends, too,—quite a little tribe, collected at random, in his large domestic circle, in the promiscuity of his vagrant existence—grooms from the paternal stables (*konioulky*) who rode the little horses of the country with him, barebacked,—scamps picked up in the streets. He played soldiers with them, of course, and, naturally, he was in command. Behold him then, at the head of a regiment ! Out of this childish play rose that mighty creation, the Russian army. Yes, this double point of departure—the pseudo-naval games on the lake of Péréiaslavl, and the pseudo-military games on the Préobrajenskoïé drill-ground—led to the double goal,—the Conquest of the Baltic, and the Battle of Poltava.

But to realise all this, to fill up the space thus indicated, more was necessary than the passage of a unique personality, however exceptional, from childhood to ripe age ; more than

¹ Amsterdam, 1746.

the humanly possible development of an individual genius ; there must have been a concourse of immense collective forces—prepared beforehand, but motionlessly awaiting the favourable hour, the man who should know how to use them—linked to the natural effort. The hour and the man once arrived, these were to be suddenly revealed, to use the individual as much as he used them, to urge him onward, quite as much as he was to stimulate their action. The man himself was but the product of this latent energy, and thus it is that, at the proper moment, he appears, rising out of, and with, and by it.

Not only are the foundations of a fleet and an army laid, amidst the boyish undertakings, and the riotous companionships of the fiery youth. A whole new society is taking shape. All the old aristocracy, all the superannuated hierarchy of Moscow, will soon be crushed beneath the feet of the bold fellows, sprung from the stable and the kitchen, whom he will make Dukes and Princes, Ministers and Marshals. And in this again, he will only take up the broken thread of national tradition. He will improvise nothing, he will merely imitate his ancestors of the pre-Mongol epoch, chiefs of a *droujina* (fighting band) who fought beside their *drouky*, drank with them, when the work was done, and refused to turn Mohammedan because 'drinking is the Russian's joy.'

Peter will always be a convivial comrade, and a heavy drinker ; always, too, he will keep the trace, an unpleasant one in some particulars, of his taste for the comradeship of the lowest of the population ; and he will leave something of it in his work, and in the national life he fashioned. The popular habits of the period preceding his accession have since found eager apologists. Such praise should surely be extended to the private personality of the great reformer. This would be a hazardous undertaking. Uncleanly habits, coarse manners, degrading vices, the musty smell of the wine-shop, a general atmosphere of cynicism, all that is most shocking in his character, Peter picked up in the street, in the common life of his country, before the Reforms. He did wrong to keep these tastes, he did still more wrong in desiring that his subjects should keep them.

V

The Tsarina Nathalia does not appear to have realised, until very late, the dangers her son ran among such companions. She herself had others, very little better chosen, who absorbed her.

The origin of the 'pleasure' regiments (*potieshnyie*) goes back, according to the most reliable information, to the year 1682; which fact suffices to deprive them, at the outset, of the serious character some people have attributed to them. Peter was then ten years old.¹ But in 1687, the young Tsar's military games began to take on proportions which attracted general attention. A fortress was built at Préobrajenskoïé, on the banks of the Iaouza, whence cannon was fired. The next year, the English skiff was discovered, and from that time forward, Peter, drawn to Péréiaslavl by the dual attraction of fire and water, escaped all domestic control. His life, it is reported, was frequently imperilled in these sports, during which accidents frequently occurred. To put a stop to them, Nathalia hit upon a plan which seemed to her a certain one. 'Marry and change,' says a Russian proverb. She looked about for a wife for her son. He let her have her way. Unlike his future adversary, the austere Charles XII., Peter was by no means indifferent to, nor scornful of, the fair sex. On the 27th of January 1689, he led Eudoxia Lapouhin, the daughter of a prominent Boyard, to the altar. But he set the proverb at nought. Three months later, the couple had parted. He was tacking about on the lake of Péréiaslavl, she, serving the apprenticeship of a widowhood which was to last all her life. Navigation has become more than a taste with the young Tsar, it is a jealous and exclusive passion. Some obscure atavism inherited from the ancient Varegians stirs his soul. He has never seen the sea,—he never ceases dreaming of it,—he will never know rest, till he has reached it. And this again is according to tradition. For two centuries, every war undertaken by his predecessors has had this object,—to reach the sea on the North-west, by driving back Poland or Sweden, or on the South-east, by driving back Turkey. Still, even for this, he will not part with his *koniouky*. Already he plans

¹ See Oustrialof, vol. ii. p. 329; comp. *Memoirs of Matviéief* (Toumanski edition), vol. i. pp. 194-196.

strategical combinations, for using and combining the naval and land forces at his disposal ; and those same forces have grown with the youth, who has already reached a giant's stature. The toy has almost reached the proportions of a weapon. In September 1688, the young Tsar requisitions all the drums and fifes of a crack *Streltsy* regiment for his war game. In November, greatly to the displeasure of Prince Vassili Galitzin, he takes two-thirds of the effective strength of another regiment, and draws the teams for his 'pleasure' artillery from the depôt of the *konioushennyi prikaz* (stable department). There is a regular recruiting station at Préobrajenskoïé, and the grooms and cook boys are not the only recruits whose names appear on the lists. Those of 1688 contain the names of some of the greatest Muscovite families, such as Boutourlin and Galitzin.

The presence of these aristocrats is in itself an absurdity, one of those ironical surprises with which history abounds. Peter, the unconscious artisan, as yet, of a great political and social renovation, who knows not whither he goes, save that he follows his own pleasure, has become the unconscious instrument of a party pursuing a very different aim. His work is confiscated, momentarily, for the benefit of tendencies diametrically opposed to it. These new comers, who will shortly incite the future reformer to claim his stolen rights, will one day help to swell the army of the most resolute opponents of reform. But for the moment there is no question of reform—far from it. The means by which the Miloslavski, and, following them, Sophia, have ensured or obtained their power,—the abolition of the *Miestnitchestvo*, the appeal to popular insurrection,—have bound their cause up with that of the lower classes. The great nobility, that section, at least, which remains most opposed to progress,—wounded in its prerogatives and its ancient customs—has a natural tendency to rally, first round Matviéief and Nathalia, and then round Peter. So that the weapon, which amuses Peter, is, in the eyes of those who now help him to forge the blade, and sharpen its edge, destined to hasten the retaliation of conservative and anti-European ideas, on the most European-minded man Moscow has ever seen. 'Down with Vassili Galitzin' will be their war-cry. Préobrajenskoïé has simply become a natural rallying point for malcontents of every kind, and among these, the reactionaries, being the

most important, take the foremost place. Peter, himself wounded, outraged, and stripped, by the transitory *régime*, the close of which they so impatiently await, is their chosen leader, the future avenger, so they fain would hope, of the common injury.

But of this he recks not. He only cares for amusing himself. He entertains himself, at Péréiaslavl, sailing boats whose canvas swells with no reforming breeze. Under cover of his name, and with his concurrence, a struggle is brewing between the silent Kreml and the noisy camp where he spends his youthful ardour. But in this game, in which his fortune and that of Russia are at stake, the only prize he sees and covets, is larger scope for his schoolboy fancies. Years must go by yet, before he finds his true path. Till that time comes, careless of where the road may lie, he will obediently follow his chance guides. On the day chosen by them, he will march to the assault of power, and will leave them the chief benefits of his victory.

Thus, he steps backwards into history, indifferent alike to his destiny and to his glory.

In July, 1689, the storm breaks.

CHAPTER III

THE MONASTERY OF THE TROÏTSA

- I. Government under the Regency—Its merits—Causes of weakness—Disappointments and bitterness—Diversion to external matters—The Crimean campaigns—Disasters—Galitzin's return—Popular indignation—Peter's party takes advantage of it—The Kreml and the Préobrajenskoïé camp—Sophia faces the storm—The conflict.
- II. The night of the 7th of August—Attack or stratagem?—Peter's flight—The convent of the Troïtza—The Archimandrite Vincent—Boris Galitzin—The struggle is organised.
- III. Parleys and manœuvres—Which way will the army go?—Sophia's courage—Vassili Galitzin's weakness—Defection—The Regent submits—He comes to the Troïtza—Exile—Question and torture—Sophia acknowledges herself beaten—Her cloister—The new *régime*—Peter's comrades in power—The reaction—the Future.

I

SOPHIA'S regency, justified, at all events, as it was, by Peter's youth, if not its natural outcome, might, in 1689, have still hoped to endure, more or less legitimately, for several years. Peter was barely eighteen years old, and no Russian law—like that of Charles V. in France—has advanced the hour of political maturity in the case of sovereigns. Impatient ambition may indeed endeavour to hurry the march of time. But not Peter's own ambition; he still cares so little about power, that, for many a day yet, the accomplishment of the great event will bring no change in his occupations.

The government of Sophia and of her co-Regent, inaugurating a gynecocracy which, for almost a century—from the days of Catherine I. to those of Catherine II.—was to become the general rule in Russia, does not strike me as having deserved either the criticisms, or the praises,—all of them equally exaggerated,—which have been showered upon it. Neither Voltaire, who follows La Neuville in describing the Tsarevna as a second Lucrezia Borgia, nor Karamzin, following Lévêque and Coxe, who calls her 'one of the

greatest women the world has ever seen,'¹ has, in my opinion, done her justice. Among the old Russian historians, Müller in his criticisms of Voltaire's views,² Boltin in his notes of the History of Leclerc,³ and especially Emin⁴ with Aristof,⁵ among the moderns, have endeavoured, not altogether successfully, to reconcile these contradictory exaggerations.

For my part, the government seems to me to have had something exceedingly Byzantine about it. No Byzantine quality is lacking—Court intrigues, party struggles, Pretorian revolts, liturgical quarrels as to how the fingers should be crossed in prayer, how many times the word *hallelujah* should be repeated, and whether, perchance, the Trinity should not consist of four Persons, with a separate throne for the Saviour of the world. Yet, other elements appear, which raise it to a higher level. There is a continuation of that economic springtime, so to speak, already inaugurated under Alexis; a beginning too, of an intellectual spring-tide. While Galitzin was building houses in Moscow, Sophia was writing plays. She had them acted at the Kreml; she even, so some people say, acted in them herself. The policy of the regency, internal and external, lacked neither energy nor skill. It made a bold struggle against the abettors of religious quarrels, who had taken the place of the rioters of former days, and who came to the Palace, even as the *Streltsy* had once come, to seek the Patriarch, and wrangle with him. The chief of the *raskolniks*, Nikita, was put to death. It defended order with all its might, and, when the *Streltsy* claimed the right to disturb it, did not hesitate to punish its former allies. It appealed from the rebellious soldiery, to the nation at large. When the Kreml was threatened, it removed the throne into the protecting shadow of the altar. In October 1682 Sophia and Galitzin took refuge in the convent of the Troïtsa.

'The Trinity,' standing some six leagues from Moscow,—the traditional refuge of the Royal house in hours of danger—still retained all the characteristics of the great Russian *Obitiels*: little fortified towns with a population of monks, novices, and serving brothers, numbering their thousands,

¹ Karamzin, vol vii. p. 293. Lévêque, *Hist. de Russie* (Paris, 1799), vol. iv. pp. 204-234.

² *Études*, 1750-1764.

³ St. Petersburg, 1788.

⁴ *Lives of the Russian Sovereigns* (St. Petersburg, 1767-69).

⁵ *Rebellions in Moscow during the Reign of Sophia* (Warsaw, 1871).

churches by the dozen, not to mention shops, workshops, and trades of various kinds. Boris Godunof once sought shelter there; and to this day the traces of the Polish balls which rained impotently on the ramparts of that holy spot are shown with pride. Thither, in his turn, and shortly too, Peter was to come, to crave help and protection.

The appeal of the *ad interim* government had been heard, and had procured it an army. Falling into an ambush at Vosdvijenskoïé, midway between Moscow and the Troïtza, Hovanski, now the hostile chief of the *Streltsy*, lost his head; his son shared his fate, and the rebellion, decapitated with its chiefs, collapsed.

Abroad,—in the field of diplomacy, at all events—Galitzin proved himself a faithful and fortunate exponent of the traditional policy of territorial expansion, which had gradually set the frontiers of Muscovy farther and farther back, towards the South and West. Taking skilful advantage of the difficulties into which, in spite of Sobieski's victories, their long war with Turkey had thrown the Poles, he snatched Kief out of their hands. In June, 1685, a new Metropolitan, duly installed in the ancient capital, consented to receive his investiture from the patriarch of Moscow. This was a decisive step on the road which was to lead to the recovery of the territories of Little-Russia and to the partition of the Republic.

But these successes were compromised, unfortunately, by the fatal consequences of causes connected with the very origin of the Regent's power. When Sophia and Galitzin put down the partisans of disorder and anarchy, they turned their hands against the authors of their own prosperity. Between the disappointment thus caused, on one hand, and the bitterness roused, on the other, their policy became an aimless struggle. It soon grew a hopeless one. The very next year they were at their wits' end. When the Boyards—ill-treated and deeply discontented—seemed inclined to raise their heads, a mob was brought together on the *Loubianka*, the most crowded square of the city. An anonymous document had been found there, which counselled the people to hurry in their thousands to the Church of Our Lady of Kasan, where, behind the image of the Virgin, another paper which should guide their course would be discovered. Thither the crowd repaired, and a

pamphlet, speaking evil of Sophia, and appealing to the people to rise and massacre the Boyards who supported the Tsarevna, was duly brought to light. This pamphlet, a mere farce, was the work of Shaklovityĭ, a new counsellor of Sophia's, a representative of ancient Muscovy, in the purest Byzantine style—a fierce and cunning schemer. The Tsarevna feigned terror, and her good people acclaimed her, and offered to rid her of her enemies.¹

And now, even abroad, the luck began to turn. The Regent, having promised Poland the help of the Muscovite troops against the Turks, in exchange for Kief, made two expeditions into the Crimea; this again was the traditional course. The Crimean Tartars formed a barrier between Moscow and Constantinople, which Russia was not to overthrow for another century. But there was nothing of the great general about Galitzin; in each campaign he left an army, vast military stores, and the remnants of his reputation, on the steppes. Starting for his second expedition, he found, before his palace door, a coffin, with the insulting legend, 'Try to be more fortunate!'² Returning to Moscow in June 1689, a wild clamour, yells, and threats of death saluted him. He was publicly accused of corruption; barrels of French louis d'or were said to have been openly conveyed into his tent. Meanwhile the Préobrajenskoïé camp was daily filling with new recruits, and Sophia saw the ranks of her partisans melt before her eyes. Yet she faced the storm bravely; her ambition, and her love, indeed, were at their very height. She had taken advantage of the conclusion of peace with Poland to get herself proclaimed *samodierjitsa* (autocrat), with equal rank to her brothers. This title figured, thenceforward, on all official documents, and on occasions of public ceremony the Tsarevna took her place beside her brothers, or rather beside the elder one, for Peter hardly ever appeared. She caused her portrait, with the crown of Monomachus on her head, to be engraved in Holland. At the same time, and notwithstanding that, according to certain witnesses, she had given the absent Galitzin an obscure rival, in the person of Shaklovityĭ,³ she pursued the supreme object of her early dreams

¹ Shaklovityĭ's depositions, see Oustrialof, vol. ii. p. 39.

² Avril, *Voyage en divers Etats d'Europe et d'Asie*, p. 315.

³ *Kourakin Archivus* (St. Petersburg, 1890-1895), vol. i. p. 55.

—her marriage with the Regent and a common throne—with ever-increasing ardour. To attain this end, she elaborated a very complicated plan, which called for the intervention of the Pope himself. Ivan was to be married, his wife to be provided with a lover so as to ensure the birth of children; Peter, thus put on one side, would be got rid of somehow. Then, tempted by a proposed reunion, to be discussed and negotiated, at any rate, between the Orthodox and the Roman Church, the Pope was to be induced to proclaim the illegitimacy of Ivan's children. The ground thus cleared, Sophia and Galitzin would only have to occupy it. Meanwhile the Tsarevna was resolved to brazen it out. While Shaklovityi, relegated by the Regent's return to the subaltern position of a partisan and a police agent, kept his eye on those few of Peter's friends who dared already to cast aside the mask, she defied public opinion, by decreeing a distribution of rewards to the companions in arms of Galitzin, whose victory she still persisted in proclaiming. Peter, well advised by those about him, refused his sanction. She did without it:—here was open conflict! Generals and officers, loaded with honours and with pensions, betook themselves to Préobrajenskoïé to thank the Tsar. He refused to see them:—here was public rupture!

II

The historic night of the 7th of August 1689 closes in at last. A luminous summer night, darkened, unhappily, by the contradictions of legend and of history. This much seems tolerably clear. Peter was suddenly roused from slumber, by fugitives from the Kreml, who came to warn him that the Tsarevna had collected an armed band to attack Préobrajenskoïé and put him to death. Nothing is less clearly proved than this attempt of hers, nothing indeed is less probable. The evidence of documents collected by the best informed of all Russian historians, Oustrialof,¹ would rather go to prove that Sophia neither thought, nor, at that moment, dared to think, of attacking the camp at Préobrajenskoïé. She knew it to be well guarded, kept on a war footing, secure against any surprise. She rather feared, or perhaps

¹ See vol. ii. p. 56.

feigned to fear, an offensive movement on the part of these 'pleasure regiments,' full of spirit, all of them eager, longing to distinguish themselves by some bold stroke. It was a habit of hers, as we know, to feign terror, so as to give the *Streltsy* or the Moscow populace a longing to defend her. So little did she think of taking any action, that until the next morning, she knew nothing of the warning carried to her brother the night before, nor of its consequences. For months past, Préobrajenskoïé and the Kreml had both been on the *qui vive*, watching, suspecting, and accusing each other of imaginary attempts. When Sophia, in the previous month, had paid a visit to Peter in his camp, on the occasion of the Blessing of the waters of the Iaouza, she had brought three hundred *Streltsy* with her. A few days later, when Peter went to the Kreml to congratulate his aunt Anna on her fête-day, Shaklovityï posted fifty reliable men near the Red Staircase, in case of accidents.

An armed band was indeed collected within the Kreml, on that fatal night. With what object? According to Sophia's later assertion, to escort her, next morning, on a pilgrimage. Among all those soldiers, several hundreds of them, picked from the Tsarevna's most devoted followers, there were only *five* who dropped a threatening word against Peter or his mother. Two others, whose names have gone down to posterity, Mielnof and Ladoguin, thought it a good opportunity to desert, slip over to the Préobrajenskoïé camp, and ensure their welcome, by giving the alarm. Some historians have taken them for false zealots, who obeyed a watchword, given by the party instigating Peter to action.¹ This may have been. Let us get to the result, which is a certainty.

Peter begins by running away. Without thinking of verifying the reality of the danger threatening him, he jumps out of his bed, runs straight to the stables, throws himself, bare-legged, in his shirt, on to a horse, and hides himself in the neighbouring forest. A few of his *Koniouhy* join him there, and bring him clothes. Then come officers and soldiers—only a few as yet. The moment Peter sees himself surrounded, and provided with a sufficient escort, without waiting to warn his mother, his wife, or his other

¹ Pogodin, *The Early Years of Peter the Great*, pp. 183-226.

friends, he puts spurs to his horse and tears off full gallop, towards the Troïtza. He reaches it at six o'clock in the morning, tired-out in body, broken down in mind. He is offered a bed, but he cannot rest; he sheds floods of tears, and sobs aloud, terrified, anxious, asking the Archimandrite Vincent, twenty times over, whether he may reckon on his protection. This monk had long been his devoted partisan, and even his banker, in those critical moments through which the deliberate parsimony of Sophia had caused him to pass.¹ His firm and affectionate words reassured the young Tsar at last. Boris Galitzin, the Regent's cousin, Boutourlin, and the other chiefs of the Préobrajenskoïé camp, who join the fugitive at the Troïtza, do better still. The events which follow, like those already passed, give evident proof, both that measures had been taken long beforehand, by Peter's familiars, for the struggle now beginning, and that he himself was quite incapable of taking any personal initiative, or guiding part. His mind was wholly set on his lake at Péréciaslavl and the boats he meant to sail there, as soon as he could build as many as he chose. He left all the rest to his friends. And he will leave them, now, full masters of the situation they have created.

Before the end of the day, the Monastery is invaded, the Tsarinas, Nathalia and Eudoxia, the *Potieshnyïé*, the *Streltsy* of the Souharef Regiment, long since won over to the younger Tsar's cause, arrive in quick succession. People who found a road so quickly, must, surely, have been prepared beforehand to take it. There is no sign of hasty conception about the measures for which Boris Galitzin forthwith assumes responsibility. Everything seems arranged and carried out according to a preconceived plan, and even the Tsar's own sudden flight, possibly a foreseen, and therefore, a prearranged event, would appear the signal designed to mark the opening of hostilities between the rival camps. As for the object of those hostilities, it is an understood thing; it scarcely would appear necessary to mention it. The fight, if fight there is, will be to decide who is the master.

¹ *Kourakin Archives*, vol. i. p. 53.

III

They began by parleying. Peter wrote to Sophia to ask for explanations concerning the nocturnal armaments at the Kreml. The Tsarevna sent an ambiguous reply. Both sides were trying to gain time. One important factor had not, as yet, taken any side in the struggle just beginning. The troops, native and foreign, the majority of the *Streltsy*, and the regiments commanded by Gordon and Lefort, had made no sign. The question was, which party they would serve. On the 16th of August, Peter makes a forward step; a *gramota* (message) from the Tsar, convokes detachments from all these troops, six men from each regiment, to attend him on the morrow. Sophia answers boldly. Her emissaries, posted at convenient spots, stop the Tsar's messengers, while another *gramota*, signed by the Regent, confines both troops and officers to their quarters, on pain of death. At first this measure seems successful; the detachments do not answer to the call, and a story is spread that Peter's *gramota* was forged. Yet slowly, insensibly, the barracks empty, while the flow of soldiers and officers, of every arm, increases at the Troitsa. Symptoms of weakness are betrayed, even by those nearest to the Tsarevna. Vassili Galitzin is the first to show the white feather. He had thought for a moment, it is believed, of going over into Poland, bringing back an army of Poles, Tartars, and Cossacks, and then facing events; but Sophia must have dissuaded him from a plan which would have separated her from her lover. Then, leaving her to her fate, he yields himself to his own, retires to his country house at Miedviedkof, three leagues from Moscow, and declares he has no further part in the government. When foreign officers come to take his orders, he gives them evasive replies,—the irretrievable signal for general defection.

But the Regent herself will not, as yet, acknowledge that her brother has won; she knows what she has to expect from him. Already the leaders of the insurgent *Raskolniks*, crowding into the Kreml, have shouted, 'It is high time that you should take the road to the convent.' She would far rather die. She sends messengers of peace,—the Patriarch himself,—to the Troitsa. The august emissary takes the opportunity of making his private peace, and appears beside

the Tsar at a solemn reception of the deserters, officers and soldiers, whose number daily increases. Then she resolves to play her last stake, and goes herself. Midway, at the village of Vosdvijenskoté, where, seven years before, Hovanski's head had fallen in an ambuscade, Boutourlin stops her. She is forbidden to proceed, and the Boyard's armed followers load their muskets. She beats a retreat, but still stands firm, and showers caresses on the *Streltsy*, most of whom, bound by past complicity, by fear of reprisals, by the temptation of fresh reward, remain faithful to her. They swear to die for her, but, turbulent and undisciplined as ever, they appear before the Kreml on the 6th of September, demanding the person of Shaklovityi, the Tsarevna's confidant, right hand, and temporary lover, that they may give him up to Peter, desiring, so they say, to make him a scapegoat, an expiatory victim, whose punishment shall appease the Tsar's wrath, and effect a general reconciliation. She gives in at last, after a desperate resistance, and from that time it becomes evident that she can depend on nothing, nor on any person.

Shaklovityi is a terrible weapon in Peter's hands. Put to the question, under the lash, he supplies all the necessary elements of the charges which the Tsar's partisans desire to bring against Sophia and her adherents. The echo of his depositions draws Vassili Galitzin himself from his retreat, and leads him, submissive and repentant, to the Troïtza. This is the end. Peter refuses to receive him, but on the intervention of Boris, he consents to show him a measure of clemency. The ex-Regent is exiled to Kargopol, on the road to Archangel; then, farther North, to Iarensk, a lonely village, where, all his wealth being confiscated, he will only have one rouble a day to support himself and his family of five persons. There he will drag on till 1715; but the Tsar's half mercy goes no further. Shaklovityi and his accomplices, real or supposed, are condemned to death. Miedviédief, shut up at first in a monastery, after enduring the most horrible tortures, comes to the same end. The scaffold makes them all equal.

As for Sophia, her fate is what she had foreseen—a convent, with some precautionary measures to increase the severity of the punishment.

Peter's first care is to settle matters with his brother. In

a carefully composed letter, he denounces their sister's misdeeds, but denies any intention of touching his elder brother's rights, when he claimed those she had usurped from himself. He even expresses his inclination to respect Ivan's precedence; 'he will always love him, and respect him as a father.' He omits, nevertheless, to take his advice as to the treatment to be meted out to the usurper. Ivan Troïékourof, one of his early companions, is directly charged to order the Tsarevna to select a convent. After a short hesitation she too submits, and chooses the recently erected Convent of the Virgin (Novodiévitchyï) close to Moscow. The new *régime* has begun.

It is still an intermediate *régime*. Between Ivan, who holds his peace, accepts accomplished facts, remains a mere figure-head for ceremonial occasions, and Peter, who, the tumult once hushed, disappears behind those who helped him to pass victoriously through it, and returns to his own amusements, the power falls to the real conquerors of the moment. Boris Galitzin, a Muscovite of the old stamp, the living antithesis of his cousin Vassili, begins by holding the foremost place, occupied later, when he has compromised himself and roused Naryshkin jealousy by protecting his guilty kinsman, by the Naryshkins themselves, and the other relatives of the Tsarina Mother.

The future great man's hour has not yet struck. The serious struggle into which, for a moment, he has allowed himself to be drawn, has not carried him beyond the limits of the childish era of toy armies and sham fights. Yet, apart from its immediate results, it has not failed to exercise an all-important influence on Peter's destiny, on the development of his character and of his talents. The young Tsar does indeed leave business in the hands of his former comrades, but he has found others, new comers these, who will rapidly oust the old ones from his affections, and who, if they do not actually join him in making the history of his great reign, are destined to point out the road and guide his feet upon it.

BOOK II—THE LESSONS OF THE CIVILISED WORLD

CHAPTER I

ON CAMPAIGN—A WARLIKE APPRENTICESHIP—THE CREA- TION OF THE NAVY—THE CAPTURE OF AZOF

- I. Peter's new comrades—Patrick Gordon—Francis Lefort—The nature of their influence—Lefort's house in the *Sloboda*—A Russian Casino—The fair ladies of the *Faubourg*—The Tsar is entertained—The Government of the Boyards—Reactionary spirit—Amusements at Préobrajenskoïé—Warlike sports—Pleasures—Buffoonery—The King of Presburg and the sham King of Poland—The Lake of Péréiaslavl—A fresh-water fleet—On the road to Archangel—The Sea—Death of the Tsarina Nathalia—A short mourning—Peter goes back to his pleasures.
- II. Russia's precarious position—The Tsar's weariness—He seeks diversion and distraction—A foreign journey planned—Peter desires first to earn warlike glory—Fresh campaign against the Turks—First attempt on Azof—Complete failure—Peter's genius is revealed—Perseverance.
- III. The greatness of Peter and the greatness of Russia—The result of the Mongol Conquest—Redoubled efforts—A second attempt—Repetition of the Siege of Troy—Success—Peter can face Europe—He decides on his journey.

I

THERE has been a great deal of hair-splitting as to the foreign companions who now make their appearance in Peter's circle. Facts and dates have been pretty generally mixed up on this subject, even so far as to make Patrick Gordon one of the young Tsar's confidants and instructors long before Sophia's fall, and to indicate Lefort as the organiser and principal worker in the *coup d'état* of 1689. As a matter of fact, neither came into contact with Peter till during the time of his residence at the Troitsa, and it was

not till much later that they were admitted into his intimacy, and there played an important part. Gordon had been a follower of Vassili Galitzin. Lefort had no special position whatever.

Born in Scotland, towards 1635, of a family of small Royalist and Catholic lairds, Patrick Gordon had spent twenty years of his life in Russia, vegetating as an officer of inferior rank, and far from happy in the process. Before ever coming to Russia, he had served the Emperor, fought with the Swedes against the Poles, and the Poles against the Swedes. 'He was clearly,' say his English biographers, 'a genuine Dugald Dalgetty.'¹ All his knowledge amounted to some recollections of the village school he had attended in the neighbourhood of Aberdeen, his native county, and to his military experiences, in command of a dragoon regiment, in Germany and Poland. In 1665, Alexis, and in 1685, Sophia, sent him on diplomatic service. He thus travelled to England twice, on commissions relative to the privileges of English merchants in Russia, fulfilled his mission with success, but gained no reward save a *tcharka* (goblet) of brandy, which Peter, then a boy of fourteen, offered him, on his return from his second journey. He considered himself ill-treated, requested permission to retire, failed to obtain it, and was thenceforward inclined to make common cause with malcontents. He took part, however, in the disastrous Crimean campaigns, and there won the rank of General. But, being naturally intelligent, active, and well born, in his own country, he thought himself justified in aspiring to a yet higher position. Personally known to the Kings Charles and James of England, cousin to the Duke of Gordon, who was Governor of Edinburgh in 1686, he was the recognised chief of the Scotch Royalist Colony in the *Sloboda*. Speaking Russian, never shrinking from a bottle of wine, he was, to a certain extent, popular amongst the Muscovites themselves. His lively intelligence, his external appearance—redolent of civilisation—and his evident energy, were certain to attract Peter's attention. The Tsar was always to lean towards men of a robust temperament like his own. Patrick Gordon was, indeed, afflicted with an internal malady, which finally carried him off, but in 1697, at four-and-sixty years of age, he closes his journal with these words, 'During the last few days I have

¹ Leslie Stephen and Sydney Lee, *Dictionary of National Biography*.

felt, for the first time, an evident diminution of my health and strength.'¹

Francis Lefort arrived at Moscow in 1675, with fifteen other foreign officers, who, like him, had come to seek their fortune. He belonged to a family of Swiss origin, of the name of Lifforti, which had left the town of Coni, and settled at Geneva. His father was a druggist, and thus belonged to the aristocracy of trade. The women of this class had obtained leave from the Chamber of Reformation, towards the year 1649, to wear 'double woven flowered silk gowns.' At the age of eighteen, Francis departed for Holland, with sixty florins, and a letter of recommendation from Prince Charles of Courland, to his brother Casimir, in his pocket. Charles lived at Geneva: Casimir commanded a body of troops in the Dutch service. He made the young man his secretary, giving him his cast-off wardrobe, worth about three hundred crowns, and his card money, worth about fifty more per day, as salary.² This income, though large, was far from certain. Two years later, Lefort took ship for Archangel. His first thought, when he set foot on Russian soil, was to leave it as quickly as possible; but in those days, travellers could not leave the Tsar's Empire when and how they chose. Foreigners were closely watched—those who went abroad were looked at askance, as possible spies. He spent two years at Moscow, where he nearly died of hunger. He contemplated disappearing into the relatively respectable obscurity of the household of some member of the Diplomatic Corps. He wandered from the Danish envoy's antechamber, to the English Envoy's kitchen, finding no permanent position anywhere. Yet, by degrees, he won friends amongst the inhabitants of the *Sloboda*. He found some kindly protectors, and even one fair protectress, the rich widow of a foreign Colonel. In 1678 he definitely decided to settle in the country, and began by taking him a wife. This was an indispensable beginning, it being necessary, in order to disarm suspicion, to have a family and a roof-tree. He married Elizabeth Souhay, the daughter of a Metz burgher, a Catholic, with a fair fortune,

¹ Unpublished as yet, except in a German translation. The original is in the Archives of the St. Petersburg War Office. Some fragments appeared at Aberdeen in 1859, published by the Spalding Club.

² Vulliemin, *Revue Suisse*, vol. xxix. p. 330.

and good connections. Two of Madame Souhay's brothers, of the name of Bockkoven, Englishmen by birth, were highly placed in the army; Patrick Gordon was son-in-law to one of them. This fact, doubtless, induced Lefort to enter the career of arms, for which he had otherwise neither taste nor inclination.¹ It was not from these two foreigners, clearly, that Peter the Great and his army learnt what they had to learn before they won Poltava. As I have already indicated, their influence on the huge work of progress, of reform, and civilisation, which is bound up with Peter's name, was really very indirect. While it was yet in its infancy, they followed each other, in rapid succession, to the grave. For the moment, too, Peter cared for other things, and the lessons he learnt from the old Scotchman and the young Genevan had no connection with the science of Vauban and of Colbert.

Lefort now owned a spacious house on the banks of the Iaouza, elegantly furnished in the French style, which had already, for some years, been the favourite meeting-place of the denizens of the *Faubourg*. Even during his absences, they habitually gathered there, to smoke and drink. Alexis had forbidden the use of tobacco, but in that respect, as in many others, the suburb was favoured ground. Nobody could organise a merrymaking so well as the Genevan. Jovial, full of lively imagination, with senses that were never jaded, he was a master in the art of setting people at their ease, a thoroughly congenial companion. The banquets to which he invited his friends generally lasted three days and three nights: Gordon was ill after every one of them, Lefort never appeared to feel the slightest evil effect. During Peter's first foreign journey, Lefort's drinking powers astounded even the Germans and the Dutch. In 1699, in the month of February, after an unusually festive bout, he took a whim to finish his merrymaking in the open air. His folly cost him his life; but, when the pastor came to offer him the last religious consolations, he dismissed him gaily, called for wine and for musicians, and passed away peacefully to the strains of the orchestra.² He was the perfect type of the

¹ Korb, *Diarium itineris in Moscoviam* (Vienna, 1700), p. 214—Comp. Oustrialof, vol. ii. p. 13; Alex. Gordon, *History of Peter the Great*, vol. i. p. 136, vol. ii. p. 154. Solovief, *History of Russia*, vol. xiv. p. 142. *La Biographie de Posselt*, transcribed in French by Vulliemin (*Der General und Admiral Franz Lefort*, Frankfort, 1866), is full of curious information, but devoid of the critical quality.

² Korb, p. 119. Oustrialof, vol. iii. pp. 262, 263.

mighty reveller, a species now almost extinct, though it has left worthy descendants in Russia. Almost as tall in stature as Peter himself, and even more powerful than the Tsar, he excelled in every bodily exercise. He was a fine rider, a marvellous shot—even with the bow—an indefatigable hunter. Handsome in face, too, with charming manners; his information was very limited, but he had a polyglot talent for languages, speaking Italian, Dutch, English, German, and Slav. Leibnitz, who tried to win his favour during his stay in Germany, declares that he drank like a hero, adding, that he was considered very witty.¹ His house was no mere meeting-place for merry boon companions of his own sex. Ladies were to be seen there too, sharp-featured Scotch women, dreamy-eyed Germans, and Dutch women of ample charms. None of these fair dames bear any resemblance to the recluses of the Russian *terems*, hidden behind their iron bars and silken veils (*fatas*). Their faces are uncovered, and they come and go, laughing and talking, singing the songs of their own country, and mingling gaily in the dance. Their simpler dresses, more becoming to the figure, make them seem more attractive than their Russian sisters. Some of them are of somewhat easy morals. All this it is which first attracts and captivates the future reformer.

During the seven years of the Regency, in spite of the tendencies common to Sophia and Vassili Galitzin, the history of Russian civilisation could boast but few days marked with a white stone. The government, ill at ease in its precarious situation, tormented, harried, fighting for existence from its first day to its last, was scarcely in a position to take thought for anything, save its own existence. But during the seven years which followed on the *coup d'état* of 1689, matters, as I have already hinted, grew even worse. This was a season of anti-liberal reaction, nay more, of frankly retrograde movement. Peter did not cause, but neither did he prevent it. He had no hand in the ukase which drove out the Jesuits, nor in the decree by virtue of which Kullmann, the Mystic, was burnt alive in the Red Square. These executions were the work of the Patriarch Joachim, and indeed, up till March 1690, when he died, the government was swayed by his authority. In his will, the prelate charged the young Tsar not to bestow

¹ Guernier, *Leibnitz in Seinen Beziehungen zu Russland*, p. 12.

military commands on heretics, and to destroy the Protestant churches in the *Sloboda*.¹ Peter was by no means inclined to obey; he even thought of providing the Patriarch with a more liberal-minded successor, in the person of Marcellus, Metropolitan of Pskof, but he lacked the power. Marcellus, so he declared, in later days, was not appointed for three reasons. First, because he spoke *barbarian tongues* (Latin and French). Secondly, because his beard was not long enough. Thirdly, because his coachman was allowed to sit on the box of his carriage instead of riding one of the horses harnessed to it. Peter was powerless. In July 1690 Gordon thus writes to one of his friends in London: 'I am still at this Court, where I have a great deal of anxiety and many expenses. I have been promised great rewards, but up to the present I have received nothing. I have no doubt that when the young Tsar himself takes the reins of government, I shall receive satisfaction.' But the young Tsar was in no hurry to take the reins of government, and indeed he never was where the interests of that government demanded his presence. Where was he then? Very frequently, after 1690, in the *Sloboda*, particularly in Lefort's house. He dined there constantly—as often as two or three times a week. Often, too, after spending the whole day with his friend, he would linger in his company till the following morning. Little by little, he brought his other boon companions with him. Soon they found themselves cramped for space, and then a palace, built of brick, replaced the favourite's former wooden house. Within it was a ball-room for 1500 persons, a dining-room hung with Spanish leather, and a yellow damask bedroom, 'with a bed three ells high, and bright red hangings'; there was even a picture-gallery.²

All this luxury was not intended for Lefort alone, nor even for Peter, who cared but little for it. The young Tsar was thus beginning a system to which he was to remain faithful all his life. At St. Petersburg, many years later, while himself lodged in a mere hut, he insisted that Menshikof should possess a yet more splendid palace. But he expected to be relieved, by him, of all court receptions and festivities. Lefort's palace, then, became, at one and the

¹ Oustrialof, vol. ii. p. 496.

² Vullieinin, p. 590.

same time, a kind of auxiliary to the very shabby establishment kept up by the Sovereign at Préobrajenskoïé, and a sort of casino. The furthest gardens of the *Sloboda* bordered on the village where Peter and his fortunes had grown up together. There was dancing in Lefort's house in the *Sloboda*,—there were displays of fireworks at Préobrajenskoïé. This was a new mania of the young Tsar's. He endeavoured, in later years, to justify the excess to which he carried this pastime (originated by Gordon, who had some knowledge of pyrotechny) by asserting the necessity of inuring his Russian subjects to the noise and smell of gunpowder. This, after Poltava, would appear somewhat superfluous; still Peter went on firing rockets, and composing set pieces, with the same eagerness as ever. The truth is, that from first to last he delighted in fireworks. To the end they were his favourite form of entertainment. He was no sportsman. Even as early as 1690 his predecessors' favourite hunting-box at Sokolniki was falling into ruin. Like his grandson, the unfortunate husband of the great Catherine, he loved noisy display, and he carried all things to extremes; the entertainment, to which a considerable part of his time was now devoted, involved considerable danger to himself and those about him, so incontinently did he set about the sport. Gordon's journal of February 26th, 1690, records the death of a gentleman, killed by the explosion of a rocket weighing five pounds. The same accident occurred on 27th January, in the following year.

These displays of fireworks alternated with the manœuvres of the *Potieshnyïé*, also presided over by Gordon, and accompanied by serious risks. In a sham assault which took place on the 2nd of June 1691, Peter was burnt in the face by a grenade, and several officers close to him were seriously wounded. Shortly afterwards, Gordon himself was wounded in the leg. In October, 1691, Peter led a charge, waving his naked sword. Officers and soldiers, excited by the sight, fell on each other in real earnest, and Prince Ivan Dolgorouki was killed in the scuffle.¹

The roughness and violence of these warlike games were not in themselves absolutely unusual; the times were rough and violent. Charles XII., preparing for his career as a mighty warrior, outstripped his future adversary in this re-

¹ Oustriatof, vol. ii. p. 186

spect. But there is a special and characteristic feature about the sham warfare in which Peter so delighted,—the touch of comic buffoonery it invariably betrays, which indicates a special tendency, destined to be considerably developed in the young man's mind. The fort on the banks of the Iaouza had grown into a little fortified town, with a regular garrison, a flotilla of boats, a Court of Justice, Administrative Offices, and a Metropolitan,—Zotof, a former tutor of the young Tsar's, whom he later created 'Pope' or 'Patriarch of the Fools.' It even had a King. This part was played by Romodanovski, who bore the title of King of Presburg, (the name now given to the town), and, in this quality, warred against the King of Poland, represented by Boutourlin. In 1694, the King of Poland was called upon to defend a duly fortified place against a besieging army led by Gordon. At the very first attack, without waiting for the effect, reckoned on beforehand, of the operations prescribed by science—lines of circumvallation, approaches, mines, and so forth—the garrison and its commander threw down their arms and took to flight. Peter was in a fury; the fugitives were ordered to return to the fort, and to fight to the bitter end. There was a tremendous expenditure of cannon fire, which, in spite of the blank cartridge, killed and wounded several people. Finally, the King of Poland was made prisoner, and led into the conqueror's camp with his hands tied behind his back.¹

It should not be forgotten, that at this period Russia was at peace, and even in actual alliance, with Poland, and that the real King of that friendly nation, whom all Europe acclaimed, was called John Sobieski! In a series of manœuvres, carried out in 1692, I see mention of cavalry drills, in which a squadron of *dwarfs* took part. In 1694, the church choristers, enrolled in some new military body, were fighting, under the command of the court fool, Tourguénief, against the army clerks.

Peter was given up to his amusements. During this transition period, lasting nearly six years, the whole life of the future hero would seem to have been one perpetual merry-making, one orgy of noise and bustle, broken, indeed, by some useful and instructive exercises, but falling, for the most part, into puerility and licence of the worst kind. At

¹ Jeliaboujski, *Memoirs*, p. 39.

one moment he was learning to throw bombs, and climbing to the top of masts; the next he was singing in church, in a deep bass voice; then, straight from divine service, he would go and drink till the morrow, with his boon companions.

Von Kochen, a Swedish envoy, speaks of a yacht, entirely built, from stem to stern, by Karschten-Brandt's pupil; and another foreigner mentions a note from the Tsar, inviting himself to his house, and warning him that he means to spend the night drinking.¹ In the list of objects brought from Moscow to Préobrajenskoïé for the Sovereign's use, I see mortars, engineering tools, artillery ammunition, and parrots' cages. Within the fortress of Presburg, engineer officers, pyrotechnists, skilled artisans of every kind, elbowed the *douraks* (court fools), who killed soldiers for a joke, and escaped all punishment.²

Peter's military pastimes had, for some time, taken on a more serious or would-be serious form. In 1690, a regiment of Guards, the Préobrajenski, was raised, with a Courlander, George Von Mengden, as colonel. This was soon followed by the Siémionovski regiment,—one-third of the effective strength, in both cases, consisting of French Protestants.³ But the approaching campaign of Azof was to teach the young Tsar the real value of these apparently warlike troops, and the danger of not approaching serious matters seriously.

Peter gave himself a world of pains to build a fleet on the lake at Péréiaslavl—the Pletchéiévo-Oziero, but this work was not his only occupation there. It is a pretty spot, reached from Moscow by a pleasant road running through a succession of valleys, and over woody hills. The clear waters of the Viksa, pouring out of the western end of the lake, pass through the neighbouring lake of Somino, and fall into the Volga. Westward, the gilded cupolas of the twenty churches of the town of Péréiaslavl-Zaleski rise round the great Cathedral of the Transfiguration. Here Peter had built himself a one-storied wooden house,—the windows glazed with mica,—a double-headed eagle with a

¹ Oustrialof, vol. ii. p. 360.

² *Russian Archives*, 1875, vol. iii. p. 221.

³ Details as to the original constitution of these regiments, which were to play such an important part in the national history, will be found in the *Saint Petersburg Journal*, April 1778.

gilded wooden crown, set over the entrance door, was the sole adornment of the humble dwelling; but life went cheerily within those walls. The shipyard was but a few steps distant, but it is hardly likely that Peter worked in it during his frequent midwinter visits to the shores of his 'little sea.' There was the greatest difficulty, in February 1692 in inducing him to leave it, to receive the envoy of the Shah of Persia in audience.¹ The fact was, doubtless, that in that retired spot, far from the maternal eye, and from other less kindly curiosity, he felt himself more free to indulge in other pastimes. These were shared with numerous companions, frequently summoned from Moscow. Their carriages often rolled past caravans, laden with hogsheads of wine, and beer, and hydromel, and kegs of brandy. There were ladies, too, amongst the visitors. In the spring, when the lake was open, shipbuilding and drill began again, but none of it was very serious. A year before the campaign of Azof, Peter has not made up his mind where, on what sea, and against what enemies, he will utilise his future war-fleet! But he has already decided that Lefort, who has never been a sailor, shall be his Admiral; that the vessel on which he will hoist his flag shall be called the *Elephant*; that the ship will be full of gilding, have an excellent Dutch crew, and a no less excellent captain—Peter himself!²

The young Tsar's last journey to Péreïaslavl took place in May 1693. He was not to look upon his lake and his shipyard again for twenty years—till 1722, when he was on the road to Persia. The fresh-water flotilla, which had cost him so much pains, given him so much delight, and never served any useful purpose, was lying in utter decay,—hulls, masts, and rigging, all rotten and useless. He fell into a fury;—these were sacred relics, and he gave the strictest orders for their preservation. All in vain. In 1803 but one boat remained, lying in a pavilion, itself fallen into ruin. There was not a sign of the house in which Peter had lived; everything, even to the birch trees, under the shade of which the carpenter's apprentice once rested from his toil, had utterly disappeared.³

¹ Gordon's *Journal*, Feb. 16, 1692.

² Posselt, *Der General und Admiral Franz Lefort* (Frankfort, 1866), vol. ii. pp. 313-315.

³ Oustrialof, vol. ii. p. 146.

In 1693 he felt himself cramped on the Pletchéiévo-Oziero, just as he had felt himself cramped, once before, on the ponds at Préobrajenskoïé. He extracted his mother's long-refused consent, and started for Archangel. He was to see the real sea at last. He had been obliged to promise not to go on board any ship—he was only to look at them without leaving the shore. These vows, as may be imagined, were soon forgotten. He nearly drowned himself, going out on a miserable yacht, to meet a ship he had caused to be bought in Amsterdam. She was a warship, but she brought other things besides guns—rich furniture, French wines, apes, and Italian dogs. When Peter set his foot on board, he was transported with delight. 'Thou shalt command her,' he wrote to Lefort, 'and I will serve as common sailor.' And to Burgomaster Witsen, who had purchased the ship for him: 'MIN HER, all I can write you at this present moment is that John Flamm (the Pilot) is safely arrived, bringing forty-four guns, and forty sailors. Greet all our friends. I will write thee more fully by the ordinary, for in this happy hour I do not feel inclined to write, but much rather to do honour to Bacchus, who, with his vine-leaves, is pleased to close the eyes of one who would otherwise send you a more detailed letter.'¹ This is signed—

'Schiper Fon schi

'p santus profet

'ities.'

which is intended to mean 'Captain of the *St. Prophet*.' Peter, though already one-and-twenty, still treated orthography as a schoolboy joke, and, for the moment, he treated naval matters after much the same fashion—playing at being a sailor, as he had already played at being a soldier, or a civilised man. In Lefort's house in the *Sloboda*, he dressed after the French fashion. He walked the streets of Archangel, in the garb of a Dutch sea-captain. Holland was his passion; he adopted the Dutch flag,—red, white, and blue—merely changing the order of the colours, and he was to be seen sitting in the wine-shops, emptying bottle after bottle, with the compatriots of Van Tromp and Van Ruyter.

In January, 1694, he was back in Moscow, beside the dying bed of his mother, Nathalia. When the end came he showed great grief, weeping freely. But three days after—

¹ *Letters and Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 23.

wards he was back, merrymaking with Lefort. Was he then heartless, incapable of tender feeling? Not altogether; he showed nothing but kindness to Ivan, and, till the very end of that unhappy Sovereign's life, which occurred in 1696, he treated him with fraternal affection. Catherine was one day to find him something better than a passionate lover—a friend, and, later on, a husband, not absolutely without reproach indeed, but trusty, devoted, and deeply attached, if not over-refined nor impeccably faithful. At the time of his mother's death he was very young; and he was, and always remained, impatient of all constraint. His recovery from the loss of a parent, who had been a certain restraint on his actions, was as rapid and complete as his utter obliviousness of the actual existence of his wife.

On the 1st of May, he started once more for Archangel, and recommenced his whimsical sailing existence. He made promotions in his fleet, just as he had previously made them in his army. Romodanovski, Boutourlin, and Gordon, became respectively, Admiral, Vice-Admiral, and Rear-Admiral, without ever, the two first at least, having seen the sea, or set foot on the deck of any vessel. Peter himself remained a mere captain, just as he had remained a private of bombardiers in his own land forces. Determined efforts have been made to find some deep intention behind this deliberate appearance of modesty and self-effacement, which, in later years, was perpetuated, and developed into a system. I really believe that the dates, the circumstances, the very origin and earliest manifestations of this phenomenon, stamp it as a mere freak of fancy, which, like all freaks of that nature, have their logical explanation in some characteristic quality. It is the constitutional timidity of the man, masked, transfigured, idealised by the contradictory external appearances of a strong, self-willed, extravagant nature, and by the deceptive brilliance of his marvellous career, which is thus betrayed. There is nothing very deep, nor very serious, in all that constituted the existence of the future great man at the time of which I write. But all these pleasures and studies, the new fancy for foreign company,—the casino in the *Sloboda*,—the Préobrajenskoïé camp, and the Archangel wine-shops,—Lefort, Gordon, and the Dutch sailors,—all these, I say, had the effect of throwing him violently, and completely, out of the rut in which his

ancestors had run,—out of the *past*, into a road of which the end was not yet evident, but which already gave promise of leading him towards a future, stuffed with surprises.

II

And how was Russia faring, while her appointed lord rushed hither and thither, according to his capricious and vagabond fancy? Russia, so far as she was capable of understanding and reasoning over what befell her, was beginning to think she had gained but little by the *coup d'état* of 1689. The young Sovereign's friendships among the *Niemtsy*, and his constant visits to the *Sloboda*, had caused his subjects little displeasure or alarm. Alexis had accustomed them to such practices. But the late Tsar's western tastes, though less pronounced than Peter's, had been far more attractive in their results—industrial successes, legislative reforms, real progress, bearing evident fruit. The sole apparent harvest of Peter's firework displays, and military games, amounted to several dead men, and numerous maimed cripples. Besides, though the young Tsar carried his European amusements to an extreme point, the Boyards who governed in his name were, in all serious matters, rather disposed to be retrograde. Added to which, they governed very ill. Galitzin's expedition against the Tartars had been a failure. But at all events he had been beaten far from the frontiers of his own country, on the plains of Perekop. Now these same Tartars threatened the very borders of Holy Russia! Alarming news, calls for assistance, reports of defeat, came pouring in from every side. Mazeppa was threatened in the Ukraine. Dositheus, patriarch of Constantinople, wrote letters filled with gloomy rumours. A French envoy, he averred, had met the Han of the Crimea, and the Grand Vizier, at Adrianople. He had bestowed 10,000 ducats on the first, 70,000 on the second, on their promise that the Holy Places should be placed under French protection. The bargain had already been partly carried out. Catholic priests had taken the Holy Tomb, half Golgotha, the church at Bethlehem, and the Holy Grotto, out of the hands of the orthodox monks. They had destroyed the icons, and the Russian name had become a

scorn in the eyes of the Sultan, and his subjects. The Sultan had omitted the two Tsars of Russia from his written announcement of his succession, to all the other European rulers. News came from Vienna, where the Russian envoys had bought over the Foreign Office translator, Adam Stille, that the Emperor's ministers, and the Polish and the Turkish envoys, were in perpetual conference, to the utter exclusion of Russia. That country was completely put aside, and ran serious risk of being left alone to face the Tartar and the Turk.

Public uneasiness and discontent, thus justified, grew louder day by day. Peter, meanwhile, had wearied of his toys. Archangel roads, and the White Sea, frozen for seven months out of twelve, were but a poor resource. He had thought of seeking a passage through the Northern Ocean, which might open the road to China and the Indies. But the lack of means for such an expedition was all too evident. On the Baltic, nothing was possible. The Swedes were there already, and did not seem likely to be easily dislodged. Lefort put forward another plan, and now it is, especially at this slippery corner in the young hero's life, that the Genevan adventurer's influence brings forth really important consequences. His position, for some years past has been pre-eminent. He is the first figure in the series,—carried on in the persons of Ostermann, Bühren, Münich,—of great *parvenus* of foreign origin, who, for more than a century, were to sway the destinies of Russia. Two sentries mounted guard before his palace. The greatest lords in the country waited in his antechamber. Peter treated him, on every occasion, with a consideration hardly usual from a sovereign to a subject. He even publicly and soundly boxed the ears of his own brother-in-law, Abraham Féodorovitch Lapouhin, who fell out with the favourite, and damaged his wig.¹ During his absences, he wrote him letters, which breathed an exaggerated tenderness. He received, in return, missives revealing more unceremonious familiarity than affection.²

In 1695, the Genevan began to reflect on the satisfaction he might find in showing off his prodigious good fortune

¹ Pylaief, *Old Moscow* (St. Petersburg, 1891), p. 491.

² Peter the Great's *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 754. Compare Oustrialof, vol. iv. part i. pp. 553-611.

before his Swiss and Dutch friends. Peter had already sent certain of his young comrades abroad. Why not follow them in person, to see, and study at first-hand, the wonders of which Timmermann and Karschten-Brandt had only given him a partial and mutilated idea? What delight for his eyes! What diversion in his budding boredom! What instructive sights! And what new pleasures! But an objection crops up. What kind of figure would the Tsar of all the Russias cut in Europe? He could only bring an unknown name, darkened and humbled by recent and by former defeats, which he had made no personal effort to retrieve. This thought, doubtless, it was, which forced Peter to reflect on his own life, on the sports and occupations which had hitherto absorbed all his activity, and to recognise their complete futility. A light flashed across his brain. Before presenting himself to the men of the western world, such great men, in his estimation,—should he not raise himself to their level, carry them something more than a record of schoolboy prowess? But how to set about it? At this point the young Tsar's fervid imagination fell in with the mental distress of the Boyards, to whom he had hitherto left the cares of state. They, too, felt the urgency of doing something to help themselves out of the unpleasant quandary, internal and external, into which the carelessness and awkwardness of a hand-to-mouth policy had led them. The impulse of these varied motives led up, at this particular moment, to the first attempt on Azof.

The intuitive genius of the future conqueror of Poltava, to whom, with many praises, the plan of campaign elaborated on this occasion has been ascribed, had, I believe, nothing to say to it. There was no necessity, indeed, for his taking that trouble. The plan, a traditional and classic one in the history of Russia's relations with her redoubtable southern neighbours, had been prepared long beforehand. Bathory, the great warrior borrowed by Poland from Transylvania, proposed it to Tsar Ivan in 1579.¹ The town of Azof, standing some ten miles from the Don,—called Tanais before the Christian era, the Tana of the middle ages,—a Genoese trading factory, captured and fortified by the Turks in 1475, had long been the natural point of attack and defence, for the two nations who had stood face to face, in perpetual quarrel,

¹ P. Pierling, *Popes et Tsars* (Paris, 1890), p. 204.

for centuries. It was the key of the river-mouth on one hand, the key of the Black Sea on the other; but the chief effort of the Muscovite army was not to be turned in this direction. The Boyards, with the greater part of the available Russian forces,—with all the old army, that which had followed Galitzin in his disastrous undertakings against the Tartars,—were simply to follow in his steps, and fight his campaign over again, with much the same results. The attempt on Azof was a mere accessory, an isolated *coup de main*, wherein the young Tsar's originating power was to find its scope. The leaders of the huge camp, moving slowly down to the Crimea, were heartily glad to be rid of him. They let him work his own sweet will. Nor did he himself give much pains to his preparations. The undertaking, in his eyes (as one of his letters written at the outset of the expedition clearly proves), was a mere continuation of the big manœuvres round Presburg.¹ He reckoned on taking the town by surprise; yet he refrained from confiding his 'pleasure' regiments to the improvised leaders he had given them during his sham battles on the banks of the Iacouza. These fights seem to have convinced him that the troops thus employed had developed into a real and serious military force, fit to face a great war; but he also felt, apparently, that his present adventure, being very different in its nature, called for different precautions. The 'Kings' of 'Poland' and of 'Presburg' were accordingly dismissed; yet, faithful to a habit long since abandoned in western warfare, he determined to divide the supreme command. Three Generals-in-chief—Golovin, Gordon, and Lefort²—rode at the head of his army, which numbered all his newly raised regiments, those of the Guard, Lefort's, and some detachments of troops drawn from the court and from the cities, *Streltsy* and *Tsaredvortsy*, thirty-one thousand men in all. The expedition thus organised still bears a close resemblance to a pleasure party. The Generals, one of whom at least, Lefort, has not a notion of what real war means, wrangle from the outset. The young Tsar cracks jokes, carries on his favourite games of masquerade and rough buffoonery, interferes in all directions, gives contra-

¹ Letter to Apraxin, April 16, 1695. *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 28.

² Petrof, *The Armed Forces of Russia* (Moscow, 1892. Published under the auspices of the Ministry for War), vol. ii. p. 4.

dictory orders, assumes the pseudonym of Peter Alexiéfief and the rank of captain, so as to parade at the head of his bombardier company. Though he has stripped Romodanovski of his prerogatives, he has left him his title, and in the middle of the campaign he writes:—

‘MIN HER KENICH,—Your Majesty’s letter, dated from your capital of Presburg, has been duly delivered to me. Your Majesty’s condescension binds me, in return, to be ready to shed every drop of my blood, with which object I am just about to march, BOMBARDIER PETER.’¹

The end is what we might have expected. Peter, like Sophia and Galitzin, is reduced to misleading opinion by reports of imaginary triumphs. Te Deums are sung at Moscow for the capture of a couple of insignificant forts. But all the world knows that the attack on the fortress of Azof has failed, twice over, with great loss and slaughter. The new army and its young founder have been tried, and found wanting. Seven years of youthful extemporisation, on the value of which judgment has been deferred, have ended in piteous and humiliating failure.

Here the history of Peter the Great begins.

III

Peter was not a great man only—he was the most complete, the most comprehensive, and the most diversified personification of a great people that has ever appeared. Never, I should think, have the collective qualities of a nation, good and bad, the heights and the depths of its scale of morality, every feature of its physiognomy, been so summed up in a single personality, destined to be its historic type. Those same unsuspected powers of mind and soul, which drove Peter into sudden action, and raised him to greatness, were the very qualities which Russia has displayed from day to day, from year to year, these two centuries past, and which will make her greatness, as they made his. Beaten by the Turks, beaten by the Swedes, overrun by Europeans, as she had once been by Asiatics, after twenty defeats, twenty treaties of peace, forced on her by her conquerors, she was still to enlarge her frontiers at their expense, to dismember Turkey, Sweden, and Poland, to end by dictating

¹ May 19, 1695. *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 29.

laws to the Continent of Europe. And all this because she persevered.

Perseverance, obstinate determination to reach the goal, even when that seemed utterly impossible,—never to swerve from the path once chosen, however dangerous, never to change adopted measures, though they be defective, simply to double and treble effort, panting, like some wearied wood-cutter, to multiply blows and await their result, resolutely, patiently, stoically,—this is the secret hidden in the Russian soul, tempered to adamant hardness by centuries of slavery and centuries of redeeming toil. The greatness of Peter, the greatness of Russia, are the outcome of the Mongol conquest, and of the patient genius of the Moscow *Kniaz*, hardened on the anvil which wore out their conqueror's hammers.

The Moscow grumblers had fine sport on the morrow of that first disastrous campaign, recalling the Patriarch Joachim's prophetic words and the anathemas he launched against the foreign soldiery, commanded by heretic generals. Nevertheless, Peter increased his calls on foreign science and industry. He sent to Austria and to Prussia for engineers, to Holland and to England for sailors and for shipwrights. The flotilla on the lake of Péreïaslavl had been utterly useless. He set about building another, at Voronèje, in the valley of the Don. He met with enormous, well-nigh insuperable, difficulties. The artisans engaged abroad first tarried in their coming, and then, when they saw the country and the proffered task, took to their heels. The native workmen, not understanding what was required of them, spoilt the work, and being punished, deserted, too, *en masse*. The forests where the timbers were cut caught fire, and hundreds of square leagues were burnt. The higher order of workers, officers, engineers, and doctors, imitated and exaggerated the freaks of conduct of which their master still set the example. There were scenes of orgy, quarrels, bloody scuffles. General and Lord High Admiral Lefort, being summoned by courier to render an account of certain details, connected with the administration of his Department, thus opens his report:—'To-day Prince Boris Alexiévitch (Galitzin) is coming to dine with me, and we shall drink your health. I fear you have no good beer at Voronèje; I will bring you some, and some Muscat wine as well.'¹ No

¹ Solovief, vol. xix. p. 227. Compare Oustrialof, vol. iv. part i. p. 585, etc.

matter! The work had been begun in the autumn of 1696. On the 3rd of the following May, three-and-twenty galleys and four fireships were launched, and dropped down the river Don, on the way to the sea. At their head Captain Peter Alexiéf on the galley *Principium*, built, in great part, by his own hands, did duty as pilot. Lord High Admiral Lefort, Vice-Admiral Lima, a Venetian, and Rear-Admiral Balthasar de L'Osière, a Frenchman, followed on board the other vessels. This time the Russian fleet was created in good earnest.

I must at once acknowledge that it was not a very brilliant fleet, nor did the land army, commanded by its new Generalissimo, the Boyard Shein, with which it was to co-operate in a new attempt on Azof, cover itself with laurels. The 'pleasure' regiments had fallen too much into the habit of joking. As for the *Streltsy*, they had grown fit for nothing but besieging palaces; one cannon shot threw them into wild rout. Peter, as he watched them, must have meditated, even under the walls of the impregnable fortress, on the fate to which he destined them, in the near future. The appearance and behaviour of this camp, previous to the tardy arrival of the military men promised by the Emperor, call up memories of the siege of Troy. The Generals lost their heads, and Gordon, the most capable of them all, having vainly tried to open a breach in the wall, the whole body of troops, officers and men, were called into council, and invited to give their opinion as to the operations to be undertaken. A *Strelets* suggested that a mound of earth should be raised against the enemy's ramparts, so as first to overlook and then to bury them. Vladimir the Great had, it appeared, adopted this expedient to reduce Kherson.¹ This strategy was adopted with enthusiasm, with the sole result of causing the Turks some little alarm, and drawing smiles from the German engineers when they reached their destination, at last. Peter's own high spirits, cheerfulness, and boyish boldness were delightful. He writes jokingly to his sister Nathalia, who is alarmed at the dangers to which she fancies she is exposed; 'It is not I who run after the bullets, they run after me. Will you not tell them to stop?' But steady as he was, even then, in his long prepared resolutions, he was specially subject to fits of dismay and momentary discouragement.

¹ Petrof, vol. ii. p. 6.

ment,—very easily disconcerted, in fact. On the 20th of May, attempting to reconnoitre the Turkish fleet, which he desired to prevent from entering the Don, and re-victualling the fortress, he fell into a sudden terror of its formidable appearance, and beat a precipitate retreat with all his galleys. At ten o'clock the next morning he was in Gordon's tent, gloomy, depressed, full of the worst forebodings. At three in the afternoon, he was back again, beaming with joy. The Cossacks, without receiving any orders, following the inspiration of their own courage, had flown across the water in their *tchaïki*, frail leather skiffs, fleet as the bird whose name they bear (*tchaïka*, seagull), had attacked the Sultan's huge vessels on the preceding night, and driven them into flight, with heavy loss.¹ Here was a fine opportunity for Gordon's artillery to distinguish itself! For, though, the guns never being properly trained, not a single shell fell within the town, a tremendous amount of powder was burnt in triumphal salvos. The arrival of a fresh detachment of troops, the taking of a redoubt, the capture of one of the enemy's skiffs,—everything was made a pretext for a cannonade.

But no matter! The effort, this time, is so tremendous, the determination to conquer so intense, that, with the help of Cossacks and German engineers, the thing is done at last. On the 16th of July the guns at last open an effective fire. On the 17th the *Zaporoztsi* (Dnieper Cossacks), who are as bold on land as on sea, carry part of the out-works of the fortress by a bold stroke, and on the 18th Peter writes to Romodanovski: 'Your Majesty will learn with joy that God has favoured your armies; your Majesty's prayers, and your good fortune, have brought the people of Azof to surrender yesterday.'

Now the young Tsar can dare to show himself to his western neighbours, and cruel experience has convinced him that he still has everything to learn from them. His mind appears broadened, and illuminated by a new brightness. He conceives a vast plan of naval policy, he foresees the share which the foreign element must have in its execution, and provides for it amply. He desires to unite the Don with the Volga by a network of canals, but he does not propose to go blindly about such an undertaking. It is not enough to engage constructors in Venice, in Holland,

¹ Gordon's *Journal*, May 10, 1696.

in Denmark, and in Sweden. It is not enough to send fifty officers of his household into foreign countries—twenty-eight to Italy, twenty-two to Holland and to England.¹ He must follow them, he must put himself to school, and in grim earnest this time, seriously, laboriously, in the sweat of his brow. There is something childish still, about this thirst for knowledge, and passion for work,—more than one sign of puerility will mark the studious pursuits of the future carpenter's apprentice at Saardam,—but the goal is marked out, the impulse has been given. The great journey, the grand tour of Europe, is to inaugurate one of the most wonderful careers in history.

¹ Solovief, vol. xix. p. 238.

CHAPTER II

THE JOURNEY—GERMANY—HOLLAND—ENGLAND—THE RETURN

- I. Precedents—The Tsar's incognito—First disguise—The great embassy—Peter Mihailof—Impression in Moscow and in Europe—Departure delayed—A conspiracy—Bloodstained ghosts—The woodcutter's hatchet and the axe of Ivan the Terrible—Sweden—Riga, a chilly reception—A future *casus belli*—In Germany—Koenigsberg—Curiosity and eccentricities—An artillery diploma—Koppenbrügge—Meeting with Charlotte Sophia of Prussia—Peter's first social appearances—Leibnitz.
- II. Holland—Zaandam—Legend and history—The house at Krimpenburg—A fair Dutchwoman—Amsterdam—Serious study begins—Shipwright and Sovereign—Weaknesses and oddities—The Russian Bacchus.
- III. England—An uncomfortable room—Peter at Kensington Palace—Unfavourable impressions—Burnet—More legends—London and Deptford—Toil and pleasure—Mrs. Cross, the actress—General initiation.
- IV. *En route* for Vienna—The arrival a failure—Austrian pride—Moral depression—The Emperor and the Tsar—The drawbacks of incognito—A diplomatic check—Failure of the journey to Venice—Alarming news from Russia—'The seed of the Miloslavski'—Hasty return—Interview with Augustus II. at Rawa—Close of the journey.

I

To find any precedent, in Russian history, for Peter's journey, we must go back to the eleventh century. In 1075 the Grand Duke of Kief, Izaslaf, paid a visit to the Emperor Henry IV. at Mayence. Thus once again, unconsciously, no doubt, Peter took up an old tradition. From the days of Ivan the Terrible, the mere desire, on the part of any subjects of the Tsar, to visit foreign countries had been held high treason. In Tsar Michael's reign, a certain Prince Hovorostinin was severely prosecuted on this very score. He had spoken, before some friends, of a journey to Poland and Rome, which he was much inclined to take, 'to find somebody to talk with.' Yet a little later, the son of Alexis'

favourite councillor, Ordin-Nashtchokin, having secretly crossed the frontier, there was some question of his being put to death abroad.¹

Peter himself did not venture to brave opinion to the extent of giving any official character to his departure. All he dared permit himself was a kind of half clandestine frolic, and there is a sort of naïve timidity about the precautions taken to ensure an incognito, which, with his constitutional petulance, he was to be the first to break. A great Embassy was organised, charged with a mission to request the Emperor, the Kings of England and of Denmark, the Pope, the Low Countries, the Elector of Brandenburg, and the Republic of Venice—the whole of Europe, in fact, save France and Spain—‘to renew the ancient bonds of friendship, so as to weaken the enemies of the Christian name.’ The ambassadors were three in number. Lefort, as ambassador-in-chief, took precedence of his colleagues, Golovin and Voznitsin. Their suite consisted of fifty-five gentlemen and ‘volunteers,’ amongst them a non-commissioned officer of the Préobrajenski regiment, who answered to the name of Peter Mihailof,—the Tsar himself. During the whole course of the journey, letters intended for the Sovereign were to bear the simple superscription, ‘To be given to Peter Mihailof.’ This was mere childishness,—but there is something touching about one detail. The seal to be used by the mock non-commissioned officer represented a young carpenter, surrounded by his shipwright’s tools, with this inscription: ‘My rank is that of a scholar, and I need masters.’²

At Moscow, opinion as to the real object of the journey was very different. The Tsar was generally believed to be going abroad to do much as he had done, hitherto, in the *Sloboda*, in other words, to amuse himself.³ Did Peter himself, at that moment, perceive the distant horizon towards which his steps were tending? It is very doubtful. He did indeed, as he travelled through Livonia, talk of trimming his subjects’ beards, and shortening their garments;⁴ but, judging from the faces and habiliments of his travelling companions, this may fairly be taken for an idle jest. Lefort was garbed

¹ Solovief, vol. ix. p. 461; vol. xi. p. 93.

² Oustrialof, vol. iii. p. 18.

³ *Ibid.* p. 640.

⁴ Blomeberg, *An Account of Livonia* (London), p. 332 (French edition, 1705).

in the Tartar style, and the young Prince of Imeretia wore a splendid Persian costume.

The journey indeed, in its earlier days, was very far from possessing the importance, either from the Russian or from the European point of view, with which later events have invested it. It made, in fact, no sensation whatsoever. I regret to have to contradict, in this matter, another legend, very dear to the national vanity. Russians had already grown accustomed to see their Sovereign rushing hither and thither, or rather indeed to never seeing him at all; European eyes were turned in quite a different direction. The moment Peter had pitched on, to make acquaintance with his western friends, and rouse their curiosity, was a solemn one for them. The Congress of Ryswick was just about to meet. It absorbed the attention of the whole world, political, commercial, and intellectual. Of this I will offer one proof only,—any one who goes to the Quai d'Orsay, may there consult the eight volumes containing the correspondence of Louis XIV. with the plenipotentiaries who were engaged, in the course of the year 1697, in defending his interests before that great diplomatic gathering. I will undertake that Peter's name will be found to occur only once, and that once in a most casual manner. The Tsar had paused in his work and scientific pursuits at Amsterdam, and had travelled to the Hague, where his embassy was officially received. The plenipotentiaries mention this fact, and that is all. He and they had been near neighbours for many months, they residing at Delft, he studying at Amsterdam,—yet they do not even seem to have suspected his existence. It is very doubtful whether they knew his name. Even in connection with Polish affairs, which constantly occupied their attention, they never refer to it. They have no suspicion, evidently, of the part which the future ally of Augustus II. aspires henceforth to play.

The appearance of the Russian Sovereign beyond the frontiers of his little-known Empire attracted interest in a special circle only. In the following year, it was to furnish the teaching body of Thorn with the subject of a public disputation.¹ Learned men had already turned their attention to Muscovy. In England, Milton had written a book on the

¹ *Conjectura aliquot politica de susceptis magni Muscovie Ducis . . itin-eribus* (Thorunii, 1698, St. Petersburg Library).

great Northern Empire, which had been followed by a whole literature devoted to the same subject. Leibnitz had recently expressed his opinion that the Muscovites were the only people capable of freeing Europe from the Turkish yoke. And it was with this learned world, especially, that Peter Mihailof desired to enter into relations. From this point of view, the brief interval of respite and relaxation which the exhaustion of France had granted Europe, between the great crisis which had placed Louis XIV. face to face with the most formidable of coalitions, and the approaching struggle of the Spanish Succession, was a most propitious moment for a tour, 'on business or on pleasure bent,' through the old European Continent.

The Tsar's departure, which had been fixed for the month of February 1697, was delayed by the discovery of a plot against his life. At the head of the conspirators we find an old acquaintance, Tsikler, Sophia's former henchman, who had joined Peter's party, but whom the Sovereign's scorn had turned into a malcontent. As for his accomplices, they are easily guessed,—the *Streltsy*, again and always the *Streltsy*! Was Peter doomed ever to find them in his path, breathing threats and hatred? This incident was quickly closed, a few heads were cut off, and at last, on the 10th of March, the start was made. But a shadow had fallen across the brightness of the journey, and the feeling of intense bitterness rose higher and higher in the young Sovereign's heart. Were these *Streltsy* to haunt him for ever? Were they never to cease recalling the bloodstained ghosts that had hovered round his cradle?

Well, war it should be, since they desired it! Their account should be settled on the first favourable opportunity. And he swore to be on his guard henceforth, to set steel against steel, unsleeping watchfulness against perpetual plotting, the scaffold waiting on the Red Square, against the dagger lurking ready in the shadow. The friends and the most faithful helpers of the Sovereign must see to it, till he returned to do the work himself. But even from afar, he would stir up Romodanovski's zeal. Wheresoever he went, in Germany, in Holland, and in England, through all the new and wonderful and dazzling sights he was to behold, his eyes were to carry with them the terrible vision, the anguished nightmare, of the mortal peril which seemed

bound up with his destiny. Thus does the distrustful, fierce, implacable genius of his ancestors revive and grow in him, wedding the splendour of his civilising work to the bloody shadows of a horrible carnage; woodcutter and executioner at once, he wields alike the hatchet and the axe.

The progress of the embassy was slow. There were 250 persons to transport. Lefort alone had ten gentlemen, seven pages, fifteen serving-men, two jewellers, six musicians, and four dwarfs in his train. At Riga, on Swedish ground, the reception was courteous, but cold. The Governor, Dahlberg, sent word that he was ill, and did not appear. Later on, Peter was to try to turn this fact into a *casus belli*, and talk of personal insult to himself. Officially speaking, his personality cannot have been in question. At Riga, as elsewhere, the ambassadors gave the word that the reported presence of the young Sovereign in their company was to be treated as an idle story. He was supposed to be at Voronèje, busy with his shipbuilding. There may have been a touch of malice about the literal manner in which Dahlberg accepted this assurance. And the Russians, following, in this respect, an inclination which, I am inclined to fear, has grown hereditary, demanded all the rights of hospitality after too familiar and exacting a fashion. Peter went so far as to endeavour to take plans of the fortress with his own hands. This attempt was instantly cut short. The Swedes can hardly be said to have done wrong, for Peter's father had besieged the place. The fault, at all events, if fault there was, was on both sides.

At Mittau, the travellers' ill-humour passed away. The reigning Duke, Frédéric Casimir, was an old acquaintance of Lefort's. He gave the embassy a cordial and magnificent reception. Peter forgot his incognito, and surprised his entertainers by the unexpectedness of his remarks, and by his jokes on the habits, prejudices, and barbarous laws of his own country. The West was beginning to take hold of him, but he was still the same extravagant fantastic youth. At Libau, he beheld the Baltic, the Varegians' Sea, for the first time. Bad weather prevented his going farther, at that moment, and he spent his days in the Weinkeller, with the sailors of the port, drinking and joking, and insisting, this time, on passing himself off as a plain captain, who had been sent to arm a privateer for the

service of the Tsar. At last he reached Koenigsberg, having outstripped his embassy, which travelled by land, while he made a short cut by sea, on a merchant vessel. He refused to receive the greeting of the Prince of Holstein-Beck, sent by the Elector of Brandenburg to meet him, made the master of the vessel vow he had no distinguished passenger, remained on board till dusk, and did not make up his mind to accept the lodging prepared for him till ten o'clock at night. There he found the Sovereign's Master of the Ceremonies, Johann von Besser, an accomplished courtier, a learned man, and a poet into the bargain. He rushed at him, snatched off his wig, and threw it into a corner. 'Who is he?' he asked his own people. The functions of the personage in question were explained to him as far as possible. 'Very good, let him bring me a ——!' This anecdote, I must acknowledge, although vouched for by a serious and a far from ill-natured historian, has a suspicious air.¹ But the numberless analogous traits preserved by tradition, leave us in no doubt as to the reality of the general impression it produces. This much is clear, the reformer of the future was still a young savage. The next morning he paid a visit to the Elector, conversed in bad German, drank a great deal of Hungarian wine, but, having once more assumed the character of Peter Mihailof, refused to receive the Sovereign's return visit. Later on he changed his mind, and prepared what he considered a magnificent reception, capped with some fireworks of his own composition. At the very last moment the Elector begged to be excused. A sorry business, this, for the bearers of the unpleasant tidings, Count von Kreyzen and Provost von Schlacken: Peter was at table with Lefort and one of his dwarfs; Lefort sat pipe in mouth, the Tsar, half drunk, and full of tenderness for his favourite, leaning across, from time to time, to kiss him. He invited the messengers to seat themselves beside him. Then suddenly, striking the table furiously with his fist, he cried: 'The Elector is a good man, but his counsellors are devils! *Gehe! gehe!* (be off with you!)', and rising, he seized one of the Brandenburgers by the throat, and dragged him towards the door, still shouting, '*Gehe! Gehe!*'

¹ Bergman, *Peter der Grosse als Mensch und Regent* (Riga, 1823), vol. i. p. 256 (Russian edition, vol. i. p. 223, note).

When he went out to walk the streets of Koenigsberg, as a simple tourist, every one took to their heels, to avoid meeting him, for he had a fertile fancy for jokes of a far from agreeable order. Meeting a lady of the court one day, he stopped her with a sudden gesture, shouting 'Halt!' in a voice of thunder. Then taking hold of the watch, which hung at her waist, he looked at the hour and departed.¹

The Elector, notwithstanding, continued to show his guest a friendly face, and give him a hospitable welcome. His love of show and ceremonial was flattered by the presence of this extraordinary embassy, and he looked forward to the conclusion of a defensive alliance against Sweden. Thus he spent 150,000 crowns—it was wasted money. ~~But~~ slipped through his fingers, his mind distracted, taken up with other things. His attention, or rather that of his counsellors, was absorbed by political matters, and by Polish affairs. The death of Sobieski had been followed by the rival candidatures of the Elector of Saxony and the Prince de Conti. Peter sided with Augustus,—in other words, against France, the ally of the Turk. Writing from Koenigsberg to the Polish lords, he formally announced his intention of interfering in the struggle. Prince Romodanovski should lead an army upon the frontiers of Lithuania. He had got to threats already.

The embassy dallied at Koenigsberg, waiting on events. Peter seized the opportunity of satisfying his curiosity, his impatience to acquire knowledge—both of them as keen as ever. Certain of these curiosities of his were more than singular, as when he insisted on seeing a criminal broken on the wheel, which instrument of torture he apparently dreamt of introducing, as a matter of variety, into the criminal procedure of his own country. The authorities demurred, on the score of the non-existence of any criminal deserving such a punishment. The Tsar was astounded. 'What, all that fuss about killing a man! Why not take one of the servants of his own suite?'² He was working daily with the Master of Artillery, Sternfeldt, and after a few weeks, was the recipient of a regular diploma, which should not be too seriously taken. Three years later, Peter was with the King

¹ Posselt, vol. ii. pp. 407, 600, 601; Theiner, *Historical Monuments* (Rome, 1859), p. 369; Herrmann, *Geschichte Russlands*, vol. iv. p. 67.

² Pöllnitz (Baron Charles Louis), *Memoirs* (Berlin, 1791), vol. i. p. 179.

of Poland, at the Castle of Birzé, in Lithuania. The two Sovereigns, both of them given to eccentricities, amused themselves by firing heavy cannon at a mark. Augustus made two hits, Peter never touched the target once.¹

The young Tsar was already the strange creature with whom the European world was destined, later, to make acquaintance, and at whom it was long to marvel and to tremble. Active beyond all description, turbulent, prying, cheerful, as a rule, full of jokes and high spirits, good-natured too, with sudden shifts of temper, fits of gloomy depression, or violence, or melancholy, genial but wayward, restless and disturbing. One night, as he sat at supper with the Elector, in a low room floored with marble, one of the servants dropped a plate. In a moment Peter had bounded to his feet, with haggard eyes and features working; he drew his sword, and thrust in all directions, fortunately without wounding any one. When he calmed down, he imperiously demanded that punishment should be inflicted on the guilty serving-man. The difficulty was got over by having some poor devil, already sentenced for a different peccadillo, whipped before his eyes.²

Early in July, Augustus seeming to be definitely taking the upper hand in Poland, the embassy started forth afresh. Vienna was the point on which the journey was to have been first directed, in the hope of negotiating a treaty of alliance. But the Tsar's envoy, Nefimof, desired, in appearance at all events, to forestall its efforts. According to his report, the alliance, offensive and defensive, was already concluded. Lefort, on the other hand, urged a direct move to Holland, though his somewhat tepid Calvinistic zeal weighed less in the matter than has been frequently supposed. Chance had far more to do than has generally been imagined with the direction of this journey, and even with the general appearance finally impressed on it by circumstances.

It is strange that Peter did not pause at Berlin on his way to Holland—he merely passed rapidly across the town. The future capital of Frederick the Great appeared to him but a barren field for the gratification of his curiosity. He had the good fortune to behold, elsewhere, the most attractive thing in all Prussia, and thus to make acquaintance with one

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 90.

² Pöllnitz, *Memoirs*. Pöllnitz is not altogether a reliable witness.

of the fairest fruits of German civilisation and culture. The Electress of Brandenburg, the future Queen Sophia of Prussia, had not accompanied her husband to Koenigsberg. She had taken advantage of his absence, to pay a visit to her mother, the Electress Sophia of Hanover. But the arrival of the ruler,—still a more or less fabulous monarch,—of mysterious Muscovy, had not failed to arouse her interest. Mother and daughter were numbered amongst the most well-educated women of their day. Sophia Charlotte, at one time the destined bride of the Duc de Bourgogne, grandson of Louis XIV., had spent two years at the court of Versailles. Her French associations had clung to her. At the age of barely nine-and-twenty, she had the reputation of being the prettiest and the most witty woman in her country. Her intimate circle was eminently intellectual. Leibnitz, who was one of its members, had inspired it with the very lively interest with which the event, which had so excited the town of Koenigsberg, had personally filled him, opening, as it did, before his versatile mind whole new horizons, a fresh programme of study, ethnographical, linguistic, and archæological, a huge scheme of great scientific enterprises, in the execution of which, the part of the great German savant, aided by the Russian Sovereign, seemed clearly indicated. He had already set himself to learn the history and the language of the country. Long years before, he had called Poland the natural rampart of Christianity against barbarians of every kind, whether Muscovite or Turk. All this was forgotten. Peter might indeed be a barbarian, but he was a barbarian with a great future before him, and Leibnitz rejoiced over him, ranking him with Kam-Ki-Amalogdo-Khan, the Sovereign of China, and Yasok-Adjan-Nugbad, the King of Abyssinia, his contemporaries, who likewise seemed to be meditating mighty undertakings.¹ Sophia Charlotte had caused circumstantial reports concerning the Tsar's stay at Koenigsberg to be sent her. These, while giving her no very high idea of the degree of culture and education she might expect to find in the august traveller, had not diminished her desire of seeing him. She kept up an active correspondence on this subject with the state minister, Fuchs. In May 1697, she wrote: 'I would have him persuaded to come here, not to see, but to be seen,

¹ Guerrier, *Leibnitz in seinen Beziehungen zu Russland*, pp. 8-20.

and we would willingly keep the money generally spent on rare animals for use on this occasion.' And a month later, 'Though I am a great enemy of dirt, my curiosity, this time, is too strong for me.'¹

Peter, interested in his turn, urged, doubtless, by his pleasant memories of the fair ladies in the *Sloboda*, willingly agreed to a meeting, to take place at Koppenbrügge, in the Grand Duchy of Zell, a fief of the House of Brandenburg, belonging to the Prince of Nassau. At first the young Sovereign took fright at the number of people he noticed in the place,—the two Electresses having neglected to warn him they were bringing their whole family with them. He tried to steal away, hastily left the village, and more than an hour was spent in parleying before he could be induced to return. At last he made his appearance at the castle, but his only reply to the compliments addressed to him by the two Princesses, was to cover his face with his hands, repeating the words, 'Ich kann nicht sprechen.'² Shyness this, if you will, but constitutional timidity as well. I hold to this opinion, and see a confirmation of it in the continuation of the interview. For the young Sovereign soon recovers from his agitation, and is, indeed, very quickly tamed. At supper he shows signs of awkwardness, and is guilty of some boorishness. He is puzzled with his napkin, which he does not know how to use, and eats in dirty and slovenly fashion. He forces the whole company to remain at table for four hours, drinking endless toasts to his health, and standing each time. But in spite of all, the impression he produces is not a bad one. He seems simple, with a great deal of natural wit, answers questions readily and promptly, and, once started, carries on the longest conversation without any difficulty. Asked if he cares for hunting, he answers by showing his hands, hardened by toil. He has no time for hunting. After supper, he agrees to dance, on condition that the two Princesses set the example. He desires to put on gloves, but finds he has none. The gentlemen of his suite take the whalebone stays of their partners for a natural physical feature, and loudly remark that 'the German ladies' backs are devilish hard.' The Tsar sends for one of

¹ Varnhagen von Ense, *Leben der Königin von Preussen, Sophie Charlotte* (Berlin, 1837), pp. 74, 76.

² 'I do not know how to talk!'

his jesters, and as the silly buffoonery of that individual does not seem to please the ladies' taste, he seizes a huge broom and sweeps him outside. But here again, take him all in all, his attractiveness seems to have been stronger than the astonishment he aroused. He was a lovable savage at all events, and, better still, 'He is' (so writes the Electress's mother) 'an altogether extraordinary man—it is impossible to describe him or even to imagine what he is, without having seen him.' Neither the mother nor the daughter had found those four hours at supper a moment too long. Both of them would have willingly stayed longer yet, 'without feeling an instant's weariness.' The younger Electress closes her letter, recounting her impressions, to Fuchs with this unfinished but very suggestive sentence: 'I have said enough to weary you, but I cannot do otherwise. I find pleasure in speaking of the Tsar, and if I had only myself to consider, I would tell you that . . . I shall always have real pleasure in being of service to you.'¹

Leibnitz was not, unfortunately, present at this meeting. He had reckoned on the passage of the embassy through Minden, and had hastily sketched out a plan of work and of reforms to be presented to the Tsar. He only succeeded in gaining admittance to one of Lefort's nephews, who dismissed him civilly. Peter remained utterly inaccessible. Learned men who knew nothing of shipbuilding, and had no knowledge of the preparation of fireworks, possessed, as yet, no interest for him. He panted to see the country of Karschten-Brandt and Kort. At Schenkenschen, a Dutch frontier town, on the road to Amsterdam, a woman asked the travellers whether they were Christians. There was a rumour that the Muscovites were on their way to Cleves, to receive Holy Baptism!

II

Saardam or Zaandam, and the shipwright-Tsar's cottage in that charming little Low-Country village, to which so many pilgrimages are now made, never knew fame till towards the middle of the eighteenth century. Baron Pöllnitz, who devotes five pages of his memoirs, written in 1726, to a

¹ Ermann, *Memoirs bearing on the History of Sophia Charlotte* (Berlin, 1861), pp. 116-120. The details of the interview are taken from the *Correspondence of the two Princesses with Fuchs*.

description of this out-of-the-way corner, makes no mention of the illustrious guest to whom it has owed its later glory. The celebrated writer, Wagenaer, does not refer to Zaandam, in his account of Peter's visit to Holland.¹ A curious example this, of the fashion in which popular imagination will add its own marginal notes to a given page of history. Historically speaking, we may be quite sure, the greater part of the time-honoured details of Peter's residence in the neighbourhood of Amsterdam, have no foundation in fact. It is not even absolutely certain that he ever occupied the cottage now so piously preserved. According to Scheltema, who quotes Noomen's diary, as yet unpublished, the dwelling belonged to a blacksmith of the name of Guerrit Kist. The records of the Lutheran community of the place speak of a different proprietor—Boij Thijsen. All the workmen's houses lining the little canal which falls into the Y so absolutely resemble each other, that some confusion may very well have arisen. Voltaire and his disciples have indeed followed the life of the heroic apprentice step by step, and hour by hour, down the whole course of his legendary freak; they see him making his bed in his humble cottage, cooking his food, constructing first a model ship, and then a model windmill, each of them four feet long, with his own hands. He fits a mast into his sailing boat, spends long days in the ship-building yards, wielding the hatchet or the plane, and in spite of all these multitudinous occupations he visits saw-mills, spinning-mills, rope-walks, compass-makers' and lock-smiths' workshops. Going into a paper-mill, he lays hands on the apparatus for drawing the sheets, and performs this delicate task with the most perfect success. How long must it have taken him to do all these things? Almost two years, Voltaire assures us.

The Tsar spent *one week* in the village of Saardam.²

What brought him there? Chance, to a certain extent, and, to a very great one, that ignorant simplicity which was his constant companion throughout his first European tour. Zaandam was, at that time, a fairly important shipbuilding

¹ Wagenaer, *History of Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 1750), p. 721. See also *Vaderlandsche Historie* (Amsterdam, 1757), vol. xvi. pp. 377-379.

² Voltaire has somewhat contradicted himself on this point. Compare his *Works*, 1853 edition, vol. iv. pp. 576 and 663.

centre, numbering some fifty ship-yards, but, whether as regards the importance or the perfection of the work turned out, none of these establishments could bear any comparison with the shipbuilding yards at Amsterdam. Peter, leaving the majority of his travelling companions at Koppenbrügge, and accompanied by some dozen of his 'volunteers,' passed through the Capital without a halt, and hurried straight to the little village. Wherefore? because the best workmen amongst the Dutch carpenters, none of them, of course, first-rate, whom he had employed at Préobrajenskoïé, at Péréiaslavl and at Voronèje had chanced to be natives of Zaandam. Whence he had concluded, that to see fine ships, and learn how to make them, it behoved him to go there, and not elsewhere.

He established himself in the village inn. Faithful to his mania for dressing-up, he forthwith sent for suits like those worn by the local boatmen—red waistcoats with large buttons, short jackets, and wide breeches. Thus garbed, he and his followers wandered through the streets, visiting the work-yards, even entering the workmen's houses, to the huge astonishment of their denizens. These houses bore a strong resemblance to those Peter had been accustomed to inhabit in his own country. He found one that took his fancy, and settled down in it. He bought a *boiejer* or small sailing-boat, fitted it with a stepped mast, then a new invention, and spent his time sailing his little vessel on the Gulf. At the end of a week he had had enough of it. The ships he had seen on the waters of the Y, or in the shipbuilding yards, were mere merchant vessels, of moderate tonnage. His presence had flurried the quiet population of the place, causing trouble to the local authorities, and some inconvenience to himself. Nobody, it is quite clear, was deceived by his disguise. His arrival had been foretold, and a description of his person given to one of the local workmen by a relation employed in Russia; 'Tall, with a head that shakes, a right arm that is never quiet, and a wart on his face.' Some children, whom he had treated roughly, threw stones at him. He lost his temper, forthwith forgot his incognito, and loudly proclaimed his quality. He was given a hint that his departure would be hailed with satisfaction, and his Embassy having arrived at Amsterdam, he determined to rejoin it.

One week he spent at Zaandam,—sailing about in a boat, and making love to a servant-girl at the inn, to whom he presented fifty ducats.¹ But his strange behaviour and his carnival disguise had made their impression. He had sowed the seeds, in that out-of-the-way spot, of a crop of picturesque anecdotes, out of which the legend was to grow. Before the end of the eighteenth century, Joseph II., Gustavus III. and the Grand Duke Paul of Russia—early in the nineteenth, Napoleon and Maria Louisa, were to visit the dwelling, authentic or non-authentic, within which the posthumous worship of a late-born religion had been set up. Napoleon it appears, showed little interest, and Marie Louise burst out laughing, when she saw how poor a spot it was.² But in 1814 Alexander I. decorated it with a commemorative slab of white marble. The poet Joukovski, going thither with the future Emperor Alexander II., pencilled the cottage walls with some enthusiastic lines, saluting the cradle of Russia under that humble roof. Modern tourists may read the following distich, beside a portrait of the great man :

‘Nichts is
den grooten man
te Klein.’

The cottage, which stands on the Krimp, in the western and somewhat retired quarter of the town, is a wooden structure on a brick-built foundation. Guerit Kist, or Boij Thijssen, shared it, in the year 1697, with a widow, who relinquished her lodging to Peter in consideration of a rent of seven florins—which he omitted to pay; he was always apt to forget such matters. There is one room only, a funnel-shaped chimney-corner, with wooden jambs and mantel-piece, a sort of wooden cupboard with folding doors, wire-latticed, and hung with curtains, in which the sleeping-mattress was placed (*betsteede*) and a ladder leading to the attic; no other furniture which can have been used by the tenant in 1697, all the rest was bought by the Empress Elizabeth, and carried off to Russia. The house, which, after

¹ Meermann, *Lecture on Peter the Great's First Journey* (Paris, 1812), p. 59, etc.; Nartof, *Anecdotes of Peter the Great* (St. Petersburg, 1891), pp. 5-7; *Noomen's unpublished Journal* in the Utrecht Library. This journal is shortly to be published by Professor Kort, of Dorpat (Iourief). Scheltema relied on it absolutely. Noomen was a Zaandam cloth-merchant.

² Scheltema, *Historical Anecdotes of Peter the Great* (Lausanne, 1842), p. 409

the Tsar's departure, was the home of several generations of artisans, was for a long time utterly forgotten; it is just possible that it may have been recognised. A sort of arched shed, built by the King of Holland, surrounds and preserves what now remains of it;—the western side, that is to say, consisting of two rooms with a loft above them, all of them sinking under the weight of the ruined roof. The right side of the building and the chimney have utterly disappeared. The Dutch quite lately made over these relics to the Russian Government, and this has taken fresh measures for their preservation, which may be indispensable, but which are somewhat distressing to lovers of the picturesque. There is even a *Calorifère*!

A picture of the Dutch school, once at the Mon Plaisir Palace at Peterhof, representing a man in a red waistcoat, clasping a girl of very opulent charms, long had the reputation of being a memento of the great man's visit to Saardam. This canvas, now at the Hermitage Palace, was certainly not painted from nature, for the artist, I. I. Horemans, was not born till 1715. Nartof, who was, in later years, a member of Peter's intimate circle, mentions the girl, who, he says, would not consent to accept Peter's advances, till a glance into the stranger's purse had convinced her he was no common boatman; and in a fragment of a letter in Leibnitz's collection, which bears no indication of its origin, I find, under the date of 27th Nov. 1697, the following lines:—'The Tsar has happened on a peasant girl of Saardam, who pleases his fancy, and on holidays, he betakes himself there alone in his boat, to take his pleasure with her, after the manner of Hercules.'¹

Peter found better employment at Amsterdam. His arrival there was awaited by a friend, well-nigh a collaborator, the burgomaster of the town, Nicholas Witsen. This official, who had visited Russia during the reign of Alexis, and written a celebrated book on Eastern and Southern Tartary, who was the constant correspondent of Lefort, and acted as his master's intermediary in the matter of the ships ordered, and other purchases made by him, in Holland, could not fail to offer the traveller the heartiest welcome. He lost no time in obtaining access for him to the great shipbuilding yards of the East Indian Company. This marks the

¹ Guerrier, *Leibnitz Correspondence* (St. Petersburg, 1873), p. 31.

opening of the serious work and usefulness of Peter's first journey.

The man himself was still unchanged, with his fads and his oddities, his queer habits and grimaces. He still pretended to hide himself under the name of 'Master Peter' (*Peterbas*) or 'Carpenter Peter of Zaandam,' shamming deafness if he was addressed in any other manner, and thus contrived to make himself more remarkable than ever. When his Embassy went to the Hague, to be received in solemn audience, he refused to accompany it, but intimated his desire to watch the reception from a neighbouring room. Some company having entered this apartment, the Tsar desired to leave it, but, finding that, for this purpose, he was obliged to cross the audience-chamber, he requested that the members of the States-General should turn their faces to the wall, so that they might not see him!¹ He reached the Hague at eleven o'clock at night. At the Amsterdam hotel, to which he was first conducted, he refused the fine bed prepared for him, in the best room, and insisted on climbing up to the roof, to choose some tiny chamber. Then changing his mind utterly, he resolved to seek a lodging elsewhere. Thus it came about that the *Old Doelen* Inn had the honour of his presence. One of his servants was there already, sleeping in a corner on his bear-skin. The Tsar kicked him to his feet; 'Give me thy place!'²

He stopped his carriage twenty times between Amsterdam and the Hague, to measure the width of a bridge, go into a mill, which he had to reach by crossing a meadow, where the water was often up to his knees, or enter some middle-class house, whose inhabitants he caused, first of all, to be sent outside. Wherever he went, his insatiable curiosity and whimsicality went with him. He barely escaped maiming himself by suddenly stopping a saw-mill. He clung to the driving wheel in a silk factory, at the risk of being carried away by one of the secondary wheels; he studied architecture with Simon Schynvoet of Leyden, mechanics with Van der Heyden, fortification with Coehorn, whom he tried hard to enlist in his own service,—printing with one of the Tessing brothers,—anatomy with Ruysch, natural history with Leuwenhœek. He took the gentlemen of his suite into the celebrated Boerhaave's anatomical theatre,

¹ Scheltema, pp. 140-142.

² *Ibid.*

and when they expressed some disgust at the preparations they saw there, he forced them to bite into the corpse which was being dissected. He learned to use compass, and sword, and plane, and even the instruments of a tooth-drawer, whom he saw, one day, operating in the open air, in a public square. He built a frigate, he made his own bed, did his own cooking, constructed a Russian bath for his own use;¹ he took drawing lessons too, and learned to engrave on copper, frequented the studio of Koerten Block, sat to her for his portrait, wrote his name in her album, and himself engraved a plate showing forth the triumph of the Christian religion over the Moslem faith.²

There is more feverish activity than reasoned application about all this, a great deal of caprice too, and even a touch of insanity. The notions of science and art thus picked up are somewhat disconcerting. 'If you want to build a ship,' we read in one of Peter's note-books belonging to this period, 'you must begin, after taking the superficial area, by making a right angle at each end.'³ Napoleon, with all the universality of his genius,—the widest and the most comprehensive our modern world has ever known,—never pretended to be a great doctor or a skilful etcher. All his practical knowledge was specialised. Yet Peter was following an instinct which was not to play him false. He was giving himself the best of preparations for the real task which awaited him,—not the building of ships, or of factories, or of palaces (foreign specialists could always be brought in for such purposes), but the inauguration of a whole plan of civilisation. He was, after all, carrying on the process which had begun with his first uncertain gropings amongst the exotic riches of the *Oroujennaia Palata*, the inventory—invariably hasty, and summary—of the various treasures, industrial, scientific, and artistic, which he proposed to borrow from the Western world. But as his field of curiosity enlarged, and, with it, his mind widened, the careless child, the inattentive youth, of former days, showed more and more of the qualities of the Sovereign. Often, at Péréiaslavl, or at Archangel, he had

¹ Meermann, p. 60.

² Scheltéma, *Russia and the Low Countries* (Amsterdam, 1817), vol. i. p. 221; F. Müller, *Attempt at a Russian-Netherland Bibliography*, pp. 164, 165; Piekarski, *Literature and Science in Russia* (St. Petersburg, 1862), vol. i. p. 9. The engraving referred to is in the Amsterdam Museum.

³ Oustrialof, vol. iii. p. 93.

utterly forgotten Moscow, and the rest of his empire. But this was past. Far as he was from his capital, and the frontiers of his country, he insisted on being kept informed of the smallest details in the management of those public affairs, which he had once so willingly neglected. He would know everything that happened, hour by hour; and many things were happening. Even the momentary application of his energetic activity in that direction had borne fruit. Near Azof, the forts of Alexis and of Peter were in course of building, at Taganrog, two more forts, named after the Trinity and St. Paul, and a harbour, were being constructed. On the Dnieper, the Turkish attacks on the fortresses of Kazykermen and of Tavan had been victoriously repulsed. The navy, too, was making rapid progress. The King of Sweden had sent 300 cannon to arm the ships, either not dreaming they might ever be turned against himself, or heroically indifferent to that possibility. Augustus was strengthening his position in Poland. Of all these things Peter was informed; he kept up an active correspondence with the persons charged to represent him at the head of the Government. Romodanovski gave him news of the *Streltsy*, Vinnius wrote to ask him for Dutch gunsmiths. He did even better than to send him these. He set about recruiting a whole staff, most numerous and varied, which was to second him in that work of transformation, the plan of which was growing clearer and clearer in his brain;—a skilled boatswain, of Norwegian birth, Cornelius Cruys, whom he made an admiral; several naval captains, three-and-twenty commanders, five-and-thirty lieutenants, seventy-two pilots, fifty physicians; three hundred and forty-five sailors, and four cooks. These men would need special stores. He set himself to collect and send them off. Two hundred and sixty cases, filled with guns, pistols, cannon, sail-cloth, compasses, saws, cabinet-makers' tools, whale-bone, cork, and anchors, and marked with the letters P.M. (Peter Mihailof) were despatched to Moscow. One consignment—the germ of the future School of Fine Arts—consisted of eight blocks of marble, designed, no doubt, to rouse the inspiration of future artists. Another case contained a stuffed crocodile. Here we have the nucleus of a museum.¹ There were occasional checks in this wonderful activity,—a

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iii. pp. 104-110.

pause, now and then, in the Sovereign's correspondence with his representatives. Peter's answers were sometimes slow in coming. He would soon excuse himself shyly, almost humbly—the fault lay with Hmielnitski, the Russian Bacchus.¹ Lefort's pupil had not—never was to—cast off the old man in this respect. The weaknesses of the daily guest at the *Sloboda* banquets still clung to him. But, in spite of all, he found means, during those four months spent in Holland, to accomplish an enormous amount of work.

He was left in perfect freedom for the purpose. His eight days' visit to Zaandam had revolutionised the village. At Amsterdam, once the first moment of surprise was past, his presence was almost unobserved. It was not till some years later that the greatness of the part he was called to play, and the frequency of his visits to Europe, drew public attention to his relatively obscure beginnings. And then, taken at a disadvantage, finding no trace of its hero in the turmoil of the great maritime city, the legend was fain to seek its guiding marks in a more modest spot, and thus settled at Zaandam. The immediate impression left there, by the visit of Peter Mihailof and his noisy comrades, is clearly shown in the two following extracts from contemporary chronicles.

The Records of the Lutheran community at Zaandam :—

'He came incognito, with very few followers, spent a week at Krimpenburg, in the house of a blacksmith, of the name of Boij Thijsen, and then went to Amsterdam, where his great Embassy had arrived. He was seven feet high, wore the dress of the peasants of Zaandam, worked in the admiralty dockyard, and is a great admirer of ship-building.'

Noomen's *Journal* :—

'Thus were the State and our little town of Westzaandam delivered and released from these celebrated, numerous, distinguished, extraordinary, and very costly visitors.'

A resolution of the States General, dated 15th August 1698, informs us that the entertainment of the Embassy cost the State 100,000 florins. Neither this document, nor any

¹ Hmielnitski was the victorious Chief who led the Cossacks in their struggle against the Poles in the seventeenth century. Both in Russian, and in Polish, the word Hmiel means *hops*, and also *drunkenness*.

of the other resolutions referring to the stay of the Ambassadors at Amsterdam, contains any reference to Peter himself.¹

III

In the seventeenth century, the Amsterdam shipbuilders had a well-deserved reputation, but they were more practical than learned. Their processes differed in different ship-yards, but no consistent theory, no carefully-thought-out justification of traditional proportions and methods, existed in any one of them. Peter, as his study of the craft advanced, became aware of this, and the fact distressed him. The why and the wherefore, and with that, all chance of making the principle his own, were beginning to escape him. An Englishman whom he met at the country house of the cloth-merchant, John Tessing, boasted of the superiority of English shipbuilders in this respect. 'In his country,' he said, 'theory and practice went hand in hand.' Thus it came about, that in January, 1698, the young Tsar was induced to cross the Channel.

He had met William III. already, both at Utrecht and at the Hague, and was assured of a courteous welcome. A yacht belonging to the Royal Navy, with an escort of three battle-ships, was sent to fetch him from Amsterdam. Vice-Admiral Mitchell, and the Marquis of Caermarthen—this last an oddity, and almost as heroic a brandy-drinker as Lefort himself,—were attached to the person of the Imperial guest. Some uncertainty exists regarding the house inhabited by the Tsar, during his stay in London. Some believe it to have been 15 Buckingham Street, Strand, on the walls of which a commemorative inscription is now placed. Others opine that he lived in Norfolk Street. When the English King entered the room selected by Peter for his own use, and in which he slept, with three or four of his servants, His Majesty almost fainted. The air was foul, and quite unbreathable; in spite of the cold, all the windows had to be thrown open. Yet, when Peter returned William's visit at Kensington Palace, he gave proof of very evident progress,

¹ Dutch State Papers, The Hague. See, with reference to Peter's visit to Holland, besides the authorities already quoted, A. Iazykof, *Peter the Great at Zaandam and Amsterdām* (Berlin, 1872).

in many social matters. He had a long conversation in Dutch with the King, he was assiduously polite to Princess Anne, the heir to the throne, and was so much delighted with her conversation that, in writing to one of his friends, he described her as 'a true daughter of our church.' An apparatus for showing the direction of the wind, placed in the King's cabinet, interested him greatly, but he only cast a careless glance on the marvels of art which filled the palace. His visit was, on the whole, a failure, the impression he produced being far from favourable. The inhabitants of this home of culture, and refined elegance, were more difficult to please than the ladies of Koppenbrügge. A few years later, Burnet, in his memoirs, almost seems to apologise to his readers, for speaking of so sorry a personage.¹ Was such a man likely to be fit to govern a great empire? The Bishop doubts it. A promising shipwright he might be. He had not been seen to interest himself in any other matter, and even in that, he was disposed to give too much attention to mere detail. Thus does the great Whig historian lay his unerring finger on the weak points of a marvellous genius, without ever seeming to suspect the existence of those powers, which, in a future page, I shall endeavour to demonstrate. But these written impressions cannot have been absolutely fresh, and distance, doubtless, deceived him with an optical illusion, analogous to that the effects of which we have already noticed in Holland.

Peter remained in England almost as long as he had tarried with the Dutch, and here, too, he gave his mind to many things. With all his usual curiosity, minuteness, and practical-mindedness, he made the tour of every public establishment likely to furnish him with useful information for his future creations—the Mint—the Observatory—the Royal Society. Though the pictures in Kensington Palace did not transport him with admiration, he had his portrait painted by Kneller, the pupil of Rembrandt and of Ferdinand Bol. This picture, preserved at Hampton Court, is one of the best of him in existence. He took his pleasure too, giving free rein to his five-and-twenty years, and making practical acquaintance with local manners and customs. The servant-girl of the Zaandam inn was replaced by an actress, Mrs. Cross, who, so it would appear, had reason to

¹ Vol. ii. p. 221, etc.

complain of the Tsar's stinginess; but he sharply reproved the persons who ventured to lecture him on this subject. 'I find plenty of men to serve me well, with all their heart and mind, for 500 guineas. This person has only served me tolerably, and what she has to give is worth much less.'¹ He won back his 500 guineas, over a match, fought in the house of the Duke of Leeds, between a Grenadier of his own suite, and a celebrated native boxer. Six weeks out of the three months were devoted to pursuing—at Deptford, a village formerly on the outskirts of the capital, now merged within it—those studies for which the Amsterdam shipyard had not sufficed him. Here too he delighted in masquerading as a working apprentice, walking through the streets with his hatchet on his shoulder, and drinking beer and smoking a small Dutch pipe in a tavern, which, until the year 1808, bore the name of the Tsar's Tavern, and showed his portrait on its signboard. Behold a new field for the legend-mongers, who did not fail to take advantage of it! Even Burnet's usually clear vision and faithful memory were thus led astray. But there is no uncertainty as to the residence occupied by Peter at Deptford. Its identity has been further established by witnesses, before a Court of Justice. When the owner, John Evelyn, re-took possession of his dwelling, which he had given up temporarily for the use of the Russian Sovereign, he found it in a condition which might have suggested the idea that Baty-Han himself had been there. Doors and windows had been torn out and burnt, hangings dragged down and soiled, valuable pictures utterly ruined, and their frames smashed to pieces. Evelyn claimed, and received, reimbursement of his loss from the public Treasury.² This mansion, Sayes Court, though half-ruined at the present day, standing in the middle of the docks, and used as a police-barrack and counting-house,—is still bound up with the memory of the illustrious guest it once sheltered. The street by which it is approached is even now called Tsar's Street.

Peter toiled hard at Deptford, under the direction of the famous Anthony Dean, whose father had made himself unpopular by passing over into France, and there teaching the art of shipbuilding. In a letter dated March 4th, 1619,

¹ Nartof, p. 9. The original expression is even coarser yet.

² Shoubinski, *Historical Sketches* (St. Petersburg, 1893), p. 30.

referring to some excess committed at Moscow by one of his provisional representatives, while in a state of intoxication, he writes, not without a touch of melancholy regret, 'We run no risk of doing anything of that kind here, seeing we are immersed in study from morning till night.' But even at Deptford, his toil as an apprentice and his passion for all sea-faring matters did not completely absorb him. As in Holland, his interests and his studies took every possible direction. He kept adding recruits to the body of his future collaborators—workmen and overseers for his mines in the Ural, engineers who were to cut a canal which was to join the Caspian and the Black Sea by the Volga and the Don. He and Lord Caermarthen negotiated the concession of the Russian tobacco monopoly to a group of English capitalists, in return for the somewhat modest sum of 48,000 roubles, which he needed to balance the budget of his Embassy. Burnet forgot all that. Yet legend speaks of an uncut diamond, wrapped in a scrap of dirty paper,—the symbolic gift which Peter is said to have conferred on his royal host ere he departed. But at Koenigsberg, if the story-tellers are to be believed, he tossed a huge ruby into the bosom of the Electress' low-cut gown, as he sat at table with her.¹ Now the Electress did not go to Koenigsberg!

IV

By the end of April, Peter was back in Holland, and before long he was on his way to Vienna. The request for aid against the Turks, addressed to the States General by the Embassy, had not been favourably received. The States had even gone so far as to suggest to the King of England that he should mediate between the Ottoman Porte and Austria, so as to place that country in a position to turn all her forces against France, in the fresh struggle which was so evidently approaching,—for the health of Charles II. of Spain was rapidly declining. This blow must be parried. Unfortunately, the movements of the Russian monarch's huge Embassy were very slow. It must take

¹ Coxe's *Travels* (London, 1874), vol. iv. p. 87. Niestroief, 'Peter the Great's Visit to Holland and England,' in the *Messenger Universel*, 1871.

three weeks to reach the capital of the Holy Empire. According to German official sources, its retinue was thus composed:—One court marshal, one equerry, one majordomo, four chamberlains, four dwarfs, six pages, six trumpeters, one cup-bearer, one cook, one quarter-master, twelve lacqueys, six coachmen and postillions, twenty-four serving-men, thirty-two footmen, twenty-two carriage horses, thirty-two four-horsed carriages, and four six-horse waggons for the baggage, and twelve saddle-horses.¹ Yet Peter proposed to enter Leopold's capital at eleven o'clock at night, and in the fourth coach, so as to pass unnoticed. At the very last moment the plan failed, and everything turned out ill for every one. The Embassy, with its endless train of followers, was forced to kick its heels one whole long day, just without the approaches to the town. The road was blocked by a great march-past of troops, not to be interrupted for such a trifle. Peter, caring nothing for the troops, jumped into a post-cart, with a single servant, and pushed forward. Yet the incident annoyed him much, and gave him an equal sense of discomfort. He was sorely put out of countenance, and the appearance of the Imperial residence only deepened the impression. The whole place awed him, with its air of implacable pride, haughty etiquette, and inaccessible majesty. The Imperial ministers, already deeply engaged with Holland and with England, sought every pretext to delay the audience solicited by his Ambassadors. He, to cut things short, demanded a personal interview with the Emperor, and met with a prompt refusal. By what right? it was inquired. Here was Peter Mihailof's first lesson in diplomacy. He began to understand the inconvenience of disguises. Three times he returned to the charge. At last the Vice-Chancellor of Bohemia, Czernini, was sent to him. 'What do you want?' 'To see the Emperor, and speak with him on urgent affairs.' 'What affairs? Are the Ambassadors of your country not here to see to them?' The poor disguised Tsar beat a hasty retreat; 'He would not even mention affairs,' he said.

A meeting was appointed at the Favorita Palace. He was to enter by a private staircase, a small spiral one com-

¹ Weber, *Archiv für Sächsische Geschichte* (Leipzig, 1873), vol. xi. p. 338.

municating with the Park. He agreed to everything. Once in the Emperor Leopold's presence, he forgot himself so far as to attempt to kiss his hand. He evidently felt himself very small and inferior; he kept putting his hat on, and pulling it off, nervously, and could not make up his mind to keep it on his head, in spite of the Emperor's repeated requests that he should do so. The interview, which lasted a quarter of an hour, was of the most commonplace description. Lefort interpreted, for Peter did not dare to fall back on his own bad German. It was not till he had left the Palace that he regained his self-possession, and then, in an instant, all the natural and exuberant gaiety of the man returned. A boat lay moored on a little pond in the Park. He rushed to it, and rowed about till he was out of breath. He was like any school-boy, just escaped from the trials of a difficult examination.¹

But the interview bore no fruit. The Emperor was quite resolved to respect Peter Mihailof's incognito. At the banquet which followed the audience at last granted to the Embassy, the young Sovereign, bitten afresh with his old mania, insisted on standing behind Lefort's chair. He was allowed to do so without protest. The political proposals he had come to make, by no means fell in with the decided intentions of the Austrian Court, which was bent on having peace with the Turks at any price. Yet Peter took great pains to give satisfaction in these new surroundings. He was much more circumspect than elsewhere. He paid a visit—at the Favorita, again, and almost secretly—to the Empress and the Imperial Princesses, and did his best to make himself pleasant. He even ventured some advances towards the dominant Church, and went so far as to rouse hopes among the Catholics, similar to those he had already roused amongst the Protestants. On St. Peter's Day he was present, with his whole Embassy, at a solemn service in the Jesuit Church, where he listened to a sermon preached in Slav by Father Wolff, and heard the preacher say 'that the keys would be bestowed a second time, upon a new Peter, that he might open another *door*.' He composed, and lighted with his own hands, the fireworks which formed part of an entertainment given, that same day, by his Ambassadors, to

¹ Vienna State Papers, Ceremonial-Protocolle. Compare Oustrialof, vol. iii. pp. 126, 127; Sheiner, p. 372.

the cream of Viennese society, and which, according to the Tsar's testimony, wound up in very much the same fashion as the fetes in the *Sloboda*. According to one of his letters to Vinnius, a great deal of wine was drunk, and there was considerable love-making in the gardens.¹ Shortly afterwards, the Emperor invited the Ambassadors to a masked ball, at which Peter wore the dress of a Friesland peasant. The Emperor and Empress appeared as the host and hostess of an inn. Innkeeping (*das Wirthschaft*) was as much in fashion, at that moment, as shepherds and shepherdesses and all pastoral matters were soon to be. But this entertainment had no official character whatever. At supper Peter sat between Freilin von Turn, who was his own pendant, as a Friesland peasant, and the wife of Marshal von Staremburg, who wore a Swabian costume. A few days later the Embassy departed. The diplomatic object of the journey had utterly failed, and the scientific resources of Vienna had been no compensation for Peter's disappointment in this respect. He desired to go to Venice, there to study a form of shipbuilding, new to him as yet—those oared galleys which were to play such a great part in the future of the Russian navy. Just as the travelling preparations were completed, the Tsar was compelled to stop short. Serious news had arrived from Russia.

'The seed of the Miloslavski has sprouted once again.' Thus he picturesquely describes it. There was a fresh mutiny amongst the *Streltsy*. Like a flash his mind was made up, and the direction of his journey changed from south to east. A few days later he was at Cracow. 'You will see me sooner than you think for,' he had written to Romodanovski, whom he accused of weakness and pusillanimity. But more reassuring news awaited him in the old Polish capital: Shein, his generalissimo, had put down the rebels; Moscow was safe. He slackened his pace a little, halted at Rawa, and there spent three days with Augustus II. The history of this meeting, which was to give birth to the Northern War, belongs to another chapter of this book. As far as Peter's studies are concerned, his journey ended at Vienna. Before setting forth its consequences, distant and immediate—the creation, in other words,

¹ *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 263.

on the confines of ancient Europe, of a new power, political, social, and economic, and the transformation, political, social, and economic too, of a certain area of the old European continent—I must fully describe the physical traits and mental characteristics of the man who was to be the instrument to perform this revolution. Standing on the threshold of the work, I must endeavour to picture forth its maker.

PART II

THE MAN

BOOK I—BODY AND MIND

CHAPTER I

PHYSICAL PORTRAIT—CHARACTERISTIC TRAITS

- i. Pen and pencil portraits—Kneller and Von Moor—St. Simon—Strength and nervousness—Twitchings—Oddities of dress—The lay figure in the Winter Palace—What his dress really was—Darned stockings and cobbled shoes—*The Doubina*.
- ii. Temperament—The delight of action—An audience at 4 o'clock in the morning—A working day of 14 hours—Ubiquity and universality—statesman, drum-major, dancing-master, fireman, major-domo, physician—The Tsar and his negro boy—The individual and the race—Russian indolence—Agreement of physical and moral phenomena—Long winters, and short-lived springs—Periods of inertia, and fits of feverish activity—The heroes of the National Legend.
- iii. Was Peter brave?—Narva and Poltava—The idea of duty—Contradictions—Moral energy and weakness—Inconstancy and versatility in detail—Steadiness and perseverance in the whole undertaking—Peter's impulsiveness—Traits of the national character—Brain and heart—Want of feeling—Cheery and sociable disposition—Boyish pranks—Why he was disliked—Frequent fits of violence and rage—Sword thrusts.
- iv. Drinking excesses—A scene of bloodshed in the Monastery of the Basilian Fathers—The Tsar not sober—Habitual drunkenness—Its results.
- v. Coarse pleasures—Banquets and orgies—Female drunkards—A regular tippler—Theological controversies at table—Peter's tastes are those of the public-house and the servants' hall—Was he cruel?—Judge and executioner—Reasons of State—Idealism and sensuality—The bondage of the Law.

I

THE picture of Peter, painted in London by Sir Godfrey Kneller, in 1698, shows us a fine young fellow of gracious and manly presence. The features are refined and regular, the expression full of dignity and pride; the wide-open eyes and somewhat full, half-smiling, lips, are instinct with beauty and intelligence. The physical mark discreetly indicated on the right cheek—the wart of the description sent to the Zaandam workman—rouses confidence in the artist's fidelity.

Yet this same fidelity has been much disputed. Not to mention the hideous waxen figure which dishonours the gallery of the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg, Leroi and Caravaque, as also Dannhauer, and even Karl Von Moor—with whose work Peter himself was so well pleased, that he sent the portrait from the Hague to Paris, in 1717, to have it reproduced at the Gobelins Factory—were all of them far less flattering.¹ The portraits painted on the spot, and at the same period (1717) by Nattier and Rigaud, pleased the Tsar less. They have a somewhat arch expression, and give nothing of that fierce, and almost savage look of power, which Moor so successfully indicated.

True it is, indeed, that twenty years—and what eventful ones!—had passed over the Tsar, between the date of Kneller's picture and that of Moor's. But Noomen saw the great man before Kneller met him, and in his Journals, I find this rough and evidently frank description:—'Tall and robust, of ordinary corpulence, lively and quick in all his movements, the face round, the expression rather severe, the eyebrows dark, like the short curling hair . . . he walks with long steps, swinging his arms, grasping a new hatchet haft in his hand.' The vanished hero stands before us! Again, about the same period, under the hand of Cardinal Kollonitz, Primate of Hungary, who met the Tsar at Vienna in 1698, and was rather benevolently inclined towards him than otherwise—I read as follows:—'Neither in his person, his aspect, nor his manners, is there anything to specially distinguish him, and betray his princely quality.'² St. Simon's portrait is well known. I should be disposed to adopt it, as indicating a happy medium—for all the contemporary documents on which I have been able to lay my hand, agree with it in every essential point. Here are two, deposited amongst the papers of the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs, during the Tsar's residence in Paris in 1717. 'His features were rather handsome, they even showed a certain gentleness, and no one would have thought, on looking at him, that he would occasionally take to cutting off the heads of those of his subjects who displeased him. He would have

¹ Rovinski, *Dictionary of Engraved Portraits*, p. 1572. The whereabouts of the original of this portrait is unknown.

² Theiner, p. 372. Compare Ruzini's *Account sent from Venice to Vienna*; *Fontes rerum Austriacarum* (Vienna, 1867), Part II. vol. xxvii. p. 429.

been a very well-built prince, but that he carried himself so badly. He walked with round shoulders, worse than any Dutch sailor, whose ways he seemed to copy. He had large eyes, a good nose and mouth, a pleasant face, though somewhat pale, and light brown hair kept rather short. He made endless grimaces. One of his commonest tricks was to try to look at his sword by bending his head backwards over his shoulder, and to raise one of his legs and stretch it out behind him. He sometimes turned his head as if he desired to bring his face above the middle of his shoulders. Those who waited on him asserted that this kind of convulsion always came upon him when his thoughts were very earnestly fixed on any special subject.¹ And again 'The Tsar is exceedingly tall, somewhat bowed, his head generally bent down, he is very dark, and there is a something wild in his look. His mind appears bright, and his understanding very ready. There is a sort of grandeur in his manners, but this is not always kept up.'² The disagreement as to the colour of Peter's hair may be put down to the fault of the wig-makers, he having adopted the style of hair-dressing peculiar to the European dress of that date. All are agreed as to his grimaces, and nervous tricks, the perpetual shaking of his head, the round-shoulderedness which struck the Emperor's Ministers in 1698, when he was only 24, and the fierce expression of his eyes. The Archbishop of Novgorod, Ianovski, admitted to audience to kiss the hands of Ivan and of Peter, when the two brothers shared the throne, felt no alarm when he approached the elder sovereign. But when he met the younger Tsar's glance, he felt his knees shake under him, and, from that day forward, the presentiment that he would be done to death by that second hand, which his trembling lips had scarcely touched, was always with him.

'It is well known,' says Staehlin, 'that this monarch, from his early youth until his death, was subject to short but frequent brain attacks, of a somewhat violent kind. A sort of convulsion seized him, which for a certain time, and sometimes even for some hours, threw him into such a distressing condition, that he could not bear the sight of any one, not even his nearest friends. This paroxysm was always pre-

¹ *Mémoires et Documents* (Russie), vol. ii. p. 117.

² Despatch from M. de Liboy—sent to Dunkirk to receive the Tsar, April 23, 1717.

ceded by a strong contortion of the neck towards the left side, and by a violent contraction of the muscles of the face.¹ Hence arose, doubtless, Peter's perpetual recourse to remedies, some of them occasionally very strange, as for instance, a certain powder, compounded of the interior and the wings of a magpie.² Hence too, his habit of sleeping with his two hands clasping the shoulders of an orderly officer.³ Some people have tried to believe this last fact to have given rise to the malevolent suppositions which have hovered round the private morals of this sovereign. But this explanation is, unfortunately, far from being sufficient. In 1718, while at table with the Queen of Prussia, Peter began to wave one of his hands—that holding his knife—in so violent a fashion, that Sophia Charlotte took fright and would have left her seat. He, to reassure her, seized her arm, but squeezed it so tightly, that she cried out. He shrugged his shoulders. 'Catherine's bones are not so tender!' he was heard to remark aloud.⁴

These traits of nervous delicacy had already appeared in the case of Ivan the Terrible, and probably arose from the same cause—the excess and violence of the shocks undergone in infancy and childhood. It was the legacy of old Russia—represented by the *Streltsy*, and doomed to death already—to her great Reformer. But with the poison, happily, she bestowed the antidote—that mighty work which was to purify his blood and invigorate his nerves. Ivan had no such good fortune.

To sum it up, Peter may be described, physically, as a fine man, exceedingly tall (his exact height was 6 ft. 8½ in.),⁵ dark—'extremely dark, as if he had been born in Africa,' says one of his contemporaries⁶—powerful in frame, with a good deal of majesty about him, marred by certain faults of deportment, and a painful infirmity, which spoilt the general effect. He dressed carelessly, put on his clothes awry, frequently appeared in a most untidy condition, was always changing his garments, military or civil, and would occasionally select a garb of the most grotesque description. He had

¹ *Anecdotes* (Richou's translation, Strasburg, 1787), p. 80.

² Scherer's *Anecdotes* (Paris, 1792), vol. ii. p. 82.

³ Nartof, p. 29.

⁴ *Memoirs of the Margravine of Baireuth*.

⁵ Two Archines, and fourteen Verchoks, Golikof, *History of Peter the Great* (Moscow, 1842), vol. x. p. 170.

⁶ Louville's *Memoirs* (Paris, 1818), vol. ii. p. 239.

no sense whatever of propriety in dress. He showed himself to the Danes, at Copenhagen, in 1716, with a green cap on his head, a black military cravat tightly buckled round his neck, and his shirt collar fastened by a big silver button, set with mock stones, such as his own officers were in the habit of wearing. A brown overcoat with horn buttons, coarse worsted stockings, full of darns, and very dirty shoes, completed his costume.¹ He agreed to wear a wig, but insisted on its being very short, so that he might be able to thrust it into his pocket; and his own hair, which he rarely cut, showed far below it.

His hair grew naturally very long and thick. In 1722, during his Persian Campaign, being inconvenienced by its quantity, he had it cut, but, being very economical in mind, he insisted on having a new wig made out of it, which wig now figures on the lay figure in the Winter Palace. It is indeed the only genuine thing about that figure; the waxen face, with its glass eyes, was modelled on a cast taken after death, and the weight of the plaster on the decomposing flesh threw all proportions out. Peter's cheeks were naturally full and round. He never wore the coat of pale blue gros de Tours, silver-trimmed, nor the sword-belt embroidered to match, and the silver-clocked poppy-coloured stockings, in which the figure is dressed up, but once in all his life. That was at Moscow, in 1724, on the day of Catherine's Coronation. She had worked with her own hands on the splendid garment, and he consented to wear it for the occasion. But he kept to his old cobbled shoes. The rest of his authentic and everyday garments are placed in two wardrobes which surround the throne—itsself a mock one, on which the lay figure is seated. There is a thick cloth cloak, worn threadbare, a hat devoid of lace, pierced by a bullet at Poltava, and some grey woollen stockings, full of darns. In the corner stands the famous *doubina*, a fairly thick ivory-headed rattan cane, with which we shall make closer acquaintance.

The sovereign's intimate circle frequently saw him in his shirt-sleeves, for, even at table, he never scrupled to take off his coat if he was too hot. Restraint, of any kind, he never would endure.

¹ Lundblad, *Life of Charles XII.* (German Translation, Janssen-Tuch, Hamburg, 1837), vol. i. p. 86.

II

'The soul's joy lies in doing.' The greatest of northern poets was swift to recognise the hero of that mighty series of brilliant exploits, the image of which I would fain evoke, and has summed him up—his temperament, his character, and almost all his genius—in those few words. As Pösselt says, '*In Thatendrange war sein wahres Genie*':—Yes; his strength, his greatness, and his ultimate success, were all of them due to that vital energy which made him, both physically and morally, the most turbulent man, the most indifferent to fatigue, the most intensely sensible of the *joy of action*, whom the world has ever seen. Nothing more natural than that the legends should have described him as a supposititious child, the son of foreign parents. His whole nature appears utterly at variance with the surroundings into which he was born. He has no prejudices, and his Russian subjects brim over with them. They are fanatics in their own religion; he is almost a Free-thinker. They look askance at every novelty; he is never weary of innovations. They are fatalists; he, an originating force. They worship form and ceremony; he views all such things with an almost cynical scorn. Finally, and above all, they are indolent, lazy, emotionless,—frozen, as it were, into a perpetual winter, or slumbering in some everlasting dream. He, driven by the feverish love of movement and of labour, which I have already described, wakes them roughly from their torpor, and their sluggish inactivity, with downright blows, falling on them with sticks, and, not unfrequently, with axes. It would be interesting to follow his perpetual comings and goings, even during the space of a few months. Cast a mere glance over the list of his correspondence with Catherine—some 223 letters, published, in 1861, by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The various dates—from Lemberg in Galicia, from Marienwerder in Prussia, from Tsaritsin on the Volga,—in the south of his empire, from Vologda, in the north, from Berlin, Paris, Copenhagen—make the brain reel. One moment he is in the depths of Finland inspecting forests; then again in the Ural inspecting mines. Soon he is in Pomerania, taking part in a siege; in the Ukraine, where he is occupied in breeding sheep; at the brilliant

Court of some German prince, where he acts as his own Ambassador ; and then, suddenly, in the Bohemian mountains, where he enacts the part of a private tourist. On the 6th of July, 1715, I find him at St. Petersburg, about to put to sea with his fleet. On the 9th he is back again in his capital, sending the Montenegrins a consolatory letter concerning the excesses committed on them by the Turks, signing a convention with the Prussian Minister, and giving Menshikof instructions as to the preservation of the timber in the neighbourhood of the town. On the 12th he is at Revel : on the 20th he has rejoined his fleet at Kronstadt, and has forthwith embarked with it.¹ And so on, year in and year out, from the beginning to the end of his life. He is always in a hurry : he makes his coachman drive full gallop ; when he is on foot he never walks—he runs.

When did he take his rest, then ? It is not easy to conceive. He would sit far into the night, glass in hand, but even then he was discussing, holding forth, trying his guests sorely, from time to time, with his sudden changes from gaiety to ill-humour, his sallies, his ill-bred jokes, and fits of fury ; and he would give audiences at four o'clock in the morning. This was the hour for which he summoned his two Ambassadors, Ostermann and Boutourlin, before sending them to Stockholm, after the conclusion of peace with Sweden, in 1721. He received them, garbed in a short dressing-gown, below which his bare legs were exposed, a thick nightcap, lined with linen, on his head—for he perspired violently—and his stockings dropped down over his slippers. According to his orderly officer, he had been walking about for a considerable time, awaiting the arrival of the two gentlemen. Forthwith he fell upon them, questioned them closely, and in every direction, to make sure they thoroughly knew what they were about, and then, having dismissed them, dressed hastily, swallowed a glass of vodka (Russian brandy), and hurried off to his dockyards.²

Even the pleasures he permitted himself—banquets, illuminations, masquerades—imposed extra labour on him ; he took more pains than actual relaxation, letting off his own fireworks, directing the order of processions, beating the big drum—for he was drum-major among other things—and leading the dances, for he had made a study of the chore-

¹ Golikof, vol. vi. pp. 33, 35, 321.

² Scherer, vol. iii. p. 267.

graphic art. In 1722 at Moscow, at the wedding of Count Golovin with the daughter of Prince Romodanovski, he performed the duties of the house-steward. The heat having become oppressive, he had the necessary tools for opening a window brought to him, and thus employed himself for half an hour. He went about gravely, carrying the staff, which was his sign of office, pirouetted before the bride, remained standing during the feast, directing the waiting, and ate nothing himself until all was over.¹ He gave personal and active attention to the treatment of his negro page, who suffered from tænia.²

But indeed his favourite occupation, even in his hours of recreation, was work, perpetual work. Thus he engraved on copper, and turned in ivory. In May 1711, the French envoy Baluze, to whom he had granted audience at Jaworow, in Poland, found him in the garden, in the company of a fair lady. He was pushing his suit with a charming Pole, Madame Sieniawska, and meanwhile, saw and plane in hand, he was busily engaged in building a boat!³

Nothing but illness, and consequent sheer inability to move, would induce him to cease, or even diminish, this wild expenditure of strength. And if this did occur, he was full of distress and regret, showering apologies on those who worked under him. 'Let them not,' so he writes, 'fancy he was idle; he was really incapable of moving, quite worn out.' And even while complaining and chafing against this condition of enforced inaction,—as, for example, in 1708, during a violent attack of scorbutic fever,—he would personally direct the repression of a Cossack revolt on the Don, the victualling of his armies, the building operations of various kinds already begun in his capital, and a mass of other details of every kind.⁴

Not one escapes him. At Archangel, on the Dvina, he takes it into his head to inspect every one of the boats which carry the rustic pottery, made in the neighbourhood, to the market. So vigorously does he set about it, that he ends by tumbling into the hold of one vessel, and smashing

* Bergholz's *Journal*, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xx. p. 462; Hynerof, *The Countess Golovkin* (St. Petersburg, 1867), p. 102, etc.

² For this anecdote, with its coarse details, see Poushkin's *Works*, 1878 edition, vol. v. p. 278.

³ Despatch from Baluze to the King, May 12, 1711, French Foreign Office.

⁴ Golikof, vol. iii. p. 301.

a whole cargo of the fragile ware.¹ In January, 1722, at Moscow, after a night in carnival time, spent in driving from house to house in his sledge, singing carols after the manner of his country, and gathering a harvest of small coins, besides swallowing numerous glasses of wine, beer, and vodka, he hears, early in the morning, that a fire has broken out in a distant quarter. Thither he flies at once, and for two whole hours does fireman's duty; after which he mounts his sledge again, and is seen tearing along as if he really desired to break his horses down. Be it remarked that he is occupied, at that same moment, with a serious change in the higher administration of his empire. He is about to break up his 'council of revision,' the duties of which are to be transferred to the Senate, besides which, he must shortly give orders concerning the funeral of a regimental major.²

In 1721, when he undertook the work of drawing up his Navy Regulations, he laid out a plan for the employment of his time, to which he closely adhered. According to his Journal, he wrote, during four days of the week, for fourteen hours a day,—from five in the morning till noon, and from four in the afternoon till eleven at night. This lasted from January to December 1721.³ The MS. of these Regulations, entirely in his hand, and full of corrections, is now amongst the Moscow archives. These also contain rough copies, written by the Tsar, which prove that a great number of the diplomatic documents respecting the Northern war, signed by the Chancellor Golovin, were directly inspired, and originally written, by his master. And the same may be said of the majority of the memorandums and important despatches signed by his ordinary political collaborators, Golovin, Shérémétief, and General Weyde, and yet more so in regard to the legislative and administrative work of his whole reign—the creation of the army and the fleet, the development of commerce and industry, the establishment of mills and factories, the organisation of justice, the repression of official corruption, the constitution of the national economy. He wrote all minutes, often several times over, drew up all schemes, and frequently

¹ Staehlin's *Anecdotes*, p. 110.

² Bergholz's *Journal*, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xx. p. 360; *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 811.

³ Golikof, vol. ix. p. 27.

several editions of the same scheme. This did not prevent him from attending to all the details of the management of his own house, and even of the houses of his kinsfolk : as when, for example, he fixed the quantity and quality of the brandy to be supplied to his sister-in-law, the Tsarina Prascovia.¹

And yet in spite, and even because of it all, he was the true son of his country and of his race, and I, for my part, would readily stake my reputation on my certainty of his Russian origin. He corresponded to a certain phase of the national life, which clearly seems to betray the influence of the special conditions of physical existence in these latitudes. In Russia, after long and cruel winters, there come late and sudden springs, which instantly cover the waking earth with verdure, in a sudden explosion, as it were, of vernal forces. The same springtime awakenings, the same rushes of energetic growth, stir the souls of the men who inhabit these countries. The length and rigour of the winter season, which condemns them to a certain slothfulness of existence, make them indolent, without, as in hot Eastern countries, making them effeminate. Mind and spirit are braced, rather, by the enforced struggle with inclement and ungrateful nature. When the sun returns, the swiftly working elements must be swiftly followed, so as to crowd the work of several months into the space of a few weeks. This fact brings forth special physical and moral habits,—special aptitudes too ; and of these habits and aptitudes Peter is simply a particularly powerful expression. Such exceptional extremes as he may betray in these respects are doubtless the survival of the savage elementary forces, peculiar to the epic heroes of the Russian legend,—superhuman giants all, who bore the heavy burden of an excess of vigour they could not use,—wearied out by their own strength !

Peter, when he passes out of our sight, will leave the *Raskolniks*, who seek to relieve themselves of the same burden by galloping to and fro, on January nights, barefoot and in their shirts, and rolling in the snow.²

¹ Siémiewski, *The Tsarina Prascovia* (St. Petersburg, 1883), note to p. 58.

² Solovief, *History of Russia*, vol. xiii. p. 166, etc.

III

Did Peter's energy, and his enterprising—nay, his extraordinarily venturesome—genius, equal his courage?

He never sought danger, like his great Swedish adversary, —never found pleasure in it. In his earlier days, he gives us the impression of being a downright coward. My readers will not have forgotten his precipitate flight, on the night of August 6th, 1689, and his far from heroic appearance at the Troïtsa. The same thing came to pass in 1700, under the walls of Narva :—In spite of the most ingenious explanations and apologies, the hideous fact remains. At the news of the unexpected approach of the King of Sweden, the Tsar left his army, made over the command to an as yet untried, and newly-enlisted Chief, to whom he gave written instructions, which bore traces, according to all competent judges, not of ignorance only, but of the greatest perturbation of mind. 'He is no soldier,' was the outspoken comment of the Saxon General Hallart, who saw him on this occasion, in the tent of the new Commander-in-Chief, the Prince de Croy, scared out of his wits, and half distracted, making loud laments, and drinking bumper after bumper of brandy to pull himself together,—forgetting to date his written orders, or to have his official seal affixed to them.¹ Peter, in his own journal, has given us to understand that he was unaware of Charles XII.'s rapid march, and this flagrant falsehood amounts to an acknowledgment of his weakness.

Yet, he did his duty bravely at Poltava, exposing his person in the hottest of the struggle.² To this he made up his mind beforehand, as to any other trying and painful experience, showing no eagerness, but yet betraying no weakness, coldly, almost mournfully. There was nothing of the paladin about him, not a spark of the spirit of chivalry; and, in that point also, he was essentially Russian. Ill, and confined to his bed, early in that same year, he wrote to Menshikof, in a somewhat melancholy strain, desiring to be

¹ Documents published by Herrmann, in his *History of Russia*, vol. iv. p. 116; Vockerodt's Journal, published by Herrmann, *Russland unter Peter d. G.* (1872), p. 42; and Kelch, *Liefländische Geschichte* (1875), vol. ii. p. 156. All agree on this head.

² This is acknowledged even by Swedish historians. See Lundblad, vol. ii. p. 141.

warned whenever there was any certainty of a decisive action, for he 'could not expect,' he said, 'to escape that sort of affair.' His mind once made up, all the risks of the adventure, personal and other, seem equalised in his mind. He calculated them all, with the same composure, and accepted whatever came, with the same calmness of mind. When, in 1713, Vice-Admiral Cruys, desiring to prevent the Sovereign from exposing his person in a dangerous cruise, referred to recent catastrophes, and instanced the story of a Swedish Admiral who had been blown up with his ship, Peter wrote on the margin of his report, 'The *okolnitchyi* Zassiékin strangled himself with a pig's ear . . . I neither advise nor order any one to run into danger; but to accept money, and then not to give service, is a shameful action.' The idea of service owed, of *duty*, was always before him, like a landmark,—beckoning him to climb the steep and rugged slope of virile virtue, and heroic sacrifice. But his progress towards the summit was always slow. This man, who proved himself, in the end, one of the most intrepid, the most resolute, and the most stubborn in the world, was also, at certain moments, one of the most easily discouraged, and, on some critical occasions, one of the most chicken-hearted. Napoleon,—another great man, compact of nerves,—was subject, in moments of failure, to the same sudden and passing fits of weakness, and the same quick revulsions of spirit, which brought him back, like a flash, to self-possession, and to the power of using his faculties and resources, still all aflame with excitement, and thus multiplied tenfold. But, in Peter's case, the proportions of the phenomenon were far more marked. When he heard of the defeat of his army under the walls of Narva, he disguised himself as a peasant, so as the more easily to escape from the enemy, which he fancied already on his heels. He shed floods of tears, and fell into such a prostrate condition, that no one dared mention military matters to him. He was ready to submit to any conditions of peace, even the most humiliating.¹ Two years later, he was before Noteburg, a paltry town to which he had laid siege with his whole army. An assault, led by himself in person, not being so successful, at the outset, as he

¹ Vockerodt, who describes this scene, may have exaggerated, but the multiplicity of analogous traits in existence would appear to me conclusive in his favour.

had hoped, he hastily gave orders to retreat. 'Tell the Tsar,' replied Michael Galitzin, a Lieutenant-Colonel in command of a detachment of the *Siemionovski*, 'that at this moment I belong to Peter no longer, but to God!' According to some other witnesses, the Tsar's order was never delivered; but with it or without it, and, it may even be, without having dropped the heroic sentence enshrined in legend, Galitzin continued the attack, and carried the place.¹

To a much later date, and even after Poltava, Peter was unchanged, in this respect. The occurrence on the Pruth, to which I shall later have to refer, proves it. He was an almost paradoxical mixture of strength and weakness, in which the conflict of contradictory constituent elements may be clearly traced. Unflinching in his attachment to the great lines of a life and work, which, for unity and consistency, form one of the marvels of history, he was inconstancy and versatility personified, in all matters of detail. His ideas and resolutions, like his temper, changed suddenly, like a gust of wind. He was essentially a man of impulse. During his French journey, in 1717, a chorus of complaint rose from all those who had dealings with him, concerning his perpetual change of plans. No one ever knew what he might take it into his head to do on the morrow, or even within the next hour,—whither he might choose to go,—and how to travel. Nowhere could the length of his stay be reckoned on, never could the programme be laid out in advance, even for a single day. This quality is eminently characteristic of the Slavonic race, that most composite product of different and various origins, cultures, and influences, both European and Asiatic. To these, perhaps, it partly owes that power of resistance and extraordinary *grit*, of which it has given proof in undertakings which have necessarily been of considerable duration. The frequent relaxing of the spring relieves it, and prevents its wearing out. But this mixture of suppleness and rigidity may also exist as an individual characteristic. It has been very evident in the case of some historical imitators of the great Reformer, and would almost seem destined by Providence, as a means of husbanding their strength. It rendered Peter admirable service, even in matters involving most important interests. The facility with which he would

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iv. pp. 197-202.

change front,—turning his back on Turkey, to face Sweden,—abandoning his projects in the Sea of Azof, to turn his mind towards the Baltic,—but throwing himself, always and everywhere, thoroughly into the matter in hand, without ever dispersing his efforts,—certainly proceeded from it. So, too, did the very great facility with which—in matters of detail—he would acknowledge a personal error of judgment, or fault in practice. When, in 1722, he revoked the Ukase by which he had introduced the Presidents of the Administrative Bodies into the Senate, which was a legislative assembly, he unaffectedly described it as ‘an ill-considered measure.’ This did not prevent him, on other occasions, from holding out against wind and tide, against all other opinions, and all extraneous influences. No man ever knew better what he wanted, and how to have it done. The inscription ‘*Facta puto quaecumque jubeo*’ which some student of Ovid placed on one of the medals struck in commemoration of the great events of this reign, was the most appropriate motto the Tsar could have chosen.

It should be noted, that in his mistakes and in his failures, it was his brain alone, always, that was at fault—feeling had nothing at all to do with it. Peter was absolutely devoid of sentiment. That weakness for Menshikof and other favourites, which so offends us, would appear to be simply the outcome of miscalculation. He had a very high opinion of the intellectual standard of certain of his collaborators. His opinion of their moral standard, in the case of every one, was of the very lowest. Menshikof was a rascal, in his eyes, but a rascal who was also a genius. In the case of the others, whose genius was not sufficient to compensate him for their peccadilloes, he could, even when they were his closest friends, prove himself very firm, and even exceedingly harsh. He coolly informed one of them, Andrew Vinnius, that he had removed him from his position at the head of the Postal Administration, because he felt convinced that he had, while occupying that post, enriched himself and cheated the State, more than was fair and reasonable. But this implied no change in his favour, ‘No favourite of mine shall lead me by the nose,’ he asserted on this occasion.¹

I have never seen any instance of such absolute insensibility of feeling. During the course of the trial of his son

¹ Letter, dated April 16, 1701, *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 444.

Alexis—the incidents of which might well have moved him—he had strength, time, and inclination to give his attention both to his usual amusements, and to other State business, which demanded all his clearness of mind. A great number of Ukases relating to the preservation of the Forests, the management of the Mint, the organisation of various industrial establishments, the Customs, the *Raskol*, and Agriculture, bear dates coeval with those of some of the gloomiest episodes in that terrible judicial drama. And at the same time, none of the anniversaries which the Tsar was accustomed to celebrate, with much pomp and noise, were forgotten or neglected. Banquets, masquerades and fireworks, all pursued their course.

He had an immense fund of unalterable gaiety, and a great love of social intercourse. In certain respects, his character and temperament remained that of a child, even in his ripe age. He had all the naïve cheerfulness, the effusiveness, and the simplicity of youth. Whenever any lucky event happened to him, he could not refrain from announcing his delight to all those who, as he thought, should take an interest in it. Thus he would write fifty letters at a sitting, about a military achievement of very second-rate importance—as, for example, the taking of Stettin in 1713.¹ All his life he was easily amused. He was seen at Dresden in 1711, mounted on a hobby horse, shouting ‘Quicker! quicker!’ and laughing till he cried when one of his companions turned giddy and fell off.² At the popular rejoicings which followed the conclusion of the Peace of Nystadt, in 1720, he behaved like a schoolboy on a holiday. He pranced and gesticulated in the middle of the crowd, jumped on the tables, and sang at the top of his voice. To the last days of his life, he loved teasing and rough play, delighted in coarse pleasantries, and was always ready for a practical joke. In 1723, he caused the tocsin to be sounded in the night, turned all the inhabitants of St. Petersburg—where fires were frequent, and terrible in their results—out of their beds, and could not contain himself for joy, when, rushing half distracted in the direction of the supposed disaster, they came upon a brazier, lighted, by his orders, in a public square, by soldiers, who laughed in their faces, and greeted them

¹ Golikof, vol. v. p. 543.

² *Archiv für Sächsische Geschichte*, vol. xi. p. 345.

with shouts of 'April fool's day!' ¹ One day, when sitting at table with the Duke of Holstein, he praised the curative qualities of the waters of Olonets, which he had used for several years. The duke's minister, Bassewitz, expressed his intention of following his example. The Tsar, with a mighty blow upon the diplomat's fat round back, cried out, 'What! pour water into such a cask! Come, come!' ²

How was it then, in spite of his cheerful qualities, that he inspired more fear than affection? How was it that his death came as a relief to all around him?—the end of a painful nightmare, of a reign of terror and constraint. In the first place, on account of those habits of his, which bore the mark of the society in which he had lived since childhood, and of the occupations in which he had always found the most delight. To the roughness of a Russian *barin*, he joined all the coarseness of a Dutch sailor. Further, he was violent, and frequently hasty, just as he was often cowardly; and this arose from the same cause, the same radical vice of his moral constitution—his total lack of self-control. The power of his will was, more often than not, inferior to the impetuosity of his temperament, and that will, which always met with prompt obedience in external matters, could not, consequently perhaps, sufficiently restrain the surging tumult of his instincts and his passions. The extreme servility of those about him contributed to the development of this innate disposition. 'He has never been over polite,' writes the Saxon Minister Lefort, ³ in his Journal, in May 1721, 'but he grows more and more intolerable every day. Happy is the man who is not obliged to approach him.' ⁴ The progress of this fault was so gradual as to be almost insensible. In September 1698, at a banquet given in honour of the Emperor's Envoy, Guarient, the Tsar lost his temper with his Generalissimo, Shein, in the matter of certain army promotions, of which he disapproved. He struck the table with his naked sword, exclaiming, 'Thus I will cut the whole of thy regiment to pieces, and I will pull thine own skin over thine ears!' When Romodanovski and Zotof attempted to

¹ Bergholz, *Journal, Buschings-Magazin*, vol. xxi. p. 238.

² *Ibid.*, vol. xx. p. 387.

³ This Lefort must not be confounded with the favourite, who will be referred to later; the relationship between the two is somewhat disputed.

⁴ *Collected Works of the Imperial Russian Historical Society* (Sbornik), vol. iii. p. 333.

interfere, he flew at them. One had his fingers almost cut off, the other received several wounds on the head. Lefort—or, as some other witnesses declare, Menshikof—was the only person who could succeed in calming him.¹ But, only a few days later, when supping with Colonel Tchambers, he knocked that same Lefort down, and trampled on him, and when Menshikof ventured, at some entertainment, to wear his sword, while he was dancing, he boxed his ears so soundly that the favourite's nose began to bleed.² In 1703, taking offence at the remarks addressed to him, in public, by the Dutch Resident, he gave immediate proof of his displeasure, by a blow from his fist, and several more with the flat of his sword.³ No notice was taken of this outburst; the Diplomatic Corps in the Tsar's capital having long since learnt to make a virtue of necessity. The Raab family, resident in Esthonia, still preserves a cane with which Peter, enraged at not finding horses at the neighbouring posting-house, wreaked his fury on the back of the proprietor of the country-house. This gentleman, having demonstrated his innocence, was permitted to keep the cane by way of compensation.⁴ And again, Ivan Savitch Brykin, the ancestor of the celebrated archæologist Snéguiref, used to tell a story that he had *seen* the Tsar kill a servant, who had been slow about uncovering in his presence, with blows from his cane.⁵ Even in his correspondence, the Sovereign would occasionally get into a fury, and lose all self-control; as, for example, when he fell on the unfortunate competitor of Augustus II., Leszcynski, and called him 'traitor, and son of a thief,' in a letter which ran more than the ordinary risk of not being treated as confidential.⁶

IV

The drinking-bouts in which the Tsar habitually indulged had a great deal to do with the frequency of these outbreaks. 'He never passed a single day without being the worse

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iii. p. 625; vol. iv. p. 211.

² Korb, pp. 84, 86.

³ Despatch from Baluze, Nov. 28, 1703, French Foreign Office.

⁴ *Russian State Papers*, vol. ii. pp. 249 and 390.

⁵ Popof, *Tatitchev and his Times* (Moscow, 1861), p. 531.

⁶ *Memoirs*, vol. ii. p. 66.

for drink,' so Baron Pöllnitz affirms, in his account of the Sovereign's visit to Berlin in 1717.

On the morning of the 11th July 1705, Peter, who was paying a visit to the Monastery of the Basilian Fathers at Poloçk, paused before the statue of the illustrious martyr of the Order, the blessed Jehosaphat, who was represented with a hatchet sticking in his skull. He desired an explanation. 'Who put that holy man to death?' said he. The monks answered, 'The Schismatics.' That single word drove him beside himself. He thrust with his sword at Father Kozikowski, the Superior, and killed him. His officers threw themselves on the other monks. Three were killed outright; two others, mortally wounded, died a few days later. The monastery was sacked, the church was desecrated and used as a military store. A contemporary description sent from Poloçk to Rome, and published in the Uniate Churches there, gave various horrible and disgusting details. The Tsar was described as having called his English mastiff to worry the first victim. He was said to have ordered the breasts of certain women, whose sole crime had consisted in being present at the horrible scene and having testified their terror and emotion, to be cut off. There was a certain amount of exaggeration about this, but the facts I have already indicated are quite unshaken. A first draft of the Journal of the Swedish War, prepared by Makarof, the Tsar's Secretary, contained this laconic mention of the incident: 'Went on the 30th of June (11th July) to the Uniate Church at Poloçk, and killed six monks for having spoken of our generals as heretics.' Peter struck the entry out with his own hand, and thus strengthened the acknowledgment of the fact. On one point every description of the incident is agreed. Peter, when he went to the Basilian Church, was in a state of intoxication. He had only just quitted some nocturnal orgy.¹

He never failed indeed, once the wine had died out in him, to regret the harm done, and endeavour to repair it. His repentance was as easy as his wrath was swift. In May 1703 I find these significant lines, written by his own hand, in a billet addressed to Féodor Apraxin: 'I know not how I left you, for I was too much overwhelmed by the gifts

¹ See, on this subject, Theiner, *Monuments*, p. 412; Dom Guépin, *Vie de Josaphat* (Paris, 1874), vol. ii. p. 430; Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 373.

of Bacchus ; wherefore I beg you all to forgive me if I caused distress to any of you, . . . and to forget all that is past.'

He frequently drank to excess, and insisted that those who had the honour of sitting at table with him should do the same. At Moscow, and, in later years, at St. Petersburg, the complaints of the Diplomatic Body on this subject were never-ending. It was a positive danger to life. Even the very women of the Tsar's circle were subject to the common rule, and Peter would find unanswerable arguments to force them to bear him company, glass in hand. The daughter of Shafirof, his Vice-Chancellor, a baptized Jew, refused a goblet of brandy. 'Vile Hebrew spawn,' he shouted, 'I'll teach thee to obey!' and he punctuated his remarks with two hearty boxes on the ear.¹

He was always in the forefront of the revel, but so robust was his constitution, that though, in the end, his health broke down, his excesses often left him steady in body, and clear in mind, while legs were trembling, and senses reeled, in the case of every one around him. On this fact another legend has been built. This perpetual and almost systematic debauch was, we are told, an instrument of government, a means of reading the most secret thoughts of his guests, to which the great man deliberately resorted. A somewhat shady expedient, if indeed, this were true. In any other country the Sovereign who attempted such a game would have risked his authority, and his prestige. And even in Russia, the political benefit would not have outweighed the moral loss,—that degradation of the whole of society, of which local customs still bear some trace. My readers will remember the story of the toast, 'A toi ! France !' proposed in the presence of Louis XV. by a guest who had been carried away by the freedom of some too familiar merrymaking. 'Gentlemen, the King is here!' answered the monarch, thus recalled to a sense of his dignity. And no more such festivities took place. But Peter allowed himself to be addressed in the second person singular, every day of his life, in a constant succession of such entertainments. If any one went too far, and it suited him to take notice of the fact, the only means of repression he would ever resort to took the shape of an enormous bumper of brandy, which the

¹ Weber's *Correspondence* (published by Herrmann, 1880), p. 173.

offender was forced to swallow at a single draught. This was perfectly certain to put an end to his pranks, for, as a general rule, it sent him under the table.¹

I should be sorry, indeed, to admit that all this shows any trace of a deep-seated idea or deliberate design. I can see nothing that would lead to such an opinion. I am, on the contrary, struck by the fact, that, especially towards the end of his reign, the more and more frequent recurrence of the prolonged and extravagant orgies in which the Sovereign so delighted did not fail to considerably prejudice the conduct of State affairs. 'The Tsar,' writes the Saxon Minister, Lefort, on the 22d of August 1724, 'has kept his room for the last six days, being ill in consequence of the debauches which took place at the Tsarskaïa-Mysa (the Tsarskoïe-Sielo of the present day) on the occasion of his baptizing a church, with 3000 bottles of wine. This has delayed his journey to Kronstadt.'² In January, 1725, the negotiations for the first Franco-Russian alliance received a sudden check. The French Envoy, Campredon, much disturbed, pressed the Russian Chancellor, Ostermann, and ended by dragging from him this expressive admission: 'It is utterly impossible, at the present moment, to approach the Tsar on serious subjects; he is altogether given up to his amusements, which consist in going every day to the principal houses in the town, with a suite of 200 persons, musicians and so forth, who sing songs on every sort of subject, and amuse themselves by eating and drinking at the expense of the persons they visit.'³ Even at an earlier period, during the most active and heroic epoch in his life, Peter would make these temporary disappearances, and thus bear testimony to the faults of his early education. In December 1707, when Charles XII. was making his preparations for the decisive campaign which was to carry him into the very heart of Russia, the defensive efforts of the whole country were paralysed, because the Tsar was at Moscow amusing himself. Courier after courier did Menshikof despatch, entreating him to rejoin his army. He never even broke

¹ Scherer, vol. v. p. 28.

² Sbornik, vol. iii. p. 382.

³ Despatch, dated Jan. 9, 1725, French Foreign Office. See also, in agreement, a letter from the Dutch Resident, De Bie, to the Secretary of the States-General, Fagel, dated Dec. 3, 1717, Dutch Archives.

the seals of the packets, and went on making merry.¹ He could stop himself short in a moment, it must be allowed, and he had a genius for making up for lost time. But it can hardly be said that it was for the sake of the internal affairs of his country that he thus forgot, during many weeks, to make war against his terrible adversary.

V

Coarse tastes naturally go hand-in-hand with public-house morals. In the society of women, to which he was always partial, what Peter seems to have cared for most, was mere vulgar debauchery. And especially he loved to see his female companions drunk. Catherine herself, according to Bassewitz, was 'a first-rate toper,' and owed much of her success to that fact. On gala days, at Court, the sexes were generally separated, and Peter always reserved to himself the privilege of entering the ladies' banquetting-room, where the Tsarina presided, and where nothing that she could do to render the spectacle agreeable to the master's eye was neglected. But in more intimate gatherings, the meal was shared by both sexes, and then the close of the festivities took a character worthy of the feasts of Sardanapalus. The clergy, too, had their place in these banquets, at which they were frequently to be seen. Peter had a particular liking for sitting near these ecclesiastical dignitaries. He would mingle the most unexpected theological discussions, with his most copious libations, and would apply the regulation punishment of a huge bumper of brandy, to the errors of doctrine which he loved to detect,—whereupon, now and again, the controversialists would come to blows, to his huge delight. His favourite guests—Dutch sea-captains and merchants—were by no means the humblest of the companions with whom he would sit at table, and familiarly clink his glass. At Dresden, in 1711, at the Golden Ring, his favourite lounge was the serving-men's room, and he breakfasted with them in the courtyard.²

There was nothing delicate, nothing refined, about Peter. At Amsterdam, during his first visit there, he fell in love

¹ Essipof, *Life of Menshikof* (*Russian State Papers*, 1875), p. 52.

² *Archiv für Sächsische Geschichte*, vol. xi. p. 345.

with Testje-Roen, a celebrated clown, who gave open-air performances, and whose silly jokes were the delight of the lowest populace, and would have carried him off with him to Russia.¹

He was a boor. In certain respects, he never, to his last day, lost any of his native savagery. But was he a cruel savage? This has been affirmed. Nothing, apparently, could be more clearly established, than his reputation for ferocity; yet, this matter should be looked into. He was frequently present in the torture-chamber—where prisoners were submitted to the question, the strappado, or the knout—and also at executions in the public squares, when all the apparatus for inflicting the most revolting torments was openly displayed. It is even believed that he did not always play the part of a mere spectator. I shall have occasion to return to this point, with reference to the terrible scenes which closed the existence of the *Streltsy*. But any discussion on this matter strikes me as idle. He may occasionally have acted the part of executioner. Why not? He was already familiar with the sailor's trade, and with the carpenter's, and he did not feel—he was not capable of feeling—any difference. He was merely the man in whose person the greatest number of functions were united, in a country where the accumulation of functions was a feature of public life. The name of the executor of his principal works in St. Petersburg, also figures on the lists of his Court Jesters!²

Did Peter, then, actually cut off men's heads? It may be. But did he find pleasure in the act? That, too, is probable;—the pleasure he found in doing anything, *the joy of action*,—but there it ends. I do not believe one word of the story told by Frederick the Great to Voltaire, about the meal during which, in presence of the King of Prussia's Envoy, Baron Von Printzen, the Tsar amused himself by decapitating twenty *Streltsy*, emptying as many glasses of brandy between each stroke, and finally inviting the Prussian to follow his example.³ Round every trait of Peter's character, and every chapter of his history, innumerable tales have thus clustered, which should be put aside *a priori*, for no other reason but that of their evident absurdity. As

¹ Scheltema, *Anecdotes*, p. 157.

² Siémiewski, *Słowo i Działo*, p. 262.

³ Voltaire's *Works*, vol. x. p. 71.

regards the rest, they deserve careful investigation. I have already referred to my own habitual guide—an agreement of general data, which, in spite of some diversity in detail, all tend steadily, and precisely, in the same direction. Now, I can discover nothing, in Peter's case, which would point to the authentic mark of the real wild beast—the greedy delight in inflicting suffering, the downright taste for blood. He shows no sign of anything of this kind; there is not even any appearance of an habitual condition of sanguinary fury. He is hard, rough, and unfeeling. Suffering, in his eyes, is a mere fact—like health or sickness—and has no more effect on him than these;—therefore I am ready to follow the legend so far as to believe that he pursued the men he had doomed to death, on to the very scaffold, with reproaches and invectives—that he jeered at them, even in their death-agony.¹ But inaccessible as he is to pity, he is moved, and easily moved, by scruple, when reasons of State do not seem to him to be involved. That famous axiom which has been ascribed, with so much praise, to Catherine II. 'It is better to set six guilty persons free, than to condemn one innocent man to death,' is no part of the historic legacy of that great Sovereign. Before her days, Peter had written it with his own hand, and on the page of a Military Regulation!²

Some of his contemporaries have, indeed, admitted the impossibility of explaining many of his actions, otherwise than by the pleasure he seems to find in doing disagreeable things to other people, or even by causing actual pain. Thus they quote the story of one of his favourites, Admiral Golovin, who refused to eat salad because he hated the taste of vinegar, which always made him ill. Peter immediately emptied a great flask of it down his throat, and almost choked him.³ I am disposed to believe this anecdote, because I have heard so many others of the same nature:—delicate young girls forced to drink a Grenadier's ration of brandy—decrepit old men obliged to prance about the streets, dressed up like mountebanks. These things were matters of daily occurrence all through Peter's reign. But this fact may bear a different interpretation. Peter had adopted certain

¹ Siémievski, *Słowo i Działo*, p. 260.

² Rosenheim, *Military Legislation in Russia* (St. Petersburg, 1878), p. 155. See also Filippof, *Peter the Great's Reform, and his Penal Laws*, p. 143, etc.

³ Korb, as quoted above, p. 88.

fashions in dress, in food, and in amusement, which he judged fitting, and which, because they suited him, must, so he argued, suit everybody else. This was his fashion of understanding his autocratic functions, and his duties as a Reformer. On that he took his stand. Vinegar, looked at from this point of view, was part of the national law, and what happened to Golovin, with respect to that condiment, was repeated, in the case of others, with regard to cheese, oysters, or olive oil—the Tsar never losing an occasion of forcing them down the throats of any persons in whom he noticed a shrinking from his gastronomic novelties.¹ In the same way, having chosen to set his capital in a marsh, and to call it ‘his Paradise,’ he insisted that every one else should build houses in the city, and delight, or appear to delight in it, as much as he himself.

Clearly he was not a man of very tender feeling. In January 1694, when his mother was lying seriously, and even dangerously, ill, he fretted furiously at being kept in Moscow, would not endure it, and fixed the day for his departure. At the very hour when he should have started, her death-agony began, and he lost no time about burying her. Neither must I overlook the blood-stained ghost of Alexis, and the weeping shadow of Eudoxia. But, even here, the circumstances, which, morally speaking, went so far to make up the man’s character, and certain other facts,—such as the terrible events inseparable from any revolutionary period, and the rebellious instincts of a nature which would brook no contradiction, not forgetting the uncompromising nature of his whole policy, the most personal and most self-willed that ever existed,—must be taken into account.

He adored his second son, and his correspondence with Catherine—always most affectionate, as far as she is concerned—teems with expressions proving his constant solicitude for the health and happiness of his two daughters, Anne and Elizabeth, whom he jokingly described as ‘thieves,’ because they took up his time, but whom he also calls ‘his bowels’ (*Eingeweide*). He went every day to their school-room, and looked over their lessons.

He did not shrink from entering the cell of a prisoner, one of his former favourites, and informing him that he very much regretted being obliged to have his head cut off

¹ Vockerodt, according to Herrmann, p. 19.

on the following morning. This he did to Mons, in 1724. But, so long as his friends appeared to him worthy of his friendship, he was not only affectionate, he was coaxing and caressing, even to excess.

In August 1723, at the Fête in commemoration of the creation of the Russian Navy—in presence of the 'Ancestress' (*Diédoushka*) of his fleet, the English boat found in a barn in 1688—Peter, not altogether sober, it is true, kissed the Duke of Holstein on the neck, on the forehead, on the head—having first pulled off his wig—and finally, according to Bergholz, embraced him in a yet more tender manner.¹

Even from the point of view with which we are now engaged, these peculiarities can hardly be taken to mark him as a mere imitation of an Asiatic despot. Something better he surely is, both as a Sovereign and as a private individual—something quite different, at all events, removed, in many respects, from common humanity, above it, or below it, but never, either instinctively, or intentionally, inhuman. A series of Ukases which bear his signature prove that his mind, if not his heart, was open to ideas, if not to sentiments, of a gentler kind. In one of these, he claims the title of 'Protector of Widows, of Orphans, and of the Defenceless.'² The moral centre of gravity, in the case of this great unconscious idealist, who was also (and his was not a unique case) a mighty sensualist, must be sought for on the intellectual side. In spite of the natural heat of his temperament, he succeeded, on the whole, in the majority of instances, in subordinating his sensations to that common law of which he had proclaimed himself the Chief Slave—believing that he thus acquired the right of bringing all other wills, all other intelligences and passions, without distinction, and without favour, under its rule.

¹ *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xxi. p. 301.

² *Collected Laws*, pp. 337, 462, 777, 839, 3279, 3290, 3298, 3608.

CHAPTER II

INTELLECTUAL TRAITS AND MORAL FEATURES

- I. Mental capacity—Power and elasticity—Comparison with Napoleon I.—Slavonic *acceptivity*—Intercourse with the Quakers—Law—Curiosity and impatience for knowledge—A night spent in a museum—Incoherent and rudimentary nature of the knowledge thus acquired—Peter's diplomacy—Was he a great leader?—Lack of proportion—Mixture of gravity and puerility—Peter as surgeon and dentist—Scientific and artistic creations—Peter and the Abbé Bignon.
- II. His clearness and perspicuity of mind—His epistolary style—The Oriental touch—Proposal to reconstruct the Colossus of Rhodes—Contradictory features—Generosity and meanness—Loyalty and roguery—Modesty and love of bragging—History and tradition—The Western spirit of chivalry, and the Byzantine influence in Russia—Joan of Arc and Queen Olga—Bayard and St. Alexander Nevski—Peter's morality—Lack of scruple and scorn for convention—Causes and results.
- III. Strength and narrowness of insight—Intellectual short-sightedness—Absence of the psychological sense—Disinclination for abstract conception—Want of comprehension of the ideal elements of civilisation—Yet he was an idealist.
- IV. Love of disguises—Buffoonery—Moral debauch, or political intention—The Court jesters—Popular manners—The Tsar's amusements—The ugly side of these recreations—Mingling of masquerade and of real life—A jester made Keeper of the Seals—Masked senators sit in council.
- V. The mock Patriarchate—The object of its establishment—Pope or Patriarch?—Did Peter intend to cast ridicule on his clergy?—Origin and development of the institution—The mock Pope and his conclave—Grotesque ceremonies and processions—Father Caillaud's habit—The marriage of the Knes-papa—The Princess Abbess—Synthesis and explanation of the phenomenon—Local causes and foreign influences—Byzantine asceticism and Western Satanic practices—Moral compression and reaction—Originality, despotic fancy, and levelling tendencies—Peter and Ivan the Terrible—Louis XI. and Falstaff.

I

THE brain of Peter the Great was certainly a phenomenal organism. Irresistibly, both by its nature and by its force, it enforces a comparison with that of Napoleon I. We note the same power of continuous effort, without apparent weariness.

ness, the same spring and flexibility, the same faculty of applying itself, at one and the same time, to an indefinite number of subjects, all absolutely dissimilar and of most unequal importance, without the smallest visible scattering of the mental faculties, or any diminution of the attention devoted to each particular object. At Stockerau, near Vienna, in 1698, when the Russian Ambassadors were in conflict with the Imperial officials over the details of their solemn entry into the capital, Peter Mihailof, while sharing in all the discussions, which cause him not a little irritation, writes orders, to Vinnius, concerning the building of a Russian church at Pekin! In one of his letters to Admiral Apraxin, dated September 1706, I find instructions for the campaign then in course, directions as to the translation of a cargo of Latin books, and advice as to the education of a couple of puppies, with the following details of what they are to be taught:—‘First, to retrieve; second, to pull off their hats; third, to present arms; fourth, to jump over a stick; fifth, to sit up and beg for food.’ On the 15th of November 1720, writing to Iagoujinski, whom he had sent on a mission to Vienna, he holds forth on the retrocession of Schleswig to the Duke of Holstein, mentions the picture of a pig-faced girl, brought back to Russia by Peter Alexiévitch Tolstoi, desiring to know where the girl is, and whether it is possible to see her; and speaks of two or three dozen bottles of good tokay, which he would like to possess, desiring to know the price and the expense of transport, before he gives the order for purchase.¹

His was a mind open to every perception, with that eminently Slav faculty, which Herzen describes under the name of *acceptivity*, carried to the extremest point of development. Until he arrived in London he had probably never heard of the Quakers, nor of their doctrine. By a mere chance, the house he inhabited was that in which the famous William Penn had lived during that critical time in his stormy existence, when he was prosecuted as a traitor, and as a conspirator. This fact sufficed to throw the Tsar into almost intimate relations with Penn himself, and his co-religionists, Thomas Story and Gilbert Mollyson. He accepted their pamphlets, and listened devoutly to their

¹ *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 253; Golikof, vol. ii. p. 296; vol. viii. p. 120.

sermons. When, some nineteen years later, he arrived at Friederichstadt, in Holstein, with a body of troops who were to assist the Danes against the Swedes, his first question was as to whether there were any Quakers in the town. Their meeting-places having been pointed out to him, he duly attended their gatherings.¹ He did not understand much of Law's system, nor of finance in general, yet Law himself, his system, and his fate, interested him deeply, from the first moment when he had any knowledge of him. He corresponded with the adventurous banker, and followed his course with curious eyes—delighted at first, indulgent afterwards, but always sympathetic, even in the speculator's hour of darkest disgrace.²

The moment there is a question of seeing or learning anything, his eagerness and anxiety of mind make Napoleon appear a comparatively patient man. Arriving at Dresden one evening, after a day of travelling which had reduced all his suite to a state of utter exhaustion, he insisted, the moment he had supped, on being conducted to the *Kunst-kamera*, or museum of the town. He reached it at one o'clock in the morning, and spent the night there, feeding his curiosity by torchlight.³ And indeed, this curiosity, as has already been made evident, was as universal and as indefatigable as it was devoid of taste and of propriety. When the Tsarina, Marfa Apraxin, Féodor's widow, died, in 1715, at the age of fifty-one years, he desired to verify the truth of a general public belief, which had its foundation in the sickly constitution of the late Tsar, and the austere habits of his widow. To attain this object, he insisted on performing the autopsy of the corpse with his own hands, and satisfied himself completely, so it would appear, as to his sister-in-law's virtue.⁴

The sum of his knowledge and qualifications, thus perpetually increased, preserved, in spite of its prodigious variety, a certain incoherent and rudimentary quality. Russian was the only language he could speak fluently; his Dutch would only carry him through conversations with seafaring men and on naval subjects. In November 1721,

¹ Clarkson, *Life of William Penn* (1813), p. 253.

² *Russian State Papers* (1874), p. 1578.

³ *Archiv für Sächsische Geschichte*, vol. xi. p. 345.

⁴ Dolgoroukof's *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 14.

finding it necessary to hold a secret conversation with the French Envoy, Campredon, who had resided in Holland and made himself familiar with the language of that country, he was fain to have recourse to an interpreter, and made a somewhat unlucky choice.¹ He was scantily acquainted, indeed, with the usual methods of Western diplomacy. In May 1719, La Vie, the French Resident at St. Petersburg, remarked 'that he had allowed the Conferences at Aland to proceed without insisting on "the preliminary points,"' thus allowing the Swedes to mislead him by means of a most compromising sham negotiation, the only result of which was to separate him from his allies. In his foreign policy, he worked on a system peculiar to himself, or to his nation. He combined Slavonic shrewdness with Asiatic cunning. He threw foreign negotiators off their guard, by a manner peculiar to himself, by unexpected acts of familiarity or of rudeness, by sudden caresses. He would interrupt a speaker by kissing him on the brow; he would make long speeches, really intended for the gallery, of which his hearers could not understand a word, and would then dismiss them before they had time to ask for an explanation.²

He has passed, and does still pass, even in the eyes of certain military historians, for a great military leader. Certain new and happy ideas as to the duty of Reserves, the part to be played by cavalry, the principles of the mutual support to be rendered by isolated bodies of troops, simplification of military formation, and the employment of improvised fortifications, have been ascribed to him. The Battle of Poltava, so we are assured, furnishes an unique example, and one which aroused the admiration of Maurice de Saxe, of the use of redoubts in offensive warfare,—which redoubts are said to have been Peter's own invention. We are further told that he personally conducted the numerous siege operations which took place during the Northern War, and that this direct intervention on his part ensured their success.³ I am not qualified to enter into any controversy on such a subject, and I should have been disposed to bow unquestioningly before the admiring testimony of Maurice de Saxe. But a contradictory witness stops me short—the Journal of

¹ Campredon's Despatch, Dec. 1, 1721, French Foreign Office.

² De Bie, to the States General, May 3, 1712, Dutch State Papers.

³ Petrof, as already quoted, vol. ii. p. 84, etc.

the Northern War, to which I have already referred. This record, drawn up under Peter's personal superintendence, does not make him appear either a great historian or a good strategist. The descriptions of battles which I find in these pages—and there is indeed little else to be found—are deplorably scanty, as in the case of the battle of Narva, or, when they enter into detail, flagrantly inexact. I know not whether the great man was the real inventor of the redoubts which played such an important part at Poltava, but all the world knows that he contented himself, in that battle, by leading a regiment, leaving the chief command, as always, to his generals. He studied military engineering with some care, and took measures to put his new acquisitions on the Baltic shores into a due state of defence. But the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul at St. Petersburg can hardly be called a masterpiece of engineering skill; and even his greatest admirers admit that not one of the other works of this kind, commenced under his direction, has ever been completed.¹ As to the sieges, the success of which may have been ascribed to him, they appear to me to have invariably ended in an assault, all the credit for which was due to the brilliant qualities, the courage, and the discipline of the new Russian army. These qualities strike me as forming the only increase in this particular line which may be written down to the undisputed personal credit of the great creator. He did, as I shall elsewhere show, create almost every portion of that wonderful instrument by which the power and prestige of his country have been ensured. He was an unrivalled organiser, and I am even willing to admit, with some of his apologists, that he outstripped his own time—in recruiting matters, for instance—in the application of certain principles which had been proclaimed and theoretically affirmed in Western countries, long before, but which had been pushed to one side by established routine, and elbowed out of practical experience.

What prevented him from acquiring a real mastery of any particular branch of knowledge was not only his lack of a sense of proportion, but also a radical defect which, from the beginning to the end of his life, led him to joke, as it were, with serious things, and take childish matters seriously. Of this fact, his studies and pretensions, in matters of

¹ Petrof, as already quoted, vol. ii. p. 84, etc.

surgery and dentistry, are a more than sufficient proof. After the date of his return from Holland he always carried a case of surgical instruments upon his person, and never allowed an opportunity of using them to slip through his fingers. The officials connected with the St. Petersburg hospitals had orders to warn him whenever an interesting surgical case occurred. He was almost always present at the operations, and frequently wielded the surgeon's knife with his own hand. Thus one day he tapped a woman afflicted with dropsy, who died a few days later. The poor creature had done her best to defend herself, if not against the operation, at all events against the operator. He made a point of attending her funeral. A bag full of teeth, extracted by the august pupil of the travelling Amsterdam dentist, is still preserved in the Museum of Arts at St. Petersburg. One of the surest methods of paying court to the Sovereign was to claim his assistance for the extraction of a grinder. He not unfrequently pulled out a sound tooth. His valet de chambre, Polouboïarof, complained to him one day that his wife, under pretext of a bad tooth, had long refused to perform her conjugal duties. He sent for her, operated on her then and there, in spite of her tears and screams, and warned her that if she continued obdurate he would pull out every tooth in her two jaws. But it is only fair to recollect that Moscow owes him the first military hospital, built in 1706, to which he successively added a school of surgery, an anatomical collection, and a Botanical Garden, in which he himself planted a certain number of specimen trees. In that same year, too, dispensaries were established, by his care, in St. Petersburg, Kazan, Glouhof, Riga, and Revel.¹

Artistic or scientific studies and creations were far from being, in his case, simple matters of taste or natural inclination. It is a well-known fact that he possessed no artistic sense, no taste for painting, nor even for architecture. His low wooden cottage at Préobrajenskoïe, soon so sunken in the soil that he could touch the roof with his hand, amply sufficed for his own personal needs. For many years, he would not live in any other kind of house, even at St. Petersburg. Yet he held it proper to build palaces for his collaborators to dwell in. But building operations flagged at

¹ Shoubinski, *Historical Sketches*, p. 11, etc.

last. Once more he saw the necessity for setting a personal example, and so he ended by having a Winter and a Summer Palace of his own. These were a somewhat clumsy imitation of Western models—for he insisted, too, on being his own architect. The main body of the buildings clashed with the wings, and formed ungraceful angles. Further, he would have double ceilings in the rooms reserved for his own use, so that he might still fancy he was living in a wooden cabin. But the impulse had been given, and in course of time, the French architect, Leblond, retained at the heavy salary of 40,000 livres a year, succeeded in correcting past errors, and in giving the new capital that monumental and decorative appearance appropriate to its dignity. Peter took pains also, to add to the small collection of works of art made during his first stay in Holland. When he reappeared in Amsterdam in 1717, he had learnt to put on the airs of an enlightened amateur. He ended by possessing works by Rubens, Vandyck, Rembrandt, Jan Steen, Van der Werf, Lingelbach, Bergheim, Mieris, Wouvermann, Breughel, Ostade, and Van Huysen. He had a collection of sea pictures in his Summer Palace. In his country house at Peterhof there was a whole gallery of paintings. A talented engraver and draughtsman, Picard, and a curator named Gsell, of Swiss origin, formerly a picture-dealer in Holland, were engaged to look after these collections, the first ever seen in Russia.

But there was not a touch of personal interest in these matters. We may venture to doubt whether the Tsar took much pleasure in his correspondence with the Abbé Bignon, the King's librarian, and a member of the Académie des Sciences, of which Peter had become an honorary member after his stay in Paris in 1717. In 1720 he sent his librarian,—for by this time he had provided himself with a library—a German, Schuhmacher by name, to the Abbé with a manuscript, written in gold on vellum, which had been found at Siémipalatinsk, in Siberia, in the vaults of a ruined church. He desired to have the document deciphered, and to know, first of all, in what language it was written. He appears to have been greatly delighted when the Abbé, having called in the assistance of the King's regular translator, Fourmont, informed him that the mysterious language was that of the Tangouts, a very ancient Kalmuk

tribe. It was not till after his death that it occurred to two Russians whom he had sent to Peking to study Chinese, and who had remained there for sixteen years, to look more closely into this scientific process, and thus to make a discovery which somewhat compromised the reputation of the Parisian Orientalists. The manuscript was of Manchurian origin, and the text was absolutely different from that given by Fourmont.¹ But Peter died in the conviction that he had elucidated an important point in the national paleography and ethnography, and thus conscientiously performed his duty as a Sovereign.

Among the curiosities collected by him in his Museum of Art and of Natural History, contemporary writers mention some living specimens of the human race: a man with some monstrous infirmity, and children afflicted with physical malconformations.² The great man believed that such exhibitions as these might serve the cause of science.

II

His mind was clear, perspicuous, exact, going straight to its point, unhesitatingly and unswervingly—like a tool wielded by a sure hand. In this respect, his correspondence is exceedingly characteristic. He never writes long letters, like his heiress, Catherine II.—he has no time for that. He has no style, no rhetoric—he fails both in caligraphy and in spelling. His handwriting is generally as illegible as that of Napoleon. In most of his words there are letters missing. A note addressed to Menshikof begins thus:—‘*Mei herbrude in Kamamara*,’ which is intended to mean ‘Mein Herzbruder und Kamarad’ (my heart’s brother, and comrade!). Even in his signature, *Reßz*, he introduces a whimsical abbreviation, borrowed from the Slavonic alphabet. But he says what he has to say, well and quickly, finding the right expression, the words which best convey and sum up his thoughts, without any delay or apparent effort. He is rather fond of a joking style of composition, and the great Catherine’s peculiarity in this respect may have been a mere imitation of his. Thus, for example, he writes to Menshikof in the character of a dog of which his favourite is particularly fond. Very often he will

¹ Golikof, vol. viii. p. 84.

² *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xix. p. 115.

break out into sallies, often carried much too far, both in thought and in expression ; but oftener still, he is incisive and sarcastic. Vice-Admiral Cruys sent him a Report, in which he complained of his officers, and complimented the Tsar himself, saying, that Peter, 'himself an accomplished sailor, would know better than any one how indispensable discipline was in the Navy.' He replied, 'The Vice-Admiral chose his own Subordinates, he can therefore blame none but himself for their faults. On quite a recent occasion, he appeared less convinced of the qualities which he now attributes to the Sovereign. His criticisms and his commendations were doubtless made after he had been drinking. They have not a leg to stand on. *Either he must cease to include me in his list of skilful sailors, or he must no longer say white when I say black.*'¹

There is something oriental in the natural imagery and picturesqueness of his style. Referring to his alliance with Denmark, and the disappointment it had caused him, I find this reflection, written in his hand, 'Two bears in the same lair never agree.' And another, 'Our alliance is like two young horses harnessed to a carriage.'² Speaking of Poland, where the public mind is in a state of continual ferment, he writes, 'Affairs there are just like new *braha*' (a drink made of barley and millet). A man who talks idly is compared to 'a bear who talks about gelding a mare.' Even as a legislator, he makes use of this sort of language. When he creates the post of Attorney-General in the Senate, he declares his desire to prevent that body from 'playing at cards with the laws, and sorting them, according to their colours,' adding that the Attorney-General is to be 'his eye.'

Though a poor historian, from the artistic point of view, he was far from lacking the historic sense. He described events very ill, but he understood their meaning and their bearing very well indeed. Even in his letters to Catherine, which are of the most confidential kind, his comments are exceedingly correct. He evidently had the clearest comprehension of what he was doing, and of what was happening to him.

His fancy was naturally attracted by what was large, and even by what was exaggeratedly huge—a very oriental

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 272.

² 1712, and 1716, *Letters to Catherine I.* (1861 edition), pp. 29 and 49.

quality, again. In his last years he meditated a sort of reconstruction of the Colossus of Rhodes. A huge tower was to have been set astride over the strait, between Kronstadt and Kronsloot. It was to be crowned by a fortress and a lighthouse, and below it the largest vessels were to pass with ease. The foundations were actually laid in 1724.¹ He would fall into fits of feverish enthusiasm, epic or tragic, and this, with freaks of eccentricity, and stains of coarseness, which have puzzled many excellent judges. There is something Shakespearian about some of his inspirations. In 1697, when his departure for Europe was delayed by the discovery of Tsikler's plot—struck by the link existing between the criminality of the present and that of the past—he caused the corpse of Ivan Miloslavski, which had been rotting in the tomb for twelve years past, to be disinterred. The remains were taken to Préobrajenskoïé on a sledge, dragged by twelve hogs, and placed in an open coffin under the scaffold on which Tsikler and his accomplice Sokovnin were to die by inches—cut to pieces, hacked slowly limb from limb. At every knife-thrust the blood of the condemned men was to flow, in an avenging stream, on all that remained of the hated enemy, who had been snatched from his silent grave, to undergo the ghastly reprisals of his conqueror.² In 1723, another scene, less hideous, but quite as extraordinary, was enacted at Préobrajenskoïé. Peter caused his wooden cottage, which—(it had been temporarily removed)—had been replaced, by his orders, in its original position, to be burnt. In those days, and in a country, the inhabitants of which were so little removed from the nomadic form of existence, dwellings were looked upon as furniture. It was a symbolic and commemorative conflagration. Under that roof—as Peter confided to the Duke of Holstein—he had conceived the plan of his terrible duel with the Swedish monarch, now brought to a happy close; and in his joy over the peace thus restored, he desired to efface every memory of the anguish of the past. But he took it into his head to heighten the solemnity of this pacific demonstration by a display of fireworks. He kindled the half-rotten timbers of his cottage with Roman candles, and set the roof alight

¹ Golikof, vol. x. p. 425.

² Jeliaboujski's *Memoirs*, p. 112; Gordon's *Journal*, March 4, 1697; Oustrialof, vol. iii. p. 22.

with many-coloured fires, beating the drum himself, meanwhile, from the beginning to the end of the *auto da fé*.¹

Now and again, even in a far more elevated sphere of conception and of feeling, he seems to rise without an effort, and hover with those choicest souls in history, whose flight soared highest, and whose scope was widest. In 1712, Stephen Iavorski, the Little-Russian monk whom he had brought from Kief to Moscow, and raised to a bishopric, publicly found fault with him, thundering reproaches, in one of his sermons, against husbands who forsook their wives, and men who would not fast at the appointed seasons. This was rank high treason, and a report to this effect was submitted to the Sovereign. Peter merely made this note on the margin of the document: 'First of all, face to face,—then before witnesses.'

When Iavorski made as though he would retire into a monastery, he would not hear of it; but he caused the Patriarch of Constantinople to send him a dispensation, which relieved him from the necessity of observing the Russian Lent.² A fanatic attempted, one day, to murder him, firing two pistol shots at him in his sleep. The weapon missed fire each time, and the would-be assassin, overcome with terror, woke the Tsar, and told him what had happened. 'God,' he said, 'must have sent him to give the monarch a miraculous sign of His protection,' adding, 'now kill me!' 'Nobody kills Envoys,' responded Peter calmly, and he let the fellow go.³ This anecdote may not be absolutely authentic; and it was somewhat unlike Peter, I confess, to allow such a fine opportunity for judicial proceedings—with all the paraphernalia of examination, search for accomplices, and sittings in the Torture Chamber—to escape him. He may, indeed, have allowed Iavorski, if he were the only person clearly implicated, to go free. But the adventure,—a pure invention, possibly, or at all events an arrangement of facts,—corresponds to an attitude of mind very characteristic of the Sovereign, and especially of his later manner. I frequently notice him giving himself airs of superior-mindedness, and of a scornful philosophy as regards his own person, and this under the most varied circumstances. When he returned from Warsaw, after his disastrous campaign on the

¹ Bergholz, *Büschings Magazin*, vol. xxi. p. 202.

² Solovief, vol. xvi. p. 324.

³ Golikof, vol. x. p. 176.

Pruth, he was complimented on his happy return. 'My happiness,' was his reply, 'amounts to this—that instead of having received a hundred strokes with a rod, I have only been given fifty.' Then, speaking to himself, 'I came, I saw, I conquered,' and as if correcting himself, 'hardly that! hardly that!' Niéplouief, one of his favourite pupils, arrived late for a morning appointment with the Tsar, in one of the naval workshops. The Sovereign was waiting for him. Niéplouief made his excuses. He had sat up late the night before with friends. 'Very well, I forgive thee, because thou hast told the truth; and besides'—here Peter would seem to have reverted to his own peculiarities, and applied one of the national proverbs to the incident—'is not every man the grandson of a woman?' (*Kto babié nié vnouk?*)¹

Were these methods of thought, of speech, of action natural to the Tsar? Did they really correspond to his innate qualities of mind and character? Were they not rather a deliberate *pose*, which he would occasionally cast aside, through inadvertence, caprice, or downright weariness? The idea is admissible, at all events, so frequently did he belie and contradict his own behaviour. When he made his entry into Derbent in 1723 he was heard to say, 'Alexander built this town; Peter has taken it!' On his return from his Persian campaign he caused his easy conquest to be thus described on one of the innumerable triumphal arches already erected at Moscow, even before the victory of Poltava:

'Struxerat fortis, sed fortior hanc cepit urbem.'

That day, evidently, he had quite forgotten to be modest! At the taking of Narva, in 1704, he forgot even to be generous—struck the enemy's commandant, Horn, whose only fault was that he had defended the place too bravely; and caused the corpse of his wife, who had been killed in the assault, to be cast into the water.² In 1710, at the taking of Wiborg, he granted the honours of war to the besieged, and then, when the capitulation was signed, he kept the garrison prisoners. This incident occurred again both at Derpt and

¹ Niéplouiet's *Mémoires* (St. Petersburg, 1893), p. 106.

² Lundblad, vol. i. p. 17: Adlerfeld, *Histoire militaire de Charles XII.* (Paris, 1741), vol. ii. p. 224.

at Riga.¹ Yet this same man, after the battle of Twaermynde (in July 1714), embraced Ehrensköld, a naval captain, and declared himself proud of having had to struggle with such an adversary. He carried out the conditions of peace signed with Sweden, in 1721, loyally enough, but the fashion in which he had opened hostilities on that occasion was a very pattern of knavery. In May 1700, returning to Moscow from Voronèje, he reproached the Swedish Resident, Knipercron, in the most friendly terms, with the alarm apparently felt by his daughter, then paying a visit to Voronèje, as to the imminence of a conflict between the two countries. He had done his best to calm her. 'Silly child,' he had said, 'how can you imagine that I would be the first to make an unjust war, and break a peace which I have sworn shall be eternal?' He embraced Knipercron before witnesses, and made him the most reassuring protestations, vowing that if the King of Poland were to seize Riga, he, Peter, would take it back, and restore it to the Swedes. At that very moment he had actually undertaken to join Augustus against Sweden. The common plan of attack was prepared, and the partition of the expected booty duly arranged. On the 8th of the following August, having heard from Oukraïntsof, his Envoy at Constantinople, that the signature of peace with the Porte, which he had been awaiting before throwing off the mask, was an accomplished fact, his troops were instantly set in motion, and marched towards Narva. At that very instant his other Envoy, Prince Hilkof, was received in audience by Charles XII., and gave him fresh assurances of his master's pacific intentions.²

The essentially practical turn of his mind not unfrequently rendered it narrow and mean. When Leibnitz proposed to him to establish magnetic observatories all over his Empire, the great savant very nearly forfeited the Tsar's good graces.³ But this did not prevent him from endeavouring to discover the strait which was later to bear the name of Behring. That was an evident commercial outlet, and therefore a desirable end to be attained. His economy amounted

¹ Polevoï, *History of Peter the Great* (St. Petersburg, 1843), vol. iii. pp. 79, 89. Compare Peter's *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. iii. pp. 99, and 111.

² Oustrialof, vol. iii. p. 369; vol. iv. Part ii. pp. 159-161; Fryxell, *History of Charles XII.*, translated by Jensen (Brunswick, 1861), vol. i. p. 78.

³ Baer, *Peters Verdienste um die Erweiterung der Geographischen Kenntnisse* (St. Petersburg, 1868), p. 56.

to absolute stinginess. He would use the mathematical instruments, which never left his person, to measure the daily consumption of the cheese served up to him ; and to make amends for the shabby salary he gave his chief cook, Velten, he turned the meals to which he invited his friends into picnics, at a ducat a head.¹ His love of interfering with everybody and everything made him always willing to act as godfather, but the present he bestowed on the child's mother, when, according to the custom of the country, he kissed her cheek, never exceeded a ducat slipped below her pillow, in the case of an officer's wife, or a rouble, in that of the wife of a private soldier.² He gave thirty roubles to a pilot named Antip Timofiéief, who saved his life in a hurricane on the White Sea in 1694.³ And this was a great effort of generosity on his part.

And yet I believe he was always, and everywhere, perfectly sincere with himself, and perfectly natural, even in his most contradictory moments. He was naturally diverse in character, for reasons to which I shall have to refer again, and both his constitution and his moral education were perfectly different from those to which we are accustomed. The country which gave him birth, the race to which he belonged, the tradition from which he proceeded, must never be forgotten. Rurik, Oleg, Saint Vladimir, Sviatopolk, and Monomachus, those heroes of Russian history and legend, are great figures indeed, but they must not be confounded with the historic and legendary glories of ancient Europe. They are as different from these, in character, as they are in name. There is nothing about them of Bayard or of Francis I. Rather, with their patriarchal customs, they bear a moral resemblance to the kings of Scripture. The Russians of the present day will not, I am sure, consider this assertion either as a gratuitous insult, nor as an unjustifiable denial of their possession of the instinct of chivalry ; I would just as soon deny the immense knowledge, and the admirable education, by which so many of them are distinguished. But not the less true is it that, in Peter's days, most Russians could not read, and that, no knightly lance having ever been broken in their country, they passed through the Middle Ages without any knowledge of chivalry, just as later they passed through the Renaissance period

¹ Scherer, vol. iii. p. 254.

² *Ibid.*

³ Oustrialof, vol. ii. p. 367.

without knowing much of Greek or Roman art.¹ The time and distance thus lost have indeed been successfully recouped, but the fact remains that for many years the country knew nothing of that brilliant and noble-hearted line which, from the days of Roland to those of Bayard, made the word honour synonymous, in Western Europe, with fidelity to a pledged promise; and further, that it underwent the contrary influence of the Greek Empire, from which it imbibed not only arts and sciences, habits, religion, and form of policy, but also all the Greek traditions of fraud and wily cunning. Even the legendary type of womanhood in Russia has no heroically ideal quality. She is no Joan of Arc, the inspired virgin, driving a whole people to victory through the impulse of her faith; nor is she Wanda, the gentle Polish martyr, who preferred death to espousing a foreign prince offensive to the national instinct. She is Olga, a brisk and bold-hearted lady, who hunts, and fights, and trades, triumphs over her enemies as much by cunning as by strength, and, when the Greek Emperor would marry her against her will, dismisses him in most uncompromising fashion. Peter, like Alexander Nevski,—that Ulysses among saints, as Custine called him,² a prince more wise than valiant, a model indeed of prudence, but no type of generosity and good faith,—was her true descendant; and so it came to pass that Campredon, the French Envoy, writing in 1725, concerning one of the Tsar's collaborators in his work, described him thus: 'He is far from upright, and this it is which acquired him the confidence of the late Sovereign.'³

The same apparent contradictions are noticeable in Peter's daily morals and religion. Was he a believer? It would seem almost doubtful, so off-handedly did he sometimes treat the ceremonies and ministers of a religion which, at other times, he would practise with the greatest fervour. When his sister Maria lay dying, he drove away the monks, who hastened about her to perform the traditional ceremonies, such as offering the dying woman food and drink

¹ 'The breath of chivalry never stirred the depths of Russia' (Pierling, *Russia and the Holy Sec.*, p. 189). The chapter in this interesting work, entitled, 'The Renaissance in Moscow,' is quite conclusive, as regards my view of this subject.

² *Russia*, vol. i. p. 265.

³ May 3, 1725, *Sbornik*. vol. lviii. p. 255.

of various kinds, and inquiring plaintively whether she desired to leave life because she had not enough to eat! He would do away with all such mummeries! Let it be admitted, then, that he clings to simple faith, and will have no superstitions. But yet I note his habit of writing down his dreams.¹ The English Envoy, Whitworth, in his despatch of 25th March 1712, speaks of a victorious struggle with a tiger *during the Tsar's sleep*, which has strengthened him in his warlike intentions.² At the same time, all propriety, morals, good or bad, civility, and decency, seem to have been a dead-letter to him. In 1723, Iajoujinski, one of the parvenus by whom he was surrounded, took it into his head to cast off his wife, with whom he had no fault to find, and by whom he had grown-up children, to marry the daughter of the Chancellor, Golovkin. As the wife on one side, and the Chancellor on the other, objected violently, Peter, who liked the plan, because it lowered the ancient aristocracy for the benefit of the new, intervened without hesitation. The woman was thrown into a convent; the father was ordered to give his consent. The Tsar declared the first marriage null and void, and undertook to bear all the expenses of the second. From the respect thus shown for family ties his regard for the rest of the moral law may easily be argued.³ At Berlin in 1718, during a visit to a collection of ancient medals and statues, his attention was attracted to the figure of a heathen divinity, one of those with which the ancient Romans frequently adorned the nuptial-chamber. He beckoned to the Tsarina, and commanded her to kiss the figure. When she appeared to object, he shouted brutally, 'Kop ab' ('Head off'), giving her to understand the risk entailed by disobedience; after which he requested the King, his host, to present him with that rare *objet d'art*, as well as with several other curiosities, including an amber cabinet, which, according to the Margrave of Baireuth, had cost an enormous sum of money. In the same way, having remarked a mummy in a Natural History Museum at Copenhagen, he manifested his intention of appropriating it. The head of the museum referred

¹ Siémiewski, *Słowo i Działo*, p. 273, etc.

² Sbornik, vol. lxi. p. 167.

³ Campredon's Despatch, dated March 22, 1723, French Foreign Office; Dolgorouki's *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 17.

the matter to his royal master, who answered by a polite refusal. The mummy was an exceptionally handsome and large one: there was not another like it in Germany. Peter went back to the museum, fell on that mummy, tore off its nose, mutilated it in all directions, and then took his departure, saying, 'Now you may keep it!' ¹ On his departure from the Golden Ring Hotel at Dresden, in 1711, he took down with his own hands, and would have carried off, in spite of the servants' opposition, the valuable curtains sent by the Saxon Court, to decorate his apartments. At Dantzic, in 1716, finding himself inconvenienced by a draught of cold air during the performance of divine service, he stretched out his hand, without a word, snatched the wig off the head of the Burgomaster, who stood beside him, and put it on his own. ²

I do not believe that Baron von Printzen was ever obliged to climb to the top of a mast to present his credentials to the Russian sovereign, who was busy in the rigging, and would not allow any interruption of that work. This anecdote—also related by the great Frederick to Voltaire ³—appears to me to stamp one of its tellers—I know not which—as a downright liar. Baron von Printzen arrived in Russia in 1700. At that period, St. Petersburg—the only place where he could have met with such a reception—had no existence. There was no shipbuilding there till 1704, when von Printzen had already been succeeded in his office by Keyserling. Further, the envoy of the Elector of Brandenburg, and future King of Prussia, having started from Berlin on the 12th of October, must have arrived at his post in the very heart of a Russian winter, a season which reduces all rigging operations in the open air to a condition of forced idleness. On the other hand, Campredon's assertion that when, on the occasion of the peace negotiations with Sweden, in 1721, he asked for an audience of the Tsar, Peter came from the Admiralty to receive him, wearing a sailor's blouse, seems to me worthy of belief.

This entire absence of scruple, this disdain for the usual rules of conduct, and scorn of propriety, were accompanied

¹ Scherer, vol. ii. p. 15.

² Polevoi, vol. iv. p. 4. There are several versions of this anecdote; see Scherer, vol. ii. p. 77.

³ Voltaire's *Works*, vol. x. p. 71.

by a very deep feeling, and absolute respect, for law, for duty, and for discipline. Why and how did this come to pass? Doubtless because, in this case, we have something beyond a mere unthinking negation of the indispensable foundations of any social edifice; in spite of a large amount of caprice and whimsicality, which gave birth to many inconsistencies, a more worthy motive did exist in Peter's mind. He had undertaken to reform the existence of a whole people, whose scruples and prejudices made up a good half of their religion and morality. He regarded these, with a good deal of correctness, as the principal obstacle to any progress, and therefore, very logically, he never lost an opportunity of warring against them. When piloting his flotilla of galleys on the waters of the Don, in 1699, he noticed a Dutch sailor enjoying a fricassee of tortoises, caught in the river. He mentioned it to his Russians, and there was a general outcry of disgust. Such food appeared to them abominable and unclean. Straightway his cook had orders to serve the horrid dish at his own table, under the guise of chicken. Shein and Saltykof, who dined on it, fainted away when, by their master's order, the plumage of the bird they believed themselves to have devoured was respectfully presented to them.

Peter felt himself called to clear the national conscience of the dross left by centuries of barbarous ignorance. But he was too impetuous, too rough and coarse, personally, and, above all, too passionately eager, to perform this work with real discernment. He hit out wildly, in all directions. Thus, even while he corrected, he depraved. The mighty teacher was one of the greatest demoralisers of the human species. Modern Russia, which owes him all its greatness, owes him most of its vices also.

III

His genius, indisputable as it is, and huge as was its field of action, does not give us the impression of taking in vast spaces and mighty wholes in one swift lightning glance. It rather gives us the idea—so great is its comprehension of, and passion for, detail—of a multitude of glances, simul-

taneously fixed on a variety of objects. And, indeed, Peter's general ideas, when such become apparent to us, always strike us as being somewhat vague and inconsistent. His plans and combinations are very apt to lack accuracy and precision, and, when his gaze turns on a distant object, his sight would seem to grow confused. Intellectually speaking, he suffered from short-sight. Of this the building of St. Petersburg is sufficient proof. Here execution came before conception. The plans were left for future consideration; and thus there came to be quarters without streets, streets without issue, and a port without water. The usual instinct of that lightning mind was to act at once—leaving reflection to a later date—without taking time to discuss projects, so long as they seemed attractive, nor weigh means, provided these lay close at hand. Peter's power of judging his collaborators, which, according to his panegyrists, amounted to a sort of divination, would seem to be open to much discussion. The means he employed, such as taking hold of the hair of the individuals he thought of selecting, lifting their heads, and gazing for an instant straight into their eyes—those summary processes which roused the admiration of even so serious an historian as Soloviev¹—are only an additional proof of that superficiality which I have already pointed out, as being the essence of all his knowledge and all his aptitudes. He had not the smallest knowledge of psychology. One day he found, in the house of a schoolmaster, a servant girl, who took his fancy. He made her his mistress, until he could make her his Empress; and, forthwith, he proposed to make the schoolmaster the founder of the national education. That is the plain story of Catherine and of Glück. The woman began by wandering from camp to camp, the prey of the officers and soldiers of her future lord; the man, a humble pastor in a Livonian village, began by teaching the little Russians confided to his care to sing the Lutheran Psalms. The Tsar, on becoming aware of it, closed the school and dismissed the master. But the national education proceeded no further.

One day, at the launch of a new ship, a sight which always heated his imagination, Peter fell to descanting on historical philosophy. Recalling the march of civilising

¹ *Studies* (1882), p. 205.

culture in Europe, from its Greek cradle, and on through its Italian glories, he finally expressed his conviction that Russia's turn had come. 'Let us hope,' he said, 'that within a few years we shall be able to humiliate neighbouring countries by placing our own on the highest pinnacle of glory.' His conception of civilisation is here clearly betrayed—the sentiment of a manufacturer in strong competition with the factory over the way. He had too little cultivation to analyse and understand the elements of the superiority of those foreign rivals whom he envied, and desired to excel. All he saw was the exterior, and therefore he esteemed the whole below its value. His intelligence, vast and comprehensive though it was, shows, on one side, a certain quality of limitation. It is radically inaccessible to any abstract conception. Hence he was very unskilful in judging any series of events, in deducing the consequences of a particular point of departure, in tracing effects back to their causes. He was quick to seize the practical advantages of civilisation, but he never had any suspicion of the necessary premises of all civilising undertakings. He was like a man who would begin to build a house from the roof, or who would work at the foundations and summit of an edifice, at one and the same time. His being a good carpenter, or even a fair naval engineer, did not suffice to set the moral forces of his people in organic motion.

To sum it up, Peter possessed more ingenuity than actual genius. His government was the handiwork of an artisan rather than that of an artist, of an active official rather than of a statesman. He had an extraordinary gift of manipulating men and things; and his surprising dexterity in this respect, coupled with a marvellous power of assimilation, is still noticeable in almost any modern Russian, who will come from the banks of the Don, where he never saw a machine nor a factory, and, after a few weeks spent in some western industrial centre, will be perfectly informed on the latest improvements of modern machinery, and well able to apply them in his own country. But Peter had not an original idea of his own, and cared little for originality in other people. He did not even attempt to put the elements, external or internal, which he used in his attempts at political or social construction, into independent motion.

His work was a mosaic, a mere patchwork. Even this imitation of the foreigner was not, in itself, his own original invention. It had been the constant rule in Russia since the days of Boris Godunof. All he did was to substitute a torrent, a cataract, a perfect avalanche, of German, Dutch, English, French, and Italian products, for the little stream of importation which had passed from Poland and slowly filtered into the arid Russian soil. His work—I say it again—was a mechanical performance,—superficial always, and far from intelligent, sometimes,—directed solely to external ends, without a thought of internal possibilities. It had been begun with so much carelessness as to the real nature, and inner values, of the materials selected, that its end and object perforce escaped the understanding of the nation called upon to perform it. It was heterogeneous, incongruous, and ill-arranged, useless in many particulars, harmful in others: a Dutch fleet, a German army, and a Swedish Government, the morals of Versailles, and the lagoons of Amsterdam—all included in the same series of borrowed treasures. Not a perception of the ideal side of the undertaking, nothing but a perpetual bondage to the tyranny of preconceived ideas. When he was informed that the canals he had cut through the Island of St. Basil (*Vassili-Ostrof*)—the only scrap of firm ground in his new capital—were useless, and too narrow for traffic, his first thought was to hurry off to the Dutch Resident, borrow a map of Amsterdam, and compare the dimensions, compass in hand.

Yet I have said he was an idealist, and I hold to that opinion. An idealist he was, in virtue of that part of his nature which escaped from the chances and incoherence of his daily inspiration. An idealist—after his own fashion—by the general subordination of his thought, and the constant sacrifice of his own person, to an end without any material or immediate tangibility. I mean the splendid destiny to which he believed his country appointed. Not, indeed, that, in the limited range of his mental sight, and amid the passion and perpetual tumult of his career, this end ever took very precise shape. That famous Will, which has been the theme of so many ingenious politicians, was, as I shall later prove, a mere hoax, with which he had nothing to do. The far horizon towards which his course was shaped loomed up before him, uncertain and confused: like a camp, it

may be, filled with the clatter of armed men, or else a busy fruitful hive—a centre of life, at all events—industrial, intelligent, even artistic. He dreamed indeed, but with wide-open eyes ; and, with all the positiveness of his mind and nature, he ended—so great was his effort, so mighty his faith—by almost touching and possessing this phantom dream of his. He went a step farther. He would ensure the continuity of this hallucination of what was to be, that far-distant, tremendous destiny, and, like the splendid despot that he was, he drove it into the very marrow of his subjects' bones—beat it in mercilessly, with blows of sticks, and hatchet strokes. He evolved a race of eager visionaries out of a people of mere brutes. He left something better behind him than a mere legend. He left a faith, which, unlike other faiths, is spiritualised, instead of materialised, in the simple minds which have enshrined it. 'Holy Russia' of this present day—practical, brutal, and mystic, above all things, even as he was,—standing ready, like a many-headed Messiah, to regenerate Ancient Europe, even by submerging her, is Peter's child.

An idealist, yes ! A dreamer too, a great poet in active life, was this horny-handed woodcutter ! Napoleon, the soldier mathematician, with conceptions less extravagant than Peter's, with a more judicious sense of possibilities, and a more real grasp of the future, was an idealist too.

IV

One of the most sharply marked and peculiar traits in Peter's character—a character offering contrasts so strong as to endue it, from certain points of view, with an appearance of absolute deformity—is the intense and never-ceasing strain of buffoonery, which sets an harlequin's cap on that imperious brow, twists those harsh features into a merry-andrew's grin, and everywhere and always—through all the vicissitudes of a career crammed with great events and mighty actions—mingles the solemn with the grotesque, and carries farce even into the region of absolute tragedy. This is betrayed very early, quite in the dawn of Peter's reign, by the disguises adopted by the young ruler, from the very

outset, for himself, and imposed, by him, on his friends and collaborators. So early as 1695, Prince Féodor Romodanovski united the title of King of Presburg with that of General. And even when writing to him on the most serious subjects, Peter never failed to address him as '*Min Her Kenich*,' and to sign himself 'Your Majesty's very obedient Slave, *Knech Piter Komondor*,' or else, '*Ir Daheleix Kneh*,' which last formula was unintelligible to any one but himself. He lost no opportunity of expressing his resolution to shed the last drop of his blood in the service of this mock sovereign. Meanwhile he had created Zotof, his former tutor, Archbishop of Presburg, Patriarch of the banks of the Iaouza, and of the whole *Koukouï* (a name of German origin given to the quarter known as the German suburb). Tihon Nikititch Streshnief was made Pope. He was addressed as 'Most Holy Father,' and 'Your Holiness,' and all his replies, whether they were business letters or official reports, were, by order, couched in the same style. Romodanovski addressed his letters to '*Bombardier Peter Aléxiévitch*,' and closed them with a simple formula of politeness, appropriate from a sovereign to a subject. In May 1703, after the taking of Nienschanz, Peter, acting as secretary to Field-Marshal Shérémétief, drew up, with his own hands, a report to the King—in other words, to Romodanovski—informing him that the Field-Marshal had promoted him and Menshikof to be Knights of St. Andrew, 'subject to His Majesty's approbation.' And so settled was the determination to take this burlesque seriously, that it actually survived the original actors in it. In 1719, when Féodor Romodanovski died, the title and privileges of his imaginary sovereignty passed to his son Ivan, and Peter, in an autograph letter congratulating Captain Siéniavin upon a victory won at sea, assures him of the satisfaction this success will cause 'His Majesty.'¹

On the 3rd of February 1703, he writes to Menshikof—calling him 'My heart'—to inform him of the opening of a fort, built on a property he had lately bestowed on him, and christened under the name of Oranienburg—the present Ranenburg, in the Government of Riazan. The Metropolitan of Kief presided at the ceremony. This mock Metropolitan was Mussine-Pushkin, one of the real

¹ Golikof, vol. vii. p. 264.

sovereign's boon companions, and by no means one of the least debauched. A plan of the fortress, showing the names given to the bastions, was enclosed in this letter. The first bastion was baptized with brandy, the second with lemonade, the third with Rhine wine, the fourth with beer, and the fifth with hydromel. The score, or thereabouts, of persons who made up the party, amongst whom were the Prussian and Polish Envoys, Keyserling and Koenigseck, an English merchant named Stiles, and several important Russians, appended their signatures to this letter, substituting joking sobriquets for their real names. Menshikof's reply was couched in a serious strain, for the Swedes were giving him much trouble, and he was in no laughing mood; but he did not forget to express his thanks to his august friend for the honour he had done him, by getting drunk upon his property.

In 1709, when the victory of Poltava was to be celebrated at Moscow, a huge wooden palace was built on the *Tsaritsine Lougue*; Romodanovski, enthroned in the Hall of Audience, and surrounded by the principal dignitaries of the Court, summoned the leaders of the victorious army to present their reports on the incidents and happy issue of the battle. The first to advance was Shérémétief: 'By the grace of God and the good fortune of your Cæsarean Majesty, I have overcome the Swedish army.' 'By the grace of God, and the good fortune of your Cæsarean Majesty,' said Menshikof, in his turn, 'I have taken General Loewenhaupt and his army prisoners at Pérévolotchna.' Last of all came Peter: 'By the grace of God, and the good fortune of your Cæsarean Majesty, I and my regiment have fought and conquered at Poltava.' All three presented the mock Cæsar with the regulation reports, and retired, bowing. After which, the astounded Swedish prisoners were brought in, and marched past the throne. A banquet, presided over by this strange substitute for the Sovereign, who was seated upon a raised dais, and condescended to summon Colonel Peter Aléxié-iévitch to his own table, closed the ceremony.¹

Efforts have been made to justify these pasquinades—almost revolting, at such a moment, and in such serious circumstances—by various interpretations of their meaning. Some will have it that this was Peter's method of inculcating,

¹ Golikof, vol. xi. p. 567, etc.

by his own example, the principle of subordination which he desired to instil into his subjects. Others, that it was an attempt to destroy all memory of the *Miestnitchestvo*, by a deliberate confusing of all ranks, and every precedence. Such ideas may, indeed, have occurred to him. He always showed the deepest intuition of the true foundation of all real discipline—the sense that he who will be obeyed must know how to obey—that he who desires service must himself learn how to serve. The expressions, ‘I serve,’ ‘since I have been in the service,’ were very habitual with him; and not less evident and enduring was his constant desire to familiarise his subjects, to fill their eyes and their souls, with that great ideal, to which he sacrificed his own life, and to which everything was to be sacrificed—to which all things must bow, and, in comparison with which, all else, even the Tsar himself, was to be accounted nothing. Such a design may have existed, at the back of such scenic effects as I have just described. But the means used by Peter for the furtherance of this object, proceeded solely and directly from his whimsicality, his love of disguises, of humbug and mystification, and from a licence of imagination which no sentiment of propriety, of respect, or even of self-respect, could keep within bounds. It should not be forgotten that masquerades were at that time a great fashion in western countries, and they had long had a settled home in Russia. Ivan the Terrible delighted in them. Peter thus merely followed the prevailing custom, which his inherent proneness to exaggeration, of view and of practical action, led him to carry to so extreme a pitch, that the means he employed finally far exceeded, and even ran counter to, his original intention.

Nothing but the extreme docility of a national temperament, long since broken in to every form of despotism, saved the very idea of sovereignty from fading out of the public mind at this period. This will appear especially true when we consider that certain of the wildest and least justifiable of the sovereign’s disguises lowered human dignity, in his own person, to the most abject and shameful level. In 1698, just after his first foreign journey, he took part in a procession, in which the mock patriarch, Zotof, wearing a mitre decorated with a figure of Bacchus, led a troop of disorderly *bacchantes*. their heads adorned with bundles of

lighted tobacco instead of vine-leaves.¹ Here, of course, we have an allusion to the monopoly, lately acquired by the Marquis of Caermarthen, and, therefore, a political intention. But the manner selected for intimating this does not strike us as being any the less objectionable. In the same year, on the very day after that on which one hundred and fifty *Streltsy* had died, in horrible tortures, Peter's cheerfulness was unabated. He kept the Brandenburg Envoy, whom he had received in farewell audience, to dinner, and regaled him, at dessert, with a scene of buffoonery, during which the mock patriarch, having bestowed his benediction on all present, with two crossed pipes, gave the signal for the dances to begin. The Tsarevitch Alexis, and his sister Nathalia, watched this entertainment from behind a hanging which was pushed aside for their convenience.²

Twenty years later the same thing was going on. During the carnival of 1724, a troop of sixty or seventy individuals—gentlemen, officers, priests (including the Tsar's Confessor, Nadajinski), burghers, and common people, amongst whom one, a sailor, walked on his hands with his head down, making strange faces and wild contortions, attended the Sovereign through the streets. These people, chosen from amongst the greatest drunkards and vilest debauchees in the country, constituted a regular brotherhood, which met on fixed days, under the name of 'Council which knows no sadness' (*Bezpietchalnyĭ sobor*), and indulged in orgies which occasionally lasted for twenty-four hours. Ladies were invited to these gatherings, and the most important officials, ministers, generals, and grave and aged men, were frequently obliged to take part in them. In January 1725, Matthew Golovin, a man of illustrious family, eighty years of age, was ordered to appear in one of these processions, dressed as a devil. He refused, and, at a word from Peter, he was seized, stripped naked, a cap with pasteboard horns was put upon his head, and he was forced to sit, for a full hour, on the frozen Neva. He caught a violent fever, of which he died.³

Not an event, during the whole course of the reign, from the Peace of Nystadt, to the wedding of a favourite dwarf, but was made the pretext for fresh doings of the kind.

¹ Korb, p. 115.

² Dolgoroukof, *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 136.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

When the dwarf died, Peter ranged maskers round his coffin, even as he had already ranged them round his marriage-bed. Every dwarf in St. Petersburg thus appeared, in 1724, at the funeral of one of their number, all of them dressed in black, and following a tiny hearse, drawn by six little Spanish horses. The same year, during a masquerade which lasted a week, senators were forbidden to unmask, even in the council chamber, during the hours devoted to important business.¹

Peter had a great number of Court jesters or fools. Strahlenberg² gives a list, which contains many names possessing other claims to importance. Zotof, Tourguénief, Shanskoï, Lanin, Shahofskoï, Tarakanof, Kirsantiévitch, and Oushakof, the most admired of all. These names can be accounted for. Flogel, in his history of Court jesters,³ divides those who surrounded the Tsar into four categories. *Firstly*, fools by natural infirmity, in whom the Sovereign finds amusement. *Secondly*, fools by punishment, condemned to play the part, for having failed in wisdom, in their former functions,—this was the case of Oushakof, who, as a captain in a guard regiment, had been sent from Smolensk to Kief with important despatches, reached the town during the night, found the gates shut, and, when there was some delay about opening them, turned round, rode back to Smolensk, and complained of his discomfiture to his commanding officer. *Thirdly*, simulated fools, who shammed mental disturbance to escape death, after having been implicated in some plot—a stratagem which did not always impose upon Peter, who, however, judged the self-chosen punishment of the poor wretches sufficient. *Fourthly*, fools by lack of education. Peter, who was in the habit of sending a great number of young men abroad, examined them, when they came back, as to the information acquired. Those who did not give him satisfaction escaped severer punishment by assuming the cap and bells. In the great Tsar's time these private jesters had a certain part assigned them, and a political importance of their own. They supplemented his 'police force. They boldly and

¹ Bergholz, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xxii. p. 436, etc.

² *Das Nord und Oestliche Theil von Europa und Asia* (Stockholm, 1730),

p. 235.

³ *Geschichte der Hofnarren* (Liegnitz, 1789), p. 409.

loudly reported the evil deeds of his ministers, at his table, relating their thefts and their embezzlements. Peter even occasionally deputed them to avenge him. On these occasions they would carefully contrive to make the guilty person drunk, would pick a quarrel with him, and then thrash him soundly.¹ Strahlenberg's list does not give the names of the two most famous members of this burlesque and pitiful legion: the Russian, Balakiref, and the Portuguese, D'Acosta, a relation, doubtless, of the celebrated convert Uriel. To this last, Peter confided the functions of director-general and organiser of the revels, and Head of the staff employed in them. In 1713 he gave him the title of Count and Han of the Samoyedes. This last promotion was made the occasion of a series of burlesque ceremonies, in which several families of real Samoyedes, brought for the purpose from the depths of Siberia, were forced to figure. Amongst them appeared one of the Empress's cooks, disguised as a Samoyede, with a huge pair of stag's horns on his head, and girt with a yellow ribbon, to which was suspended a medal, bearing the name 'Actaeon' engraved upon it. Peter occasionally associated this man with Oushakof and Balakiref, and frequently made him his favourite butt. The poor wretch had a wife, whose reputation was of the lightest, and the Tsar never failed, when he saw him before company, to lift two of his fingers, with a symbolic gesture, above his forehead.²

These forms of amusement, coarse as they seem, especially in these days, might have passed almost uncriticised. They were the natural, and, in a sense, the indispensable, rebound of an existence devoted to a toil, which, without them, would have exceeded the limit of human strength, even in the case of such an exceptionally robust nature as Peter's. The great man thus instinctively sought relief for his overstrained nerves, and, extreme as he was in all particulars, inevitably fell into the worst excesses. It might even be urged that the disgusting, cynical, or inhuman side of his behaviour was atoned for by the unconstrained gaiety and large-hearted good-humour which usually marked it. Half a century later, Christian VII. of Denmark caused a certain Count Brandt, who had been set upon on the score of his

¹ *Kourakin Papers*, vol. i. p. 73.

² Scherer, vol. iii. p. 56; *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xix. p. 87.

conjugal misfortunes, to be tried and condemned to death, because, in his fury, he had raised his hand against the Sovereign. Peter bore the hearty blows showered upon him by Catherine's head cook, when that functionary was not in a joking humour, without a word of complaint.¹ It may be said that he should have chosen the subjects of his jests elsewhere than in the kitchen, but that was his style. He was no aristocrat. He was essentially vulgar, on the contrary—as much allied, by certain traits of rustic humour and childish gaiety, with the plebs of every country, as he was distinguished and widely separated, by the general tendency of his mind and character, from the native plebeian element. His earliest comrades, the *Koniouhy*, had made him thoroughly acquainted with the manners and habits of the Russian populace, and to that, in part, he owed his knowledge of the masses, and his gift for ruling them. I have described him during the Christmas festivities as following the practice, traditional in the lower classes, of the *Slavlénie* (*Christa slavít*, 'praising Christ')—that is, of singing the Saviour's praises before the doors of houses, and claiming the gifts usually bestowed. One day the richest merchant in Moscow, Filadief, refused to be sufficiently generous in his donation. Peter forthwith collected the inhabitants of the whole quarter before his house, and forced him to pay a ransom of one rouble for every head in the crowd.² Here a certain quality of his genius appears: his aptitude for stirring the mob by appealing to its lowest instincts.

The really dangerous side of these pleasures and relaxations resided in the deliberate confusion, kept up by Peter, of madness with reason, of mere masquerade with serious existence. These sham counts and patriarchs, these buffoons and harlequins, constantly added to their carnival dignities and functions, and mingled with them, others, which made, or should have made, them, very serious personages. Zotof was Keeper of the Seals; Ivan Golovin, who, though he had been with Peter in Holland, knew nothing of naval matters, was, *for that very reason*, created head of the Admiralty. The Sovereign and his friends found this a very pretty subject for jesting, but the fleet,—which, amongst themselves.

¹ Bergholz, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xix. p. 87.

² Korb, p. 101.

whenever they drank Ivan Mihaïlovitch's health, they called his *family*,—was far from being the better for it.

No justification nor excuse can be offered for these disorders. They were the clear and evident weak point of a most superior mind,—too far removed from the common track, too completely bereft of the balance which education, tradition, and social surroundings, generally enforce, even in the most independent natures,—to be able to maintain its equilibrium in that huge space wherein it moved, and traced out its own path.

V

It will naturally be inquired whether the public and official institution of the mock Patriarchate, to which I have already referred, really was intended, as some think, to prepare the way for the suppression of the real one. I would willingly admit this, were it not for my sense of the evident dangers such an indirect course would have involved. Would not Peter have thus risked, not only the dignity of the whole clergy, but the very idea of religion? Some people have looked on this burlesque as a mere parody of the Papacy. I cannot share their opinion. I find Zotof alternately designated *Knes-papa* and *Patriarch*. And, when Peter set the mock Cæsar, Romodanovski, beside the *Knes-papa*, whose rank was it, whose title, whose function, that he sought to ridicule and roll in the mud? I am rather disposed to believe his chief desire was to divert a mind predisposed by certain hereditary germs of Eastern despotism, certain constitutional vices, and certain faults of early education, to whimsical eccentricities. I will not deny that more serious intentions may have occasionally existed, and may even have been at the root of this wild and licentious debauch of fancy. But these soon disappeared—carried away, and fairly drowned, in the muddy waves of that tumultuous stream.

This is by no means the opinion of a recent apologist, so convinced in his own opinion as to express astonishment that no one before him had become aware of the real and abiding depth of the plans and calculations thus set in

motion by the great sovereign. How is it, he wonders, that no one has perceived that this was the Tsar's manner of hiding the forces secretly prepared, and the work of destruction to which he had already doomed them, from the eyes of his enemies? The *Knes-papa* and his Conclave, so we are told, drunk, or seemingly drunk, as they may have been in the daytime, spent their nights in unrelenting toil. The correspondence of the mock Pontiff with his Deacon (the title taken by Peter himself), with all its apparent ravings, and its filthy jokes, was a mere matter of cypher. Thus, in Zotof's letter to the Tsar, dated 23rd February 1697, *Carnival*, with his companions, *Ivashka* (drunkenness) and *Ieremka*, (debauchery), against whom Peter was warned, are said to stand for cunning and servile Poland, with her allies, the Hetman of the Cossacks, and the Han of the Tartars.¹ This interpretation has not even the virtue of ingenuity. Is it likely that, in 1697, Peter or his collaborators would have taken so much pains to convince the Swedes or the Poles of the poverty of their resources? It was only too apparent, at that moment, and the optical delusion they would have desired to produce was a very different one. As for the laborious nights of such a man as Zotof, my imagination rebels at the very thought. In a despatch from the French envoy Campredon, dated 14th March 1721, I find the following words: 'The Patriarch, of whom I have spoken above, and who is here known as *Knes-papa*, is a professional drunkard, chosen by the Tsar himself, with the purpose of turning his clergy into ridicule.' This is a true description, so far, at least, as the moral identity of the personage is concerned, although the individual actually referred to was Zotof's successor. Did Peter really think of turning his own clergy into ridicule? He may, indeed, have desired to lower the Patriarchate, as being a rival authority to his own. Up till this time, the Tsar, according to immemorial custom, had always walked in the solemn Palm-Sunday procession at Moscow, leading the Patriarch's mule. Thus, from year to year, the supremacy of the ecclesiastical power, dating from the preponderating part played by the Patriarch Philaretus during the reign of the first of the Romanoffs, was formally affirmed.

¹ See Paper, by M. Ivan Nossowitch, in *Russian Antiquities* (1874), p. 735.

Peter replaced this solemn procession by the burlesque *cortège* of his *Knes-papa*, who rode on an ox, and was followed by an army of vehicles drawn by hogs, bears, and goats.¹ The political intention is here quite manifest. But it is equally clear that this intention rapidly faded, and became more and more debased, in the prolonged course of the huge and irreverent parody, which a very sensible eye-witness, Vockerodt, described as a 'mere mental and physical debauch.'² Yet this phenomenon calls for another explanation. Its depth, its extent, its duration, were all so remarkable, that I cannot accept it as the outcome of a single individual inspiration, however fanciful and licentious. And, indeed, I remark a very general tendency, during the period immediately preceding Peter's accession, to irony, to satire, and to the comic representation, or caricature, of all the important acts of life. This may be the mere rebound from the asceticism to which I have already referred, and which, as I have pointed out, had led to a denial of every outward manifestation of social existence.³ As to the form which Peter gave, or, perhaps, only contributed to give, this tendency, it may bear some relation to the excesses in which popular imagination and passion indulged, in other countries, under the action of so-called demoniac influences. My readers will recollect the orgies of the nocturnal revels and *messes noires* so common in France early in the seventeenth century, of which the mystifying performances of modern disciples of the occult arts are but a pale reflection.⁴ The analogy of causes would here seem to confirm the analogy of facts. Both in Russia and in France we have a revolt, physical and mental, against the ordinary course of life, which compressed and wounded body and spirit alike; and human beings, seeking for momentary relief, dashed at a bound beyond the pale of reality, outside the limits of law, and religion, and society. The strange thing is that Peter should have presided at these Saturnalia. But surely he—the first and willing prisoner within the iron circle of his own Ukases—sharing, as he did, the common condition, may well have felt the common need.

¹ Bergholz, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xix. p. 128

² Vockerodt. See Herrmann, p. 19.

³ Zabielin, *Lives of the Tsarinas*, p. 426.

⁴ See Michelet, *Histoire de France* (Flammarion edition), vol. xi. p. 54.

I must now proceed to facts, and these, I believe, will strike my readers as being conclusive.

The origin of the scenes of desecration in which the *Pope* or *Patriarch* Zotof and his successors played their part, dates, as I have said, from the earliest years of this reign. But its decorative accessories were successively developed. Peter, after he had created a pontiff, proceeded to appoint him cardinals and a conclave. This was the *Vsiéshoutchie-ichyi* or *Vsiépiianietchyi Sobor*, 'the Conclave or Council of the maddest or the most drunken'—a fixed institution, almost official in its character. The Tsar worked out its organisation from year to year, inventing statutes and regulations, which he drew up with his own hand, even on the very eve of the battle of Poltava.¹ Its members consisted of the most dissolute of his boon companions, with whom,—either out of mere brutal and despotic caprice, or in the idea of debasing, so as the more easily to control them,—he associated a certain number of men of serious mind, and rigid morals. The members' first duty was to present themselves at the house of the *Knes-papa*, called the *Vaticanum*, and there offer him their homage and their thanks. Four stutterers, conducted by one of the Tsar's footmen, were spokesmen on this occasion, in the course of which the new arrivals were invested with the red robe which was to be their future official costume. Thus garbed, they entered an apartment called the Hall of the Consistory, the only furniture of which consisted of casks ranged round the walls. At the end of the room, on a pile of emblematic objects, such as barrels, bottles, and glasses, was the throne of the *Knes-papa*. One by one the cardinals defiled before him, each receiving a glass of brandy, and listening to this formula: '*Reverendissime*, open thy mouth, swallow what thou art given, and thou shalt tell us fine things.' After which, all being seated on the casks, the sitting was opened, and continued many hours, during which copious libations were mingled with low jests. The Conclave was held in a neighbouring house, to which the members went in procession, headed by the *Knes-papa*, sitting astride on a wine-butt drawn by four oxen. He was attended by mock monks—Jacobins, Franciscans, and so forth. The habit of Father Cailleau, a French Franciscan, resident in Moscow, had supplied the

¹ See Nossowitch's Paper. Compare Siémievski, *Slovo i Dielo*, p. 281.

pattern for their dresses. Peter went so far as to try to force the monk himself to take part in the procession, and only desisted in face of the energetic opposition of the French minister. He himself, dressed as a Dutch sailor, generally ordered the march of the procession. A spacious gallery, lined with narrow beds, awaited the members of the conclave; between the beds casks sawn in half were ranged, filled with food. The sham cardinals were forbidden to leave their beds before the close of the Conclave. Certain conclavists, attached to the person of each, were charged with the duty of inciting them to drink, urging them to the wildest extravagances, to the most filthy jests, and 'also, so we are told, to talk unreservedly. The Tsar was always present, listening, and noting things down on his tablets. The Conclave lasted three days and three nights. When there was no question of electing a new Pope, the time was employed in discussions relative to such matters as the quality of some particular brand of wine, with which one of the cardinals had found fault.

In 1714 Peter took it into his head to vary the monotony of this programme by celebrating the wedding of the *Knes-papa* Zotof, an old man of eighty-four, whose sons were distinguished officers in the army. One of these vainly besought the Tsar to spare this shame to his father's old age. The bride was a noble lady, Anna Pashkof, nearly sixty years of age. Immense preparations were made for the celebration of this extraordinary wedding. We must not forget that the Northern War, with all its dreary array of daily sacrifice and mourning, which sucked the resources of the country dry, was then in progress. Yet, four months in advance, all the lords and ladies of the Court had orders to be ready to play their part in the ceremony, and to send detailed descriptions of their chosen disguises to the Chancellor, Count Golovkin, so that there might not be more than three of any character. Twice over, on the 12th of December 1714, and the 15th of January 1715, performers and costumes were duly inspected by Peter himself. With his own hand he wrote out all the instructions and arrangements for the ceremonial, specially invented for the occasion. On the appointed day, at a signal given by a cannon, fired from the fortress of St. Petersburg, the male and female participators in the masquerade gathered—the former in

the Chancellor's house, the latter in the dwelling of the Princess-Abbess, a lady of the name of Rjevski, 'an active and compliant, but exceedingly drunken body,' as one of her contemporaries described her. She was replaced, after her death, by Princess Anastasia Galitzin, the daughter of Prince Prozorovski, a great friend of Peter's, whom he treated like his own sister, until he had her publicly whipped in the courtyard of the offices of the Secret Police at Prébrazenskoié, she having been accused of complicity with Alexis, after having been commissioned to watch and spy upon him. She bought back the Tsar's favour by accepting the post of Princess-Abbess.¹

The procession formed up in front of the Tsar's Palace, and, crossing the frozen Neva, took its way to the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, on the opposite bank, where a priest of over ninety years of age, actually brought from Moscow for the purpose, awaited the bride and bridegroom. At its head was Romodanovski, the mock Cæsar, dressed as King David, carrying a lyre, draped in a bearskin. Four bears were harnessed to his sledge, and a fifth followed it like a footman. These creatures screamed in the most frightful manner under the blows which were rained upon them from start to finish. King David was followed by the bride and bridegroom, seated on a very high sledge, surrounded by Cupids, a stag with huge horns on the coachman's box, and a goat seated behind them. The mock Patriarch wore his pontifical robes. All the greatest people in the capital—ministers, aristocrats, and diplomatic corps,—followed the procession, some of them more than a little constrained and uncomfortable; but for that Peter did not care a jot. Prince Menshikof, Admiral Apraxin, General Bruce, and Count Vitzthum, the Envoy of Augustus II., costumed as Hamburg burgomasters, played on the hurdy-gurdy. The Russian Chancellor, the Princes James and Gregory Dolgorouki, the Princes Peter and Demetrius Galitzin, dressed as Chinamen, played on the flute. The Austrian Resident, Pleyer, the Hanoverian Minister, Weber, the Dutch Resident, De Bie, as German shepherds, blew the bagpipes. Certain gentlemen, Michael Glebof, Peter and Nikita Hitrof, had been dispensed from performing on a musical instrument on account of their age, but they had to

¹ Dolgoroukof, *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 75.

put in an appearance. The Tsarevitch, garbed as a huntsman, blew his horn; Catherine, with eight of her ladies, wore Finnish costume; the old Tsarina Marfa, the widow of Tsar Féodor, appeared in Polish dress. The Princess of Ost-Friesland had an old German costume. All these ladies played the flute. Peter, dressed, as usual, as a sailor, rattled on the drum. He was surrounded by a noisy and motley crew of Venetians blowing shrill whistles; Honduras savages, who waved their lances; Poles, scraping violins; Kalmuks, tinkling the *balalaïka* (Russian guitar); Norwegian peasants, Lutheran pastors, monks; Catholic bishops with stags' horns on their heads; *Raskolniks*, whale-fishers, Armenians, Japanese, Lapps, and Tungouses. The noise of the instruments, the screams of the bears, the clang of the bells that rang out of every church tower, and the acclamations of the thousands of onlookers, rose in an infernal cacophony of sound. 'This is the Patriarch's wedding!' shouted the spectators; 'Long live the Patriarch and his wife!' The ceremony closed, as may be imagined, with a banquet, which soon became an orgy, during which a flock of trembling octogenarians acted as cupbearers. The festivities continued the next day, and lasted well into February.¹

But it would be very unbecoming on my part to omit one detail. On the very day of the wedding, Peter, still in his sailor's costume, contrived, between the masquerade and the banquet, to give an audience to Count Vitzthum, during which, after having discussed most important matters, he charged him with a letter for his master, dated that very day, and dealing with Polish affairs. He also received Bassewitz, and talked over the Duke of Holstein's business with him.² This incident, in itself worthy of all admiration, will not diminish the disgust inspired by the circumstances which surrounded it.

When Zotof died, in 1717, Peter drew up fresh regulations for the election of his successor—quite a little volume of grotesque contrivances, in which he particularly insisted on the verification of the candidate's sex, according to the custom established at Rome since the days of the

¹ Golikof, vol. vi. pp. 279-290. Letter from De Bie to the Secretary of the States-General, St. Petersburg, Feb. 1, 1715, Dutch State Papers; Dolgoroukof, *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 141.

² Golikof, vol. vi. pp. 279-290.

famous Pope Joan. We must not forget that, just at that moment, he was expecting the return of his son Alexis, and was making ready to begin that terrible trial which was to cast such a painful shadow over the last years of his life. No symptom of that shadow was apparent as yet. The new candidate was called Peter Ivanovitch Boutourlin. He had hitherto borne the title of Archbishop of St. Petersburg 'in the diocese of drunkards, gluttons, and madmen.' He was a member of one of the most illustrious families in the country. This time Peter kept the part of Subdeacon to the Conclave for himself. The members of this Conclave received their ballot balls, or rather the eggs which represented them, from the hands of the Princess-Abbess, whose breasts they kissed . . . I pass over details, which are either indescribable or uninteresting.¹ A few months later the unhappy Alexis was agonising in the Question Chamber under the torture of the whip, and yet his father sat gaily at table with the new *Knes-papa*—'the Patriarch, or rather the burlesque of a Patriarch,' as Vockerodt calls him—and presided over scenes of the vilest and most disgusting debauchery.

In 1720 Peter took it into his head to marry Boutourlin to Zotof's widow; and once more we see him lavishing the strangest drolleries, obscenities, and unheard-of profanities, in all directions. A bed was set up within a pyramid, which had been built, in 1714, before the Palace of the Senate, in commemoration of a victory over the Swedes. He must needs scoff at his soldiers' victories, at the blood spilt in defence of the country, even at his own glory! The newly married couple were put to bed dead drunk, and subjected to the grossest indignities at the hands of the populace. The next morning, the new *Knes-papa* opened his Pontificate, by giving his blessing *after the fashion of the Russian priests*, to a procession of maskers, who waited on him at his house.²

This Pontificate was of very short duration. On the 10th of September 1723, I read in one of Campredon's despatches: 'The ceremony of the installation of the new Patriarch will take place at Moscow; the Conclave will be held in a small

¹ Siémievski, *Słowo i Działo*, p. 281, etc.; Scherer, vol. ii. p. 163.

² Despatch from the French Resident, *La Vie*, St. Petersburg, Oct. 4, 1720, French Foreign Office; Bergholz, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xix. p. 127.

island near Préobrajenski, on which there is a peasants' cottage. The mock cardinals will there assemble on the appointed day; they will have to drink wine and brandy, for four-and-twenty hours, without going to sleep, and after that fine preparation, they will choose their Patriarch.'¹

There can be no two opinions concerning these shameful scenes and aberrations from decency. The only possible disagreement is as to what explanation may be given of them. I hold to that I have already indicated. Peter was the representative of a society in process of formation, into which historical premisses, and his own personal initiative, had introduced, and continued to maintain, diverse and opposing elements of fermentation—a society in which nothing stable, nothing consecrated, and, therefore, nothing sacred, existed. From the days of Ivan the Terrible, all the remarkable men in this society had been *eccentrics*—'*Samodoury*,' according to the expressive national term—and this fact is explained by the absence of a common fund of national culture. Peter was the same. He was a huge Mastodon, and his moral proportions were all colossal and monstrous, like those of the antediluvian flora and fauna. He was full of elementary forces and instincts—the true primitive man, close and thick-growing like a virgin forest, bursting with sap, and infinitely diverse. Man, as he was before a long course of natural selection developed him into a special type of the human species—like no one else, and still full of the most incongruous resemblances, mighty, capricious, tragicomic, a kinsman of Louis XI., and own cousin to Sir John Falstaff. Very plebeian too, as I have already said—a close neighbour of those lower strata, out of which a chosen circle was slowly rising. He chose his friends and collaborators among the common herd, looked after his household like any shopkeeper, thrashed his wife like a peasant, and sought his pleasure where the lower populace generally finds it. When, to all this, we add the incessant clash, within his brain, of ideas and inspirations, which, though often contradictory in themselves, generally tended to a deliberate upheaval and a consequent universal levelling process—when we consider that he consciously possessed the most absolute power, over the men and things around him, that any human being has ever known—and

¹ French Foreign Office.

when we recollect the urgent need, that, as I have said already, must from time to time have stung him, to violently cast off the realities of existence, because, in the long-run, they grew unendurable, even to such a man as he was—this strange aspect of the great Tsar's moral character will surely be sufficiently explained.

CHAPTER III

IDEAS, PRINCIPLES AND SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

- I. Abundance of ideas—Aids to memory—These ideas mostly suggested—Peter haunted by the West—Inadequacy of certain essential notions—Justice, religion, morality—Intellectual incoherence—Utilitarian spirit.
- II. General conception of the Sovereign's duty—Contradictory principles mingled with it—Individual abnegation, and absorption of the common life—Introduction of the social principle into the organisation of the country, and acceptance of its extreme consequences—The first servant of the State—Peter relinquishes the wealth amassed by his predecessors—The patrimony of the Romanoffs—Peter Mibailof's pay—His account book—366 roubles a year—The reverse of the medal—Whimsicality and despotism—The servant's hand raised against his master.
- III. The causes of this contradiction—Revolutionary nature of the Reform—Asiatic elements—The Régime of terror aggravated by them—Historical connection—Arbitrary Government and the Inquisition—A dilettante in Torture—Universal espionage—'The tongues'—The Secret Police and the Tribunals of the Convention—Duration of this régime, and patience of the country under it—Suited to the National habits.
- IV. A system of perpetual threats—Summary executions—The *Doubina*—The executioner's axe—Desertion—Attempts to repress it—The brand—Outlawry—None of these measures suffice—A general *sauf-qui-peut*—'Near the Tsar, near death'—Absenteeism of the great families—Parvenus—The system thus rendered still more oppressive—Favouritism—Ancestral traditions—Their share in the Reform, and their influence on its scope.

I

I HAVE already, in the course of my remarks on the intellectual gifts of the great reformer, described them in active operation,—for action was his invariable condition. It now remains for me to show them in more direct connection with the realities of life, and of practical government.

Peter's ideas came to him in shoals. Their abundance is proved by the means he employed to protect the daily product of his active brain against the weakness of his own memory. He always carried tablets with him, which he constantly drew from his pocket and covered with hasty

notes. When these were filled—and this was all too soon—he would lay hands on the first piece of paper that came handy, and would even use the smallest clear space on any document within his reach,—whether its contents bore any relation to the subject of his momentary preoccupation or not. Thus, on the margin of a report on the proposed establishment of the St. Petersburg Academy, and following certain notes of his, respecting this particular business, the following lines, also in his handwriting, appear:—‘I must send orders to Roumiantsof, in the Ukraine, to exchange all the oxen he can get in the province for sheep, and to send some one abroad to learn how to take care of that sort of animal, how they are shorn, and how the wool is prepared for use.’¹

These ideas, if we look into them closely, are no more than suggestions, coming directly from without, and but slightly modified by any internal intellectual process; and they are more remarkable for their number than for their amplitude. Peter thought, just as he looked at things, in detail, and the chief quality of his mind was a marvellous reflecting power. But the mirror of his intellect would appear to us to be broken up into too many, and too strangely disposed, facets. A certain number of the surrounding objects,—and these often the nearest ones,—escaped his perception altogether. He spent years in the near vicinity of such a man as Possoshkof, and utterly ignored the existence of that profound and original thinker. Probably the poor philosopher suffered from the fact, that he was neither a German nor a Dutchman. In vain did he send some of his writings—his treaty on poverty and wealth, a huge and astonishing political encyclopædia—to his sovereign. In vain did he even recommend himself to his notice in that domain of practical performance, which Peter so particularly appreciated. Possoshkof was the first person to open salt-petre works in Russia. Prince Boris Galitzin gave him *fourteen* roubles for his discovery, and that was all he ever made by it. When, long after Peter’s death, people began to read his work, he was shut up in prison, and there died. No publisher touched it till half a century later—in 1799. Peter had no use for his knowledge and his talents. Yet, during his first visit to the Hague, he applied to the Secretary

¹ Staehlin, p. 170.

of the States General,¹ Fagel, to find him a man who would undertake to organise and direct his State Chancery,—another Dutch boatswain to erect another machine, and set it going! A short time later, in London, he took the advice of a Protestant ecclesiastic on the same subject. The *Apoleipomena* of Francis Lee,² show clear traces of this consultation, and some of his readers have discovered, beside a learned dissertation on the plan of Noah's Ark, the principle of those future administrative bodies, on which the working of Peter's Government was to hinge. That looking-glass of his was invariably turned westward. The Memoirs of Ostermann, unpublished as yet, are indeed said to contain this sally, ascribed to the Tsar: 'Europe is necessary to us for a few decades; after that, we will turn our back on it.'³ I have not been able to verify the quotation, but even the fact of its correctness would not convince me of the authenticity of the remark. Failing clear proof of that, I should be much more inclined to take it as the dictum of some modern Slavophile.

Action—with this man of perpetual motion—often preceded thought, or, at all events, followed immediately on it; and the number of his acts for this reason far exceeds the quantity of his ideas. Certain very essential notions he absolutely lacked, especially in matters of mere justice. In 1715, some of his sailors burnt certain Dutch ships, which they had taken for Swedish ones. He vowed it was Sweden's business to pay the damage, because the incident had occurred near Helsingfors; and Helsingfors stood on Swedish soil. And he really believed he was within his right. He forced the Swedish Chancellor, Piper, whom he had taken prisoner at Poltava, to sign a draft for 30,000 crowns on Stockholm, and, when the Swedish Government refused to pay, he threw the Chancellor,—a sick man, over 70 years of age,—into a dungeon, where he died the following year.⁴ I have already spoken of the inconsistency and confusion of mind, betrayed in all his behaviour, as regards religious matters. The *Registers of the Confessional*, about which Catherine was later to make such a mystery to Voltaire, and the penalties for refractory persons, were all of his invention. He used to sing

¹ Scheltema, *Russia and the Low Countries*, vol. i. p. 175-183.

² London, 1752.

³ Russian Archives, 1874, p. 1579.

⁴ Bergholz, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xix. p. 67.

in the church choirs, and each of his victories was celebrated by a service which lasted at least five hours. The thanksgiving for the victory of Poltava lasted seven, so as to give good measure to the God of armies. Poor-boxes were placed in all the churches he usually frequented, to receive the fines he inflicted on any members of the congregation whom he caught in unseemly attitudes, talking or sleeping. And an iron collar, which the severity of the Sovereign reserved for hardened offenders, is still preserved in the Convent of St. Alexander Nevski. Such persons heard their Mass, the following Sunday, firmly fastened by the neck to one of the pillars of the sacred edifice!¹

Yet, at other moments, both his words and actions seemed to indicate a leaning towards Protestantism. He would surround himself with Calvinists and Lutherans, would hold long doctrinal discussions, in which his orthodoxy often appeared very questionable, and would listen, with apparent devotion, to sermons that reeked of heresy. An edict, published in 1706, and approved by him, granted all Protestants free exercise of their worship.

But again, Theiner has published a series of documents proving the hopes felt at Rome—both before, and after, this decision—as to a possible reunion between the two churches. The Sovereign went so far, at certain moments, as to be gracious even to the Jesuits. He began, it must be confessed, by expelling them, in 1689, and the opinion he expressed of them at Vienna, in 1698, was far from friendly. ‘The Emperor,’ he was heard to say, ‘must know those people are much richer than he is, yet during the whole of his last war with Turkey, he never forced them to send him a man, or even a copper coin.’ Notwithstanding which, only eight years later, the Jesuit Fathers had colleges, both at Moscow, St. Petersburg, and at Archangel. This went on till 1719, then, all of a sudden, they were driven out again. Why? Because of a quarrel with the Austrian Court, the natural protector of the disciples of Loyola. Peter, not finding himself able to injure the Emperor, wreaked his bad temper on the Emperor’s *protégés*. All his principles, whether in religion or in politics, were of a piece with this sorry performance.²

¹ Scherer, vol. iii. p. 238.

² Golikof, vol. vii. pp. 237, 431. Weber, *Last Anecdotes*, p. 348.

As regards the Jews, he would seem to have had a settled determination of a sort. He could not abide them. He would not have them in his empire at any price. And yet, I find in his inner circle a Meyer, a most undoubted Jew, who, with his brother-in-law, Lups, served the Tsar in various operations connected with army finance and supply. The contractor was to be seen, close to his employer, sitting on his right, even at the deliberations of the Senate, and treated with every respect and consideration.¹

The fact is, that in everything, and above all things, Peter was *utilitarian*, and thus it came about, that, in matters of morality, his opinions and his line of conduct generally led him into practical cynicism. He made a law whereby infanticide was punished with death, but the lawgiver was astounded to find that Charles V. had visited adultery with the same penalty. 'Had he too many subjects?'² One day, at Vichnyï-Volotchok, in the Government of Novgorod, whither he had gone to inspect some canals in course of construction, he noticed, in the crowd, a young girl, whose pretty face, and air of embarrassment, both struck him. He beckoned to her. She came at once, but all abashed, hiding her face in her hands. He said something about finding her a husband. Her young companions burst out laughing. He inquired the reason, and was told the unhappy child had gone astray, and that her lover, a German officer, had left her with a baby in her arms. No crime this, in the Tsar's eyes! Sharply he took the girl's companions to task, sent for the infant, and openly declared his pleasure at the thought that he would some day be a good soldier. He kissed the mother, gave her a handful of roubles, and promised not to lose sight of her.³ He bestowed 10,000 ducats, and an order for banishment, on Tolstoï, the President of the commercial department of his Government, to help him to get rid of an Italian courtesan; but, that the money might not be altogether wasted, he contrived a secret negotiation at Vienna and at Rome, in which the fair lady was expected to act as a decoy.⁴

¹ Staehlin, p. 333.

² *Ibid.*

³ Staehlin, p. 233.

⁴ Campredon's Despatches, 17th Aug. 1722 (French Foreign Office).

II

Peter had, as I have endeavoured to show, a general conception of his duties, of the part he had to play, and of the rights it conferred on him. Yet, unconsciously, he mingled two principles, which—though he neither knew it nor cared—were in radical contradiction to each other. Starting from his own absolute individual sacrifice on the altar of the common interest, he arrived at the complete absorption of the whole community into his own all-engrossing individuality. Louis XIV.'s pretensions were nothing to his. He not only claimed that the Sovereign was the State, but that the whole life of the nation, past, present, and future, was identical with his own. He firmly believed that the intellectual and economic renewal—over which he did indeed preside, but which certainly proceeded, in part, from causes anterior to, and independent of, his action—was his personal work, his creation, his chattel, devoid of any reason for, or possibility of, existence, apart from him. He doubtless believed in a prolongation of this work, beyond the probable term of his own existence. All his efforts, in fact, were directed to this object. But, at the bottom of his heart, he could not conceive its existence without any participation of his. Hence his indifference in the matter of the dynastic question. It is no deluge that he foresees, after his own departure: he sees something not far removed from utter void.

His rights and duties, as he understood them, were quite a novelty to Russia. Until his time, the whole organisation of the country, including its political life, had been founded on the family idea. His father, the Tsar Alexis, had been no more than the chief of a race, and of a household; there was no society in his days, no suspicion of a reciprocity of rights and duties. This was the true Oriental conception of existence. Peter returned from the west, bringing with him a social principle, which he put forward with all his usual determination and exaggeration. He proclaimed himself the first servant of his country, and carried this idea to an extreme and fantastic point. In 1709 he wrote to Field-Marshal Shérémétief, asking him to support his application to the sovereign—that is to say, to Romodanovski—to be

promoted rear-admiral, humbly pleading his own cause, and reciting his services. In 1714 he received, and uncomplainingly accepted, the refusal of the Admiralty to his request for promotion. In 1723, when he was with the fleet at Revel, he asked for a doctor's certificate to enable him to get leave from the Lord High Admiral to sleep on shore.¹ He built himself a country house near Revel, which he christened *Catharinenthal*, and expressed astonishment, on the occasion of his first visit to it, at seeing the park quite empty. Did people think that he had set so many hands to work, and spent so much money, for no one's benefit but his own? The very next morning the town crier informed the inhabitants of Revel that the park was theirs, for their free and unrestricted use.² Immediately after his accession to the throne, he divided the considerable fortune amassed by his father and his grandfather into two parts. By means of the privileges and monopolies assigned to the sovereign, the Tsar Alexis had accumulated 10,734 *diessiattines* of cultivated land and 50,000 houses, bringing in a revenue of 200,000 roubles. Peter would keep none of this. He made all his wealth over to the State, only reserving the modest patrimony of the Romanofs, '800 souls' in the Government of Novgorod, for his private use.³ The only increase of income he would accept, was the usual pay of the various grades he successively held in the army and in the fleet. Receipts, signed by his hand, are still preserved, acknowledging the sum of 366 roubles, the amount of his annual pay as a chief carpenter. We also have his account book, which, though not very regularly kept, is full of curious details. 'In 1705 I earned 366 roubles for my work in the Voronéje shipyards, and 40 roubles as my captain's pay; in 1706, 156 roubles altogether, received at Kief; in 1707, received at Grodno, my colonel's pay, 460 roubles. *Expenses*—In 1707, gave at Vilna, for a monastery, 150 roubles; for stuffs bought in the same town, 39 roubles; to Anisia Kirillovna, for wearing apparel, 26 roubles; to Prince George Shahofskoï for wearing apparel, 41 roubles; to the aide-de-camp Barténief, for a very important errand, 50 roubles.'⁴ Going one day round

¹ Sbornik, vol. xxv. p. 152. Golikof, vol. v. p. 257. Bergholz, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xxi. p. 281.

² Scherer, vol. iii. p. 65.

³ Karnovitch, *Great Russian Fortunes* (St. Petersburg), 1885, p. 27.

⁴ Cabinet, Series I., No. 64, *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. iii. p. 31.

the forges at Istié, in the Government of Riazan, he mingled with the workmen, toiled, hammer in hand, for several hours, and then counted up his gains. He had earned 18 *altines* (copper coins of 3 kopecks each) for a corresponding number of poods of metal, on which he had spent his strength. He drew the money, and gleefully announced that as soon as he got back to Moscow he should go to the *Riady* (a sort of bazaar), and there spend it on a pair of shoes, those he had on his feet being quite worn out.¹

Something there was, at once touching and imposing, about this attitude of mind, but it had another side. To begin with, there was a good deal of whim about it, and of this the great man himself was well aware. Writing to Catherine from Helsingfors, in 1713, he says, 'On the 6th of this month the Admiral promoted me to the rank of General, whereupon I beg to congratulate the General's wife. A strange business! I was made a Rear-Admiral while I was campaigning on the Steppes, and here I am a General while I am at sea.'² Nartof's story of the Tsar's meeting with Romodanovski, on the Préobrajenskoïé Road, throws a comical light on the perpetual ambiguity which it pleased him to keep up, between the reality of his rank, and the fiction of his assumed position. Peter, seated, as usual, in his unpretending vehicle, saluted the mock sovereign, giving him his title, '*Mein gnädiger Her Kaiser*,' but forgetting to uncover. Romodanovski—in a splendid carriage, surrounded by a numerous suite, and preceded by a footman, who drove back the crowd with a heavy whip, shouting 'Stand back! hats off!'—swept by like a whirlwind, casting a furious glance on the real sovereign. An hour later he sent for Peter Mihailof, and without himself rising, or offering him a seat, roughly addressed him, inquiring what he meant by not baring his head when he saluted him. 'I did not recognise your Majesty in your Tartar dress,' was Peter's reply.³ And his Majesty did not press the matter, remembering, doubtless, a certain letter received from Peter Mihailof in consequence of a complaint made by James Bruce, and thus beginning: 'Wild beast! (*Zvier*) how long will you go on ill-treating people thus? Even here' (Peter was then in Holland) 'the wretches you have maimed come to me. Let

¹ Nartof, p. 55.

² *Correspondence*, 1861 edition, p. 34.

³ Nartof, p. 93.

there be an end to your too great intimacy with Ivashka (drunkenness)!'¹

Another, and a much more serious, fault appears. All this false humility, and all the very real self-sacrifice which goes with it, do not prevent the relations of this man with the nation he professes to serve—and for which, indeed, he strips himself and sacrifices his whole existence—from being not only of the most exacting—that might be justified—but of the most arbitrarily despotic nature. He evidently looks on all service and sacrifice as being only the due of that towering and merciless ideal, to which every one, like himself, is bound to contribute. But, granting this, he might have been expected to make some allowance for natural lack of aptitude, for weakness, for mental inadequacy, and individual incapacity. He would not even admit the existence of such failings. The man who did not take up his appointed place, and there perform the task assigned him, was held a traitor, a relapser, and, as such, was forthwith outlawed. His property, if he had any, was sequestered,—for, being good for nothing, he was not worthy to possess anything. He was allotted a small subsistence out of his own income, the rest passed to his relations, and their mere declaration, confirmed by him, and presented to the Senate, sufficed for the transfer. If he was old enough to marry, he was forbidden to take a wife, lest his children should be like himself,—for the State had no need of such persons.² At Moscow, in December 1704, Peter himself inspected all the staff at his disposal, *Boiars*, *Stolniks*, *Dvorianin*, and other officials of every kind. Against each name he wrote with his own hand some special duty to be performed.³ If any man failed in his functions, or tried to slip out of their performance, his punishment, at the very least, was civil death.

But was the toiler free when once his task was finished? No, indeed; for the principle, in virtue of which he had been called upon to labour, claimed him altogether. His body and his soul, his thoughts, his occupations, his very pleasures belonged to the Tsar. And here we see the consequence of the confusion between the idea itself and the man who repre-

¹ *Correspondence*, Dec. 22, 1697, vol. i. p. 226. Compare Oustrialof, vol. iii.

p. 95.

² Ukase, dated Dec. 6, 1722. Golikof, vol. ix. p. 83.

³ Golikof, vol. ii. p. 513.

has suffering from the

sented it. There was only one goal, and one road which led to it. The Tsar led the van, and all the rest must follow. His subjects had to do what he did, think as he thought, believe what he believed, and even take their amusements when, and as, he took his. They had to do without bridges across the Neva, because he liked crossing the river in a boat, and they had to shave their beards, because his beard grew sparsely. They must even get drunk when he got drunk; dress themselves up as cardinals, or as monkeys, if that pleased him; scoff at God and His saints, if the fancy took him; and very likely spend seven hours with him in church on the following day. Any resistance, any weakness, a mere lack of comprehension, a sign of visible effort, a symptom of disgust, or a mere failure in understanding instructions, was punished with the rod, the lash, or even the headsman's axe. The so-called servant would raise his hand upon his master, to strike, and often to kill him. In March 1704, Prince Alexis Bariatinski was whipped in the public square for having failed to bring up a few recruits for inspection. In that very same year Gregory Kamynin underwent the same punishment for having refused to share in the delights of the *Slavlénie*.¹

III

These contradictions, flagrant as they are, can be explained. Peter was a violent reformer. His reform was revolutionary in character, and his government consequently partook of those conditions of existence, and of action, which have always been the inseparable concomitants of a political and social state of revolution. Again, his government, in spite of its revolutionary character, was the outcome, to a certain extent, of the former course of the national history, customs, and traditions. Of this fact Peter himself was evidently conscious. On one of the triumphal arches, raised at Moscow, on the occasion of the peace with Sweden, in 1721, the effigy of the reigning Tsar was associated with that of Ivan the Terrible. This idea emanated from the Duke of Holstein. The uncle seems to sanction the nephew's action, and thus to claim an historical connection,

¹ Jeliaboujski, *Memoirs*, pp. 214, 225.

which is, indeed, constantly confirmed by all that nephew's acts and ways of thought.¹ But, though principles might differ, practice daily gave the lie to theory. Theory, in this case, was frequently liberal in the extreme; practice almost always stood for despotism, arbitrary rule, inquisition, downright terrorism. Peter's reign was a reign of terror, as Cromwell's had been, as Robespierre's was to be, but with a special stamp of savagery of its own, derived from his Asiatic origin. In 1691, Basil Galitzin, Sophia's unfortunate political partner, was visited, even in his distant and cruel exile, by a fresh criminal prosecution. A *tcherniets* (monk) had heard the Ex-regent foretell the Tsar's approaching death. Put to the question, several times over, he still adhered to his denunciation. The proofs seemed clear enough, yet the enquiry ended by establishing that the monk had never seen the exile, and had never travelled to Iarensk, where he was interned. The whole story had been invented '*ot bezoumia*,' in a fit of frenzy, a form of mental alienation common both in Ivan's reign and in Peter's, resulting from the constant and haunting terror of the secret police, and of the torture chamber. The whole system was a part of the national tradition. The Russian proverb, 'The knout is no angel, but it teaches men to tell the truth,' contains at once its sanction and its apology. Of that fact Peter was deeply convinced. He was himself the most eager of inquisitors, delighting in the monstrous art, drawing up manuscript notes for the conduct of examinations, in which he frequently took a personal share, watching the smallest details, laying stress on every word, spying the slightest gesture. He caused a private jeweller, suspected of misappropriation, to be brought to his palace for examination. Twice over, for an hour each time, he put him to the combined tortures of the strappado and the knout, and he cheerfully related all the grisly incidents of the business to the Duke of Holstein, that very evening.² With an army of spies and detectives already at his beck and call, he would personally supplement their efforts, listening behind doors, and moving about amongst the tables during banquets, when enforced libations had heated men's heads, and loosened their tongues. He would set men to watch

¹ Staehlin, p. 217.

² Siémiewski, *The Empress Catherine II.* (St. Petersburg, 1884), p. 154.

and supervise those officials, civil or military, who were stationed too far from him to be under his personal eye. He corresponded with these spies, and gave them very extensive powers. Field-Marshal Shérémétief, who was employed to put down a revolt in Astrakhan, was thus watched by a sergeant of the guard, Shtchépotief. Baron Von Schleinitz, the Tsar's minister in Paris, was spied on by one of his own copying clerks, named Iourine.¹ My readers will recognise the methods which sent Bellegarde, Dubois, and Delmas, to represent the convention in the camp of General Dumouriez. There is a close family resemblance between all revolutions.

A contemporary memoir writer describes a single year of the great Russian reign, as being hardly more than an enumeration of tortures and executions.² The arrest of one culprit brought about the arrest of ten, twenty, or even a hundred more. The man was first of all put to the torture, to force him to give the names of his accomplices, which names he gave, not unfrequently, at random. When his memory failed him, a sort of coarse canvas hood was put over his head, and he was led through the streets, in search of passers-by, whom he might point out to the officers of justice. Then a shout would rise, more terrible even than the call of 'fire,' and the most populous quarters would straightway become a desert. 'The tongue, the tongue,' thus the populace designated the involuntary, but generally docile instrument of this hunt for culprits, and forthwith there was a general *saute qui peut*.³ Secret accusations were of common occurrence. A series of ukases provided for them, offering encouragement and bounties to informers, and threatening any persons knowing anything affecting the safety of the Tsar or of the empire, who hesitated to come forward, with the most terrible chastisements.⁴ The usual bounty was a sum of six roubles, but in special circumstances, it rose much higher. In 1722, ten bags, each containing 100 roubles, were laid, with a lantern beside them, in one of the Moscow squares. The contents, according to an announcement,

¹ Golikof, vol. viii. p. 406.

² Jéliaboujski, p. 26.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 274 (Editor's note).

⁴ Nov. 1st, 1705; March 2nd, 1711; Aug. 25th and Oct. 25th, 1715; Jan. 25th, Sept. 26th, and Dec. 24th, 1716; April 16th and 19th, 1717; Jan. 19th, 1718; April 16th, 1719; Feb. 9th and July 22nd, 1720; Feb. 19th, 1721; Jan. 11th, 1722.

placed on the same spot, were to belong to any person who should give information as to the author of a pamphlet against the Tsar, which had been found in one of the churches within the Kreml. The informer was further promised a gift of land, and a post in the public service. Any man who chose to pronounce the time-honoured formula, *Slovo i dielo* (literally 'word and action'), and thus to affirm his knowledge or suspicion of any act punishable by the secret police, could call for a criminal enquiry. And a very small thing, an imprudent word or even less, was held to justify suspicion. A peasant was put to the torture, and condemned to hard labour for life, for having, when in a state of intoxication, done obeisance to the Tsar 'in an unusual manner.' Another shared his fate for not having been aware that the Tsar had assumed the title of Emperor. A priest who had spoken of the sovereign's illness, and had appeared to admit the possibility of his death, was sent as a convict to Siberia. A woman found letters, traced by an unknown hand, and in an unknown tongue, on a barrel of beer in her own cellar. She was examined, could give no explanation, and died under the knout. Another woman's screams and wild convulsions disturbed the service in church. She was blind, and probably epileptic, but there was just a chance that she might have deliberately attempted to cause scandal. She was put to the question. A tipsy student who had spoken some unseemly words, was given thirty lashes with the knout; his nostrils were torn out, and he was sent to hard labour for life. I quote from official documents, from the minutes of the Russian Star Chamber,¹ and, save for the knout, I could easily have mistaken them for the minutes of the Courts presided over by Couthon, and St Just.

Peter was not, indeed, altogether devoid of any idea of clemency. He is superior, in this matter, to the ordinary type of revolutionists, and justifies the idea I have formed of his character. In 1708, I find him desiring Dolgorouki to treat those members of Boulavin's insurrection, who should willingly make their submission, with indulgence. When Dolgorouki betrays his astonishment, the Tsar insists, pointing out the necessity of distinguishing cases in which severity was indispensable from those in which it may be

¹ Siémievski, *Glovo i Dielo*, p. 51.

relaxed. But Dolgorouki's wonder proves the settled ferocity of the general tendency of Peter's rule.

{ This severity lasted till the end of his reign. How came it to have been so long patiently endured? Surely because it corresponded with the national customs. The whole nation was a party to it. There was no public sentiment of dislike to the person or the act of an informer. A century and a half later, this condition of mind remained almost unchanged. The most popular lines, probably, of the most popular of all the national poets, describe a Cossack's ride across the Steppes, carry an accusation to the Tsar.¹

IV

A special characteristic of the great Reformer's methods is his incessant use of threats. When Niéplouief, his Resident at Constantinople, was taking his final leave, he addressed him by the name of Father. The Tsar interrupted him, 'A father I will be to thee if thy conduct is good—if not, I will be thy merciless judge!'² He ordered General Repnin to prevent wood, sent from Poland, from being admitted into Riga, adding, 'If a single faggot gets through, I swear by God, thy head shall be cut off!'³ And this was no empty threat. When he wrote to his friend Vinnius, in 1696, in reference to a careless correspondent, 'Tell him I will lay what he fails to put on paper on his own back,'⁴ we feel he used no figure of speech. He would often send for officials, high and low, with whom he had to find fault, into his cabinet, and would there indicate his displeasure by a sound drubbing with his *doubina*. This, indeed, was considered a mark of favour—it being the sovereign's will that, on such occasions, fault and punishment alike should be kept secret. The only persons present were such faithful servants as Nartof, and the culprits composed their countenances as best they could, before leaving the Imperial presence, so that no sign of the occurrence might appear. As a general rule, to complete the illusion, they were commanded to dinner on the

¹ Poushkin, *Poltava*, Canto I. (Collected Works, 1887 edition), vol. iii. p. 118.

² Golikof, vol. viii. p. 132.

³ 19th May 1705, *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. iii. p. 346.

⁴ 15th July 1696, *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 90.

same day. But occasionally the *doubina* did its work in public, in the offices of some administrative body, or even in the open street. Sometimes—and this was a great proof of the sovereign's esteem and friendship for the person so commissioned—a third party was deputed to administer the extra-judicial correction. When Captain Siéniavin took the two first Swedish vessels which fell into Russian hands, he at once became the chief favourite of the moment. Peter sent for him, and said, 'To-morrow you will dine in the house of such a person; during the meal you will pick a quarrel with him, and you will give him, in my presence, fifty blows with your stick, neither more nor less.' And the sovereign evidently considered this participation in the punishment inflicted by the Imperial will, which chastised one man and rewarded another, as reflecting considerable honour on both.¹ During the Persian campaign, another temporary favourite, Wolynski, was accosted one night, close to the Imperial tent, and, without a word of explanation, overwhelmed by a shower of blows. All at once, the Tsar held his hand. The darkness and a chance resemblance had misled him; there had been a miscarriage of justice. All he vouchsafed was coolly to remark, 'No matter! Thou art sure one day to deserve what I have given thee now; thou wilt only have to remind me, then, that the debt is paid.' And the opportunity was not long in coming.²

The Tsar's irascibility, and habitual fits of rage, certainly had something to do with these summary chastisements, but they were also the outcome of a certain deliberate system. Coming one day, unexpectedly, into a naval captain's cabin, Peter noticed an open book, which the officer vainly endeavoured to conceal. Glancing at the page, he read the following aphorism aloud: 'Russia is like a cod-fish; unless you beat it constantly, you can do nothing with it.' The Tsar smiled, and departed, saying, 'That is well! The books you read are useful books. You shall be promoted!'³

The *doubina*, as I have said, was kept for those he loved, and would fain spare; the rest had to do with a very different form of the judicial power. Uniformity of punishment is one of the chief characteristics of the criminal legislation of that period. The legislator never measured his severity by the

¹ *Memoirs* (published by Prince Galitzin, Paris, 1862), p. 133.

² Scherer, vol. iii. p. 32.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 15.

degree of culpability inherent to the crimes to be suppressed—all he thought of was his personal interest in their repression. Now as this interest, which was also the interest of the State, admitted of no gradation, neither did the punishments to be inflicted admit of any. The civil ukases and regulations were just as ferocious as those applied to military matters. Death to the soldier marching to the assault, who shall give vent to 'wild cries,' or stop to pick up a wounded man, 'even his own father.' Death to the office clerk, who should not complete a given piece of work within the time the law prescribed. Death, in almost every imaginable case.¹

Towards the end of the reign, the mutual dread and distrust had grown so universal, that life in the Tsar's immediate circle was really intolerable. He watched every one, and every one watched him, and watched his neighbour, with anxious and suspicious eyes. He concealed his smallest plans, and every one else did the same. Every business matter, whether diplomatic or other, was shrouded in impenetrable mystery. Conversation was carried on in whispers; correspondence was crammed with ambiguous terms. At a gathering in the house of Prince Dolgorouki, in February 1723, Ostermann addressed Campredon, and drew him gradually and cautiously into a window. He had a message for him, he said, for the Tsar. Campredon was all ears, when, suddenly, the expected disclosure died on the Chancellor's lips, and he would utter nothing but commonplaces. A third party had, as he fancied, drawn too near them. Then came the Tsar himself. He made the French Minister sit familiarly beside him, and lavished compliments upon him. But when the envoy tried to come to the point, he pretended not to hear him, drowned his voice with noisy exclamations, and then left him, whispering the words, 'I will give orders to have terms arranged with you.' All this fuss was over the marriage of the Grand Duchess Elizabeth with the Duke de Chartres; and the first appointment to talk the matter over, made subsequently by Ostermann with Campredon, was fixed for six o'clock in the morning, as being more likely to escape observation.²

Two years before, in the midst of the negotiations begun

¹ *Peter I.'s Writings and Correspondence*, vol. iii. p. 77. Filippof, *Peter the Great and the Penal Laws*, page 283, etc.

² Campredon's Despatches, Feb. 12, 1723 (French Foreign Office).

in December 1721, to guarantee his own succession, the Tsar's interviews with Campredon had taken place in the house of Jagoujinski, and without Ostermann's knowledge. The first thing Peter then demanded, was to be enlightened on a point which was of the utmost importance to himself, but which had no relation whatsoever to the subject under discussion. He had, it would appear, during his visit to Paris, begun, and personally carried on, some other negotiation, the secret of which had been betrayed. How and by whom? Campredon was desired to send a courier to the Regent, with orders to bring back a prompt reply to these questions. The Regent, according to his wont, carefully sent the despatch on to the King of England, who, quite unmoved, wrote on the margin, 'All this convinces me that the Tsar's ministers, who are endeavouring to destroy each other, have found means to inspire him with suspicions as to some of their number, and that he is dying to find a pretext to have them impaled as soon as possible. I believe this to be the sole reason for his curiosity.' And further on he writes, 'This confirms me in my conviction that the Tsar desires to impale somebody.'¹

It is a curious fact, that all the rigorous penalties by which the implacable ruler endeavoured to enforce that universal service, which he desired to impose, on his subjects, did not succeed in preventing numerous and constantly increasing desertions. In vain did he answer these by increased severity. A regulation of the War Department, dated 1712, decreed the use of the brand for military recruits, as well as for convicts. There is even a legend connected with this matter, according to which the Tsar, in his contempt for the ancient faith, marked his soldiers with the sign of Antichrist. The brand chosen was, in fact, a cross, tattooed on the left hand; the outline was pricked into the skin, and covered with a pinch of powder which was set alight. It is worthy of remark, that one of Peter's letters, with reference to this barbarous custom, is also filled with directions, which prove the greatest solicitude for the comfort of the poor tattooed fellows, during their long marches to rejoin their *dépôts*.¹ The practical-mindedness of the great Reformer is clearly shown in this contradictory epistle—a practical-mindedness

¹ Campredon's Despatches, Dec. 21, 1721.

² Russian Archives, 1873, pp. 2067 and 2296.

suggesting the employment of the most healthy, and therefore the most paying, methods of treating those human forces which his merciless eagerness led him, at the same time, cruelly to overtax. In civil matters, desertion, as I have already said, was punished with infamy and outlawry. 'If,' so runs a ukase, published in 1722, 'any man should rob one of these deserters, wound him, or kill him, he is not liable to punishment.' The names of the outlaws were made known to the public by means of lists hung upon gallows. The half of a deserter's goods was promised to the person who should take him alive, even if the capturer was the serf of the captured man. The other half went to the Treasury.¹ And still the desertions went on.

'Near the Tsar, near death,' says a Russian proverb. Many people preferred safety of any kind. The presence, in Peter's circle, of so many parvenus of low extraction,—Menshikof, Loukin, Troïékourof, Vladimirof, Sklaïef, Pospiólof,—is explained, independently of his personal preferences, by this general *sauve qui peut* amongst the great Russian families.² And the part played by these parvenus, in the political system of which they formed an integral part, made it still more oppressive. Peter's personal government was often the hardest, the most overwhelming, the most disquieting of realities. But it not unfrequently became a mere fiction, and the change brought no improvement. In spite of his huge expenditure of labour and of energy, in spite of all his constant goings and comings, the Tsar could not see everything with his own eyes, and do everything with his own hands. During his absences with his army, when he was travelling abroad, or through the huge provinces of his own realm, power passed into the hands of Menshikof and his fellows. They used it, and more frequently abused it, after their own fashion. They were called on, periodically, to render up an account, which was not unfrequently settled by the executioner. But, living as they did, like every one else, from hand to mouth, subject to the common terror and the universal bewilderment, they took full advantage of their short hours of freedom, and thus increased the overwhelming weight and cruel pressure of the terrible Juggernaut which, sooner or later, was to crush them all. The system of favouritism which has cost Russia so much gold, so many tears,

¹ Golikof, vol. ix. p. 48.

² See Strahlenberg, p. 238, etc.

and such streams of blood, was not indeed of Peter's own creation. It was a legacy from the past, which he had not courage to repudiate, which indeed he consecrated, and the tradition of which he developed, by his own adherence to it.

He was, in some respects, even in that economic department, wherein, at first sight, he would appear to have worked such a radical change, the true heir and follower of his ancestral traditions. He did away with that system of monopolies and royal privileges which had made his predecessors the foremost merchants in their country. But, in September 1713, having to fetch a sum of money from Lubeck to St. Petersburg, he ordered the cargo of the galliot, which was to be sent on this errand, to be completed with merchandise likely to sell at a good profit in St. Petersburg.¹ This is quite in the manner of the old rulers of the Kreml, all of them greedy of every kind of profit, and by no means scorning the very smallest. At a masquerade, during the fêtes given at Moscow in 1722, I notice the description of a bearded Neptune who played quite a special part. The Tsar's faithful subjects were invited to fasten golden ducats to the hairs of that symbolic beard, which was shortly to fall under the scissors of a barber,—none other than Peter himself. A captain of the Guard, accompanied by a clerk, followed the sea-god through the streets, and carefully registered the ducats, and the names of those who gave them.²

Even his wonderful knowledge of stage effect was connected, in a way, with the spirit of bygone times. 'Whenever the smallest advantage is gained,' observes the Dutch Resident, Van Der Hulst, in 1700, 'there is a noise made about it here, as if the whole universe had been overthrown.' During the disastrous period of the Swedish war, salvoes of cannon, fireworks, extra promotion lists, and distributions of rewards, followed each other in quick succession. This was an endeavour, no doubt, and a laudable one, to mislead public opinion, so as to prevent discouragement, and also, perhaps, to put heart into the Tsar himself. But it was quite in Sophia's manner, and thoroughly Oriental in spirit. The English Envoy Whitworth, when at table with the Tsar, in 1705, was confronted with a Russian soldier, who, so he averred, had, with forty-four comrades, prisoners like him-

¹ Golikof, vol. v. p. 536.

² Bergholz, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xx. p. 385.

self, been mutilated by the Swedes. Peter made this the text of a long sermon on the barbarity of his enemies, which, he declared, far exceeded that of the nation over which he ruled. 'Never,' he vowed, 'had any Swedish prisoner been so treated in Russia, and he would forthwith send these forty-five mutilated men into his different regiments, to warn their comrades of what they had to expect from such a treacherous enemy.' The Tsar's trick failed. Whitworth was convinced that he was being made game of, all the more as he had naturally not understood a word of the Russian soldier's story.¹ But the whole incident is thoroughly Byzantine in its nature.

This peculiarity it was, in part, which bound the Tsar so closely and so firmly to the flesh and spirit of his people, to their past and to their present,—and which has made him so permanent a factor in their very existence. Had his despotism been more logical, less influenced by the very air of the country he was sent to rule, its results would have been more short-lived.

¹ Despatch, dated 2nd May 1705. *Sbornik*, vol. xxxix. p. 79.

CHAPTER IV

PRIVATE LIFE

- I. The cottage at St. Petersburg—The pilot's dinner—Katia—Palaces and country houses—The lime tree at Strielna—Peterhof—Tsarkoïe-Sielo—Revel.
- II. A day in the great man's life—His morning work—His table—Private meals and State dinners—Catherine's kitchen—What Peter ate and drank—Court luxury and domestic simplicity—Menshikof's coach and the Tsar's cabriolet—His dress—His roughness and coarse habits—Cockroaches.
- III. His amusements—Neither a sportsman nor a gambler—The water his chief delight—Winter cruises—All St Petersburg at sea—Animals—Finette and Lisette—A dog's part in politics.
- IV. Social habits—Meeting with the Margravine of Baireuth—In the German suburb—Boon companions—The Tsar's *coucher*—His pillow—His intimate circle—The *Dienshtchiks*—A favourite's marriage—Maria Matviéief.

I

IN November, 1703, the first merchant vessel, a Dutch galliot, laden with salt and wine from Friesland, entered the mouth of the Neva. The Governor of St Petersburg invited the captain to a banquet, and lavished presents on him and on his crew.¹ But before this entertainment took place, he had to accept the hospitality of the pilot, who had directed the course of his ship into harbour. He dined with him and with his wife in a modest cottage on the river bank. The fare consisted of national dishes, to which a few dainties, peculiar to his own country, had been added. At dessert, not desiring to be behindhand in politeness and generosity, the worthy captain drew from his wallet, first of all, a delicious cheese, and then a piece of linen, which he presented to the mistress of the house, with the request that he would permit him to kiss her cheek. 'Let him have his way, Katia,' said the pilot, 'the linen is of the finest, and will make you chemises

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iv. part i. p. 252.

better than you ever dreamt of wearing in your youth.' Just at that moment the Dutchman, hearing a door open behind him, turned round, and almost fainted. A man, evidently an important personage, covered with gold embroidery, and starred with decorations, stood on the threshold, and bowed to the ground as he replied to the words of welcome addressed to him by Katia's husband.

I am half afraid this story is not true; in any case, it must have occurred some years later than 1703. Catherine does not appear, at that date, to have taken up her residence with her future husband. But, otherwise, there is an air of likelihood about it. It is very characteristic of Peter's general behaviour, and of his most intimate surroundings. He was always piloting ships, Dutch or others, receiving sea captains at his own table, and taking them in by the extreme simplicity of his manners and of his surroundings. As for the cottage on the river bank, it may still be seen at St Petersburg. It was built by Dutch workmen, on the model of those seen by the sovereign at Zaandam, in 1697. A framework of roughly-hewn tree trunks supports a low roof, on which the gay, red, Dutch tiles are replaced by wooden shingles. It contains two ground-floor rooms, of very modest proportions, separated by a narrow passage, and a kitchen, with a garret above. There are only seven windows. The exterior is painted in the Dutch style, red and green. On the apex of the roof, and at its two corners, a martial-looking decoration has been superadded—a mortar and lighted shells, all carved in wood. Within, the walls are hung with white canvass, and the door and window-frames painted with bouquets of flowers. The room on the right hand side was used as a working and a reception room. That on the left served at once for dining-room and bed-chamber.¹

This latter apartment has now been turned into a chapel, where the faithful pray, and burn candles, before an image of our Lord, below which Elizabeth caused the first words of the Lord's Prayer to be inscribed. I have never seen it otherwise than closely crowded. In the other room a few souvenirs have been collected—wooden furniture made by the great man's own hands, and "done up," alas! in 1850; a

¹ Boulhakovski, *Peter's House* (St. Petersburg, 1891). Roubane, *Topographical Description of St. Petersburg* (St. Petersburg, 1799).

cupboard, two chests of drawers, a table, a bench on which he often sat outside his door to breathe the fresh air, and watch his standard floating over the ramparts of the *Petro-pavloskaia Kriépost*; utensils, and tools, which he once used.

This cottage, small and far from luxurious as it was, hardly measuring more than 18 yards by 6, was very dear to its master. He regretted it deeply, when he felt his duty was to leave it for a palace, itself a very modest one. Though he loved to build towns, he had little taste for dwelling in them. In 1708, he began to look about for a more rural residence, in the far from attractive neighbourhood of his chosen capital. His first choice fell on a retired spot on the banks of a cool and rapidly-running stream, the Strielka. Here, in one season, and not unfrequently putting his own hand to the work, he built himself a rather more comfortable dwelling, with two living-rooms and eight bed-chambers. Catherine was with him by this time, and children were beginning to come. No trace of this house remains; but we are still shown a huge lime tree, in the branches of which an arbour was built, reached by a staircase. Here Peter often sat smoking, and drinking tea out of Dutch cups, to the hissing of a samovar, also brought from Holland—for this utensil, now become so thoroughly national, and known all over Europe under its picturesque Russian name, came, like everything else, from Holland.¹ The only change made in its constitution by the Russians was the substitution of charcoal, a far cheaper mode of heating, for the original system of burning spirits of wine. Close by the lime tree, there are some majestic oaks, known as the Tsar's nurselings (*Piétrovskiié Pitomtsy*). He planted them himself. He also grew, from seed gathered by his own hands in the Hartz Mountains, the fir trees which stand at a little distance, and shade the approaches to the castle. For a castle there was, at last, in this hermitage at Strielna. When Catherine became an empress, the demands of her new rank had, perforce, to be considered, and accommodation found for her Court. But Peter soon took a sudden dislike to this country residence. It had grown too closely inhabited, and too noisy for his taste. He rid himself of it, bestowing it on his daughter, the Grand Duchess Anne,

¹ The meaning of the Russian word samovar is 'that which boils of itself.'

in 1702, and departed to Peterhof.¹ Alas! the Imperial Court and Courtiers pursued him, and a yet more sumptuous palace, with a park in the French style, and fountains, copied on those of Versailles, soon rose at Peterhof. Peter refused, at all events, to live in it himself. He had his Dutch house, which even now bears that name, close by. Though a very modest residence, it betrayed a certain amount of Flemish luxury, which removed it very far from the roughness of his earliest homes. The walls of the bedroom, a very small one, were covered with well-varnished white tiles, the floor with a flowered waxcloth, and the chimneypiece was adorned with the most magnificent specimens of Delft china. As Peter lay in bed, he could see Kronsloot, and count the vessels in his fleet. A few steps brought him to a little harbour, whence he could go by boat, down a canal, to the mouth of the Neva.

The number of the Tsar's country houses constantly increased, in consequence of his nomadic habits. He had one, a wooden building, like all the others, at Tsarkoïe-Sielo. This contained six rooms, which he occasionally shared with Catherine. According to a somewhat doubtful legend, the name of this locality, since so celebrated, is derived from that of a lady called Sarri, to whose house Peter would occasionally come, and drink a draught of milk. The Finnish name of the place, *Saari-mojs*, meaning 'high' or 'raised' village, would seem a more probable derivation. The Tsar possessed a little wooden house at Revel, before he built the ugly and heavy-looking palace which was erected towards the close of his reign. He always kept clear of palaces, as far as he found that possible. The Revel cottage, which has been preserved, contains a bedroom, a bathroom (*bania*), a dining-room, and a kitchen. In the sleeping-chamber there is a double bed of somewhat narrow proportions, with a sort of platform at the foot, on which the three *dienshtchiks* (orderlies), charged with watching over their master and mistress's slumbers, were permitted to stretch themselves.

II

Peter was never a great sleeper; he was generally up by

¹ Pylaïet, *The Forgotten Past of the Neighbourhood of St. Petersburg* (St. Petersburg, 1889), p. 210.

five o'clock, and even an hour or two before, if he had pressing business—a secret council to hold, a courier to send off in a hurry, or a departing ambassador, who needed extra instructions. When the Tsar left his bed, he would walk about his room for half an hour, wearing a short dressing-gown, which exposed his bare legs, and a white cotton night-cap trimmed with green ribbons. This, no doubt, was his moment for ruminating over, and preparing, the day's work. When he was ready, his secretary, Makarof, appeared, and read him the daily reports of the different heads of departments. Then he breakfasted quickly, but heartily, and went out,—on foot, if it were fine, otherwise in a very modest cabriolet with one horse. He went to the naval dockyards, inspected the ships in course of construction, and invariably wound up by a visit to the Admiralty. Here, he would swallow a glass of brandy, and lunch off a biscuit, and then work on till one o'clock, when he dined. The kitchen of the little palace, which now stands in the Summer Garden at St. Petersburg, is next the dining-room, with a hatch through which the dishes were passed. Peter never could endure the presence of numerous servants during a meal. And this peculiarity was exceedingly Dutch. When he dined alone with his wife, as was his usual habit, they were waited upon by a single page, chosen from amongst the youngest in his service, and the Empress's most confidential waiting-woman. If the party was increased by the presence of a few guests, the chief cook, Velten, assisted by one or two *dienshtchiks*, handed the dishes. Once dessert was on the table, and a bottle placed before each guest, all the servants were ordered to withdraw.¹

These dinners were quite unceremonious; no others were ever given in the Tsar's house. All State dinners were given in Menshikof's Palace, and he it was who presided over the sumptuous repasts, consisting of as many as 200 courses, cooked by French cooks, and served on quantities of gold plate and priceless china. There were two dining-rooms in the great Summer Palace, one on the ground floor, and another on the first, each with its own kitchen beside it. Peter found time, in 1714, to give his most minute attention to the arrangement of these kitchens. He insisted on their being comparatively spacious, with tiled walls, so, he said,

¹ Staehlin, p. 109. Nartof, p. 53.

that the *haziaika* (mistress of the house) might be able to look after the oven comfortably, and even occasionally prepare dishes of her own.¹ Catherine, though no *cordon bleu*—she was supposed to have given most of her attention to the washing, in her former master's household—was not without culinary talents.

Peter himself was a very large eater. At Berlin, in October 1712, we find him supping with the Prince Royal, after having already supped with his own chancellor, Golovkin, and eating, at both tables, with the heartiest appetite. Manteuffel, the King of Poland's minister, in the description of the second of these repasts, gives great praise to the Tsar, who, he declares, 'behaved himself with perfect decorum, so far at all events, as I could see or hear.' And before offering his hand to the Queen, he even put on 'a rather dirty glove.'²

The Tsar carried his knife and spoon and fork about with him. The spoon was made of wood mounted in ivory. The knife and fork were iron, with green bone handles. He liked the simple dishes of his country, such as *shtchi* and *kasha*, preferred black bread, and never ate sweet things nor fish, which always disagreed with him. On special Fast days, he lived on fruit and farinaceous foods. During the three last years of his life, he would, from time to time, in obedience to his doctor's entreaties, give up the use, or at all events the abuse, of wine. Hence that reputation for sobriety ascribed to him by certain travellers, who visited Russia at that period, —amongst others by Lang, who accompanied the sovereign during his Persian Campaign. On these occasions, he drank *kislyie-shtchi* (sour kvass) flavoured with English small beer,³ but was never able to resist the temptation of indulging in a few glasses of brandy. But indeed these fits of abstinence never lasted long. He soon went back to his old habits, save that he avoided any mixture of alcoholic beverages, and restricted himself to drinking Medoc and Cahors. At the very end, by the advice of a Scotch doctor, Erskine, who treated him for diarrhoea, he drank Hermitage.⁴

The Tsar's stable arrangements were simple. The palace

¹ Golikof, vol. v. p. 570 (note).

² Letter to Count Flemming, Sbornik, vol. xx. p. 59.

³ This would appear to be a probable translation of 'baume d'Angleterre.'

⁴ Staehlin, p. 272, etc.

coach-houses only contained two coaches, with four places in each, for the use of the Empress, and the Emperor's cabriolet, with which we have already made acquaintance. Nothing more. This cabriolet was painted red, and hung very low. It was replaced, in winter, by a small sledge. Peter never got into a coach, unless he was called upon to do honour to some distinguished guest, and then he always made use of Menshikof's carriages. These were magnificent. Even when the favourite went out alone, he drove in a gilded fan-shaped coach, drawn by six horses, in crimson velvet trappings, with gold and silver ornaments; his arms crowned with a prince's coronet, adorned the panels; lacqueys and running footmen in rich liveries ran before it; pages and musicians, dressed in velvet, and covered with gold embroideries, followed it. Six gentlemen attended it at each door, and an escort of dragoons completed the procession.¹

Peter never indulged in luxury of this kind. When he was not in uniform, his dress was not unlike that of one of his own peasants. In summer he wore a kaftan, made of stout dark-coloured cloth, manufactured by Serdioukof, one of his *protégés*, a silk waistcoat, woollen stockings,—generally, as we have already seen, full of darns,—heavy, thick-soled shoes, with very high heels, and steel or copper buckles. His head-covering was a three-cornered felt hat, or a velvet cap. In winter the velvet cap was replaced by one made of sheep-skin, and the shoes by soft deer-skin boots, with the hair turned outwards. A fur lining,—sable in front, and squirrel for the back and sleeves,—was put into his kaftan. His uniform, which he never wore except on active service, was that of Colonel of the Préobrajenski regiment of the Guard. The coat was of rather coarse dark green Dutch cloth, lined with silk of the same colour (now faded to a blue shade), edged with narrow gold braid, and with large copper buttons; with it a thick doe-skin waistcoat was worn. The hat had no lace on it, the sword had an ungilt copper guard, and black sheath, and the stock was of plain black leather. Yet Peter loved fine and well-bleached linen, such as was then made in Holland, and this was the only point on which he could be induced to compromise with the deliberate and determined simplicity of his life,—a simplicity which, I am disposed to believe, was inspired by a very conscientious

¹ Pylaief, p. 379.

feeling for economy. When Catherine showed him the splendid coronation dress to which I have referred on a previous page, his first expression was one of extreme annoyance. He laid an angry hand on the silvery embroidery and shook it so violently, that several of the spangles fell to the ground. 'Look at that, Katinka,' he said, 'those will all be swept away, and they would nearly make up the pay of one of my grenadiers.'¹

He never acquired the Dutch taste for cleanliness and domestic order. At Berlin, in 1718, the Queen caused all the furniture to be removed from the house (*Mon Bijou*) intended for him, and her precaution seems to have been a wise one. He left it in such a condition that it almost had to be rebuilt. 'The desolation of Jerusalem reigned within it,' says the Margravine of Baireuth. In one detail only did an instinctive repugnance clash with the sordid habits which Oriental associations had perpetuated in Russian domestic life. He had a horror of certain parasites, which then, as now, alas! too often swarmed in Muscovite dwellings. The sight of a cockroach almost made him faint. One day an officer, with whom he had invited himself to dinner, showed him one, which, thinking to give his guest pleasure, he had nailed to the wall in a conspicuous spot. Peter rose from the table, fell on the unlucky wight, gave him a sound thrashing with his *doubina*, and made for the door.

III

His pleasures were like his tastes, not over remarkable for elegance. Unlike his ancestors,—all of them great slayers of bears and wolves, and passionate devotees of the art of falconry,—he cared nothing for sport. That imitation of war gave offence to his practical mind; not that he cared for real war, he only resigned himself to it for the sake of the profit he hoped it might bring him. Once, indeed, and once only, early in his reign, he was induced to go out coursing, but first he made his own conditions. No huntsman or whipper-in was to put in an appearance. His conditions were accepted, and he thus played his friends a sorry trick, and gave himself the satisfaction of making them feel

¹ Pylaieff, p. 379.

the conventional nature of their sport. The hounds, bereft of huntsmen and whippers-in, became unmanageable, dragged at their leashes, and pulled the riders from their saddles, so that the next moment half the company was lying on the ground, and the hunt came to an end, amidst a scene of general confusion. The next day it was Peter who suggested another coursing party, and the sportsmen, most of them sorely knocked about, and some, indeed, obliged to stay in bed, who demurred to his proposition.¹

He hated cards, which he called a game for cheats. His military and naval officers were forbidden, under the severest penalties, to lose more than one rouble in an evening. Sometimes, to please the foreign sailors, whom he entertained, he would take part in a game of Dutch *gravijs*. He was fond of chess, and played it well. He both smoked and snuffed. At Koppenbrügge, in 1697, he exchanged snuff-boxes with the Electress of Brandenburg. His chief pleasure—his master-passion, in fact—was boating in all its branches. At St Petersburg, when the Neva was three-parts frozen, even when the clear space of water did not measure a hundred feet square, he would go upon it in any boat he could lay his hands on. Often, in mid-winter, he would have a narrow passage cut in the ice, and there indulge in his favourite sport.² Arriving in his capital in 1706, he found the streets flooded, and two feet of water in his private rooms. He clapped his hands like a child.³ He was never really happy except on board a ship. Nothing but serious illness could keep him on shore, if he was near any port; and, indeed, he averred that, in case of illness, he was better if he went to sea. At Riga, in 1723, in the midst of a violent attack of tertian fever, which had already driven him on shore, he had his bed carried on board a frigate, fought through the illness, and always attributed his recovery to this expedient. Towards the end of his life, even for his after-dinner siesta, he stretched himself out in the bottom of a boat, which was generally provided for the purpose.

All the inhabitants of St Petersburg, either following his example, or by his care, possessed means of aquatic locomotion. All his chief officials were given a yacht, and two boats, one of twelve and another of four oars. Other officials

¹ Golikof, vol. i. p. 28.

² Pylaief, p. 379.

³ Russian Archives, 1875, vol. ii. p. 47.

were more modestly provided, according to their *tchin*. The regulations for the use of these boats were written out by his own hand. On certain fixed days, when the Tsar's standard had been hoisted at the four corners of the city, the whole flotilla was expected, on pain of a heavy penalty, to collect in the neighbourhood of the fortress. At the signal given by a salvo of artillery, Admiral Apraxin led the way on his yacht dressed with red and white flags. The Tsar's boat followed—Peter, in his white sailor's dress, and generally accompanied by Catherine, holding the rudder. Some of the boats, which were richly decorated, had musicians on board. Thus the procession took its way to Strielna, to Peterhof, or to Oranienbaum, where a banquet awaited the party.¹

Peter, like Catherine II., in later days, was a great lover of animals, especially of dogs. In 1708, a poor country priest, of the name of Kozlovski, was put to the torture at the *Préobrajenski Prikaz*, for having spoken improperly of the Tsar's person. He had been heard to say that he had seen the Sovereign at Moscow in the act of kissing a bitch.² There was no doubt about the fact. The unlucky priest had happened to pass down the street just at the moment when the Tsar's favourite dog, Finette, had bounded into her master's carriage, and was rubbing her muzzle against his moustaches without any resistance on his part. Finette, called Lisette by some contemporaries, who have confused her, doubtless, with a very favourite mare, competed for the Tsar's favour with a great Danish dog, whose stuffed body now has its place amongst the souvenirs so piously preserved in the gallery of the Winter Palace. This honour is shared by the mare, a present from the Shah of Persia—a small animal, but with muscles of steel. Peter rode her at Poltava. There is a story that Finette once played a part in politics. An edict had been published, forbidding the presentation of petitions to the Tsar, on pain of death. The friends of an official who had been sentenced to the knout for some breach of trust, fastened an ingeniously drawn-up appeal to the Sovereign's clemency, to the pretty creature's collar. Their stratagem was crowned with success, and their example largely followed. But Peter speedily discouraged all imitators.³

¹ Pylaief, p. 210.

² Documents of the Préobrajenskoïé Secret Chancery.

³ Scherer, vol. iii. p. 294.

IV

The great man often sought his pleasures and relaxations in very inferior company. It must be admitted that his acquaintance with good society was but limited. The Margravine of Baireuth was a terrible gossip, and owned the worst tongue, perhaps, that ever wagged in the eighteenth century. Yet there must be a certain amount of truth in her rather amusing story of her meeting with the Tsar during that sovereign's stay at Berlin in 1718. Peter had already met her five years previously. The moment he recognised her, he rushed at her, seized her in his arms, and scratched her face with his rough kisses. She struggled, slapped him in the face, but still he held her tight; she complained, was told she would have to make up her mind to it, and so submitted. But she took her revenge by jeering at the brutal monarch's wife and suite. 'She had with her 400 so-called ladies. Most of these were German servant girls, who performed the duties of ladies-in-waiting, serving-women, cooks and laundresses. Almost every one of these creatures carried a richly-dressed child in her arms, and if any one enquired to whom the children belonged, they answered, with all sorts of Russian salaams, "The Tsar has done me the honour of making me the mother of this child."' "

The habits and the friendships contracted by Peter in the German suburb, superior as they were to the social level of old Russia, were not calculated to fit him for the Courts and elegant circles of the West. And with these old associations he never broke. When he was in Moscow, in 1723, he spent his evenings between an old friend of his, the wife of an official named Fadenbrecht, to whose house he had his meals carried, Bidlau, a doctor, Gregori, an apothecary, Tamsen, Konau and Meyer, tradesmen, and a certain young lady of the name of Ammon, barely sixteen years of age, in whose house dancing went on till five o'clock every morning.¹ And even this is a somewhat favourable specimen.

On Easter Day, the 24th of March 1706, Peter causes his letter to Menshikof to be signed, and a postscript added to it, by the friends gathered round him to celebrate that solemn day. In that intimate circle, I notice a private

¹ Bergholz, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xxi. p. 183.

soldier, two *Dienshtchiks*, and finally a peasant, who, not knowing how to write, replaces his signature by a cross, affixed to an intimation that he had been given leave 'to get drunk for three whole days.'¹

Peter never slept alone. His bed was generally shared by Catherine, very rarely by a mistress. He sought his couch for purposes of slumber. He was sensual, but not voluptuous, and his love affairs, like all his other affairs, were got through as quickly as possible. I have already (page 106) explained his dislike to sleeping alone, and in the absence of his wife, he would avail himself of the company of the first *dienshtchik* he could lay his hand on. This individual had orders to lie exceedingly quiet, under pain of being well thrashed. Peter generally woke in a bad temper. In the country, when the hour for his daily siesta came, he made one of these *dienshtchiks* lie down on the ground, and used his stomach for a pillow. This man did wisely, unless his digestion was an exceptionally quick and easy one, to be in a fasting condition, for, on the slightest movement, or sound, the Tsar would spring to his feet and fall upon him.²

All this notwithstanding, he was really exceedingly indulgent and easy-going, in all matters connected with his personal service. Nartof has given us the story of the cupboards invented by the Tsar, in which he would lock up, beds and all, certain of his orderlies who, in spite of his reiterated orders and threats, persisted in spending their nights in houses of ill-fame. He kept the keys under his pillow, and used to get up, after midnight, to inspect these dormitory cells. One night he found them all empty. His astonishment and rage were terrible. 'So the rascals have made themselves wings,' he cried, 'I'll cut them to-morrow with my *doubina*.' But when morning came, and the culprits appeared before him, he contented himself with promising them a better watched and less comfortable prison, if they relapsed into misbehaviour.³ His personal service was performed by six *dienshtchiks*, amongst whose names we notice those of Tatishtchef, Orlof, Boutourlin and Souvarof, two couriers to go distant messages, one valet-de-chambre,

¹ Golikof, vol. iii. p. 94.

² Scherer, vol. ii. p. 81.

³ *Memoirs*, p. 36. The personal portion of Nartof's recollections deserves a certain amount of credence, but the remainder of the work is a later compilation, the only value of which, and that a doubtful one, resides in the various anecdotic sources from which it has been drawn.

Polouboiarof, one secretary, Makarof, and two under-secretaries, Tcherkassof and Pamiatin. Nartof also belonged to the household, in his quality of assistant in the Tsar's ivory and wood-turning, at which he spent several hours a day. The whole household formed an exception to the general rule, according to which every one who had to do with the sovereign, whether closely or not, detested as much as they feared him. Peter the Great, like the great Catherine, was always adored by his personal servants.

This was far from being the case with his collaborators, who, for a certain period, were generally his favourites as well. With the exception of Menshikof, none of them maintained this last position for any length of time. Where they were concerned, phases of condescension, and even of extreme partiality, invariably led up to a swift veering of the Tsar's humour, and a terrible change of fortune. So long as things went well, they were treated like spoilt children. Peter's care for their health and comfort was unflagging. He even found them wives. When the calamities which overtook the Tsar's unhappy son, brought one of the myrmidons of the law, named Alexander Roumiantsof, who had been employed to capture him, into high favour, a Boyard offered him his daughter, who had a considerable dowry, in marriage. Roumiantsof, the son of a needy gentleman, in the Government of Kostroma, was himself a poor man. 'Hast thou seen the girl?' asked Peter. 'No, but I hear she is a sensible girl.' 'That's something, but I want to see her.' He went that evening to a gathering at which he knew the young girl was to be present, had her pointed out to him as soon as he arrived, shrugged his shoulders, said very loud, as if speaking to himself, '*Nitchémou nie byvat!*' (no good at all) turned on his heel, and departed. The next day, meeting Roumiantsof, he repeated '*Nitchémou nie byvat!*' adding, 'I will find thee something better, and that by this evening. Be here at five o'clock.' Roumiantsof naturally kept the appointment, and, at Peter's order, seated himself in his cabriolet. He was more than astonished when he saw the carriage stop before the house of Count Matviéief, one of the noblest and richest subjects of the Tsar. Entering, Peter addressed the Count familiarly, kissed him, and said point blank, 'You have a daughter whom you want to marry. Here is a husband.' Without further pre-

liminary, Matviéief's daughter became Roumiantsof's wife. According to certain accounts, she had already, at the age of nineteen, been the mistress, and the fickle mistress, of her sovereign. Peter, who had lately surprised her in circumstances which left no doubt of this unfaithfulness, is supposed to have selected this means of guarding her fragile virtue, having previously, with his own hands, administered healthy correction to the fair lady.¹

But the following chapters will give my readers fuller information as to the most certain and probable facts concerning this obscure corner in the Tsar's personal history.

¹ Pylaief, *Old Moscow*, p. 52.

BOOK II—THE TSAR'S ASSOCIATES

CHAPTER I

COLLABORATORS, FRIENDS AND FAVOURITES

- I. The Aristocracy and the Popular Element—The *Diliatiels*—The great Favourites—Romodanovski—The *Prince Casar*—The Secret Police—The Red Square at Moscow—Old Russia—A bear as house steward—Loyalty, energy, and ferocity—Oriental suppleness—Shérémétief—A poor leader and a fine soldier—Menshikof—The pastry cook's boy—The Tsar's minion—Peter's indifference to scandal on some subjects—*Alexashka*—a Prince—Profusion of titles and functions—Omnipotence—Abuse of power—A military leader—An administrator—Faults and virtues—An apology for theft—Peter's indulgence worn out—Semi-disgrace.
- II. Collaborators of the second rank—Golovin—An Admiral who was no sailor, and a Foreign Minister who was no diplomat—Russian sailors and foreign sailors—Apraxin and Cruys—Politicians and police agents—Golovkin—Tolstoï—A high-born Russian Diplomat of the new school—Boris Kourakin—Some great *Diliatiels*—Néplouief and Tatishchev—The Tsar's Confessor, Nadajinski—A match with the Abbé Dubois' secretary.
- III. The Agents of a lower order—Iagoujinski and Shafirof—Polish Jews—The Viesselovski—The *Prybylshtchiks*—Kourbatof and Solovief—Possoshkof, the first Russian Economist—The fortunes of the Demidofs—Lomonossof.
- IV. Foreign Collaborators—They often did the work, but remained in the shadow—Shérémétief and Ogilvy—Vinnius—James Bruce—Ostermann—Devier, a Portuguese Jew—The invariable close of brilliant careers—The final crash—Frenchmen—De Villebois—A scene in the Imperial bedroom—Englishmen—Perry and Fergusson—Poushkins's negro ancestor, Abraham Hannibal.
- V. General summing up—Peter and Leibnitz—The great German's posthumous rôle.

I

‘ALONE, or almost alone, our Tsar struggles to raise the country, millions of individual efforts drag it down.’

When Possoshkof thus picturesquely described Peter's isolation, and the difficulties he met with, in carrying out his reforms, he indulged in a slight exaggeration. The

very accession of the great reformer was, as I have already shewn, the result of a party triumph. His first revolutionary attempts were inspired by those about him, and he certainly would never have been able to compress the work of several centuries into twenty years, unless he had been assisted by a very considerable amount of extraneous energy and intelligence. The country which he ruled so proudly, and which indeed he watered with the sweat of his own brow, yielded a fruitful harvest of effort and capability, rough-hewn, no doubt, but not the less gallant for that. On the heels of the earliest workers—Lefort and the Naryshkin—came others, native or foreign, none of them indeed great leaders, nor very profound politicians, but men of action like Peter himself, like him hastily and superficially educated, yet possessing a remarkable and varied power of initiative, of endeavour, and of resource. When the old aristocracy failed him, and this soon came to pass (the old nobility, alarmed by the boldness of his measures, outraged by the roughness of his manners, and bewildered by the giddy rapidity of his movements, soon began to hang back and even steal away), he went below it, down even into the lowest strata of the populace, and thence took a Demidof and a Iagoujinski, to replace a Matviéief, or a Troubetzkoï. Thus a school of statesmen rose around him, men of peculiar stamp, the prototypes of the *Diètiels* (agents) of a later date; soldiers, diplomatists, or political economists, turn about, with no defined speciality (a trifle amateurish in that matter), who knew neither prejudice nor scruple, without fear, if not without reproach, who marched straight forward, without a backward glance, always ready for strong measures, wonderfully fitted for the rapid performance of every kind of duty, and for the bold assumption of any and every responsibility. They answered Peter's purpose, and the purpose of the work which they were to do with him. He did not, and in that he was right, expect them to be paragons of virtue. In 1722, Campredon writes to Cardinal Dubois,—‘I have the honour of pointing out to your Eminence, that unless, with my diplomatic powers, I am provided with means of giving money to the Russian ministers, no success can be expected, however advantageous an alliance with France may appear to the Tsar; for, if his ministers do not perceive their own personal benefit in it,

their intrigues and secret enmities will foil any negotiations, even those which might be of most service, and bring most credit to their master. I notice proofs of this truth every day of my life.'¹ The ministers here referred to were Bruce and Ostermann, and the proofs, very solid ones, perhaps, of which the French Envoy boasts, had not prevented them in the preceding year, at Nystadt, from outstripping Peter himself in the defence of his interests, and obtaining conditions of peace which he had not dared to hope for.

Three men, Romodanovski, Shérémétief, and Menshikof, tower above all others in the great monarch's personal circle. The two first were the only human beings to enjoy a privilege denied to Catherine herself, that of being received by the sovereign, unannounced, whenever they chose to appear in his presence. When he dismissed them, he always conducted them himself to the door of his cabinet.

In the beginning of the eighteenth century, none of the princely families descended from Rourik equalled the Romodanovski in rank and influence. Yet only a century before, this family held quite a secondary position, inferior to that of the Tcherkaski, Troubetzkoï, Galitzin, Repnin, Oourussof, Shérémétief, and Saltikof, equal to that of the Kourakin, Dolgorouki, Volkonski, and Lobanof families.² A younger branch of one of the younger branches of the great Norman house, that of the Princes of Starodoub, it took its name, somewhere in the fifteenth century, from a property called Romodanof in the Government of Vladimir. The prominent rank it subsequently held, was attained in virtue of a kind of hereditary function, which in itself would hardly be looked on as a claim to much distinction. When the Tsar Alexis established an office of the secret police at Preobrajenskoïé, with subterranean dungeons and question chambers, all complete, its management was confided to Prince George (or Iouri) Ivanovitch Romodanovski. After his death, his son inherited the post, and finally transmitted it to his own heir. The son of George Ivanovitch was the *Prince César*, with whom we have already made acquaintance. It was, it seems, in 1694, and as a reward for a victory gained by him over the mock King of Poland, represented by Boutourlin, that Peter took it into his head to dress Romodanovski up in

¹ July 24, 1722 (Paris Foreign Office).

² Kotochihin, *Memoirs* (St. Petersburg, 1884), p. 25, etc.

this strange title. It was a mere joke, but we know how whimsically the great man would mingle pleasantry with serious matters. It is not easy to understand how such a man as the Prince Feodor Iourievitch could consent to act such a farce, his whole life long. There was nothing of the buffoon about him, neither the necessary docility, nor the indispensable love of frolic. Perhaps, in his barbarian simplicity, he never realised the insulting and degrading reality so apparent under the mockery. In Peter's eyes, evidently, he represented a sort of huge compromise with a state of things he himself had doomed to destruction. Therefore it was, that the reformer endured his long moustaches and his Tartar or Polish garments. But, even while Peter set up and worshipped this strange idol, in whose person he seemed to commemorate and atone for the past, he scoffed at and spurned that hated past itself, and all the ideas and memories he associated with, and loathed in, it. The old Kreml of Moscow, and the semi-Asiatic pomp of the Tsars, the ex-yassals of the great Han, which had crushed his early years—the old Burg at Vienna, and the majesty of the Roman Cæsars, which had crushed him too, in that never-to-be-forgotten moment during his earliest appearance on the European stage, all these things he desired to cover with ridicule, and cast into oblivion.

The person chosen to play this dubious part, was not devoid of merits of his own. Placed apparently, at all events, above any possibility of attack, he set himself, in all reality and truth, above suspicion. His loyalty was unshakable; he was faithful, honest, and unswerving. His heart was flint, his hand was iron. Amidst all the intrigues, the meannesses and the cupidity which seethed around the sovereign's person, he stands out, upright, haughty, clean-handed. When an insurrection threatened at Moscow, he cut it short, after his own fashion. He picked 200 rioters, at hazard, from the crowd, and hung them by their ribs on iron hooks on the Red Square (so appropriately named), in the old city. Even in his own house, he had dungeons and instruments of torture, and when Peter, during his absence in Holland, reproached him for some abuse of his terrible power, committed while in a state of drunkenness, he sharply replied,—‘It is only people who have plenty of leisure and can spend it in foreign countries, who can afford to waste

their time with *Ivashka*. Here we have other things to do than to gorge ourselves with wine, *we wash ourselves every-day in blood!*¹

Notwithstanding this, I remark a certain Oriental strain of suppleness in his character. He does indeed thwart the sovereign secretly, and even occasionally goes so far as to censure him openly, so that in 1713, the self-willed despot himself does not seem to know how to manage 'this devil of a fellow who will do nothing but what he chooses himself.' Romodanovski appears to have taken his sovereignty very seriously, and never permitted any jesting on the subject. When Shérémétief announced the victory at Poltava, he addressed him as *Sire* and *Your Majesty*. No one entered the courtyard of his palace except on foot and bare-headed; even Peter himself left his cabriolet at the outer door. He was surrounded with all the luxuries of an Asiatic monarch, and his personal freaks were quite of a piece with them. When he went out hunting, he was attended by 500 persons, and every visitor, of whatever rank, who entered his presence, was forced to empty a huge glass of coarse brandy, seasoned with pepper, served by a tame bear, which growled threateningly. If the brandy was refused, the bear forthwith dropped his tray, and hugged the visitor.² Yet this very same man took good care not to forget that Menshikof was a great lover of fish, and never failed to send him the best in his own fishponds, and he bestowed many a barrel of wine and hydromel on a *Dienshtchik* of the name of Pospíelof, a great drunkard, and a prime favourite of the Tsar's.³

Shérémétief was also, after his own fashion, a representative of former times. At Narva, like everybody else, he lost his head. At Poltava, like the rest, he did his duty bravely. In his will, drawn up in 1718, he confided his sinful soul to the Tsar.⁴ That one trait describes the man. He was simple, candid, and very ignorant. 'What rank did you hold before you came here?' he enquired of a non-commissioned officer, just arrived from Germany. 'Master at arms.' '*Arm*, does not that mean *poor*, in German? In your own country you

¹ *Peter I.'s Writings and Correspondence*, vol. i. pp. 226, 671.

² Hymrof, *Countess Goloukin and the Times she Lived in*, p. 76, etc.

³ Dolgoroukof, *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 55.

⁴ *Russian Archives*, 1875, vol. i. p. 86.

were poor; here you shall have the same rank, and be rich into the bargain.'¹

But he was a splendid soldier; always in the forefront of the battle, tranquil and calm under a hail of bullets, adored by all his men. If he happened to see any officer, who had served under him, passing through the streets of Moscow, he never failed to leave his coach, as richly gilt as Men-shikof's own, and clasp his old comrade's hand. Generous, open-hearted, and hospitable, he fed an army of beggars, and kept open house for fifty persons every day. He was one of the last specimens of the best and most attractive type of the old Russian Boyard.

Alexander Danilovitch Menshikof was another and very different type. He opens the long series of great parvenus, the creatures of the Russian Sovereign's caprice. The story goes, that, in his youth, he had been a pastry-cook's boy. According to family documents, he should be descended from an ancient Lithuanian family. There may be truth in both these versions. The son of a needy gentleman in the neighbourhood of Smolensk may very well have sold pastry in the Moscow streets. A knight of St Louis certainly sold cakes at Versailles, in Sterne's days.² In any case, his father never was more than a corporal in the Préobrajenski regiment, and he himself was serving in it as a sergeant, somewhere about 1698. He may have combined his military duties with the sale of *pirogui*. Even in Peter's newly-raised regiments a very curious commercial element, the outcome of traditions inherited from the *Streltsy*, long survived. But already, at that period, the young man was supposed to stand high in the Tsar's good graces. The Sovereign always called him by a pet name (*Alexashka*), and, even in public, lavished proofs of an almost passionate tenderness upon him.³ My readers will recollect the story of the part he is said by some persons to have played in a violent scene at the house of Sheïn, during which Peter had to be recalled to reason.⁴ According to other stories, his favour was originally due to a different, though an equally salutary and important, intervention in the Sovereign's destiny. Peter, we are told, while on his way to dine with a certain Boyard, was accosted by

¹ Bruce's *Memoirs* (London, 1782), p. 113.

² *Sentimental Journey*, chapter headed 'The Pastrycook.'

³ See Solovief, vol. xiv. p. 267.

⁴ See *ante*, p. 128.

the *Pirojnik*. Pleased with his countenance, he took him with him, and desired him to stand behind his chair during the meal. Just as the Tsar stretched out his hand to help himself to a dish, a gesture, and a few low words, from the pastry cook, suddenly checked him. Some hours previously the *Pirojnik* had been in the Boyard's kitchen, and had observed preparations for an attempt to poison the chief guest. The dish was forthwith given to a dog, the truth of the allegation proved, the Boyard and his accomplices arrested, and thus *Alexashka's* astonishing career began.¹

Born in 1763, a year before Peter himself, tall, well-built, and handsome, Menshikof, unlike his master and the great majority of contemporary Russians, had a pronounced taste for cleanliness, and even for personal elegance. The representative part which he was later called upon to play was the result, to a certain extent, of this peculiarity. Yet he was quite uneducated; he never learnt to read, nor to write, beyond signing his name.² According to Catherine II., who should have had good opportunities for learning the truth, he never had 'one clear idea on any subject whatsoever.'³ But, like Peter, though in a very inferior degree, he had a talent for appropriating notions on every subject, including the habits of the great world. He was his Sovereign's shadow; he was with him under the walls of Azof, and shared his tent; he accompanied him abroad, and shared his studies there. He took part in the destruction of the *Streltsy*, and is said to have boasted that, with his own hand, he had shorn off the heads of twenty of the rebels. After having allowed Peter himself to clip his beard, he performed the barber's office on all the members of the Moscow Municipality, and then led them into the presence of the Tsar, thus symbolising his future co-operation in the great man's work. As early as 1700, he seems to have performed the duties of major-domo in the Sovereign's house, and to have occupied a quite special place in his affections. In his letters Peter calls him '*Min Herzenskind*' (child of my heart), '*Min bester*

¹ Bruce's *Memoirs*, p. 76.

² The instances quoted by Oustrialof (vol. iv. p. 210) in support of his contrary assertion of signatures to which the favourite is said to have added such postscripts as *vzial* (received), or *prinial i spisalsia* (received and answered), are not conclusive. Catherine's testimony is far more convincing. See also Essipof's *Biography* (Russian Archives, 1875, vol. ii. p. 569), and Kourakin (Archives, vol. i. p. 76).

³ Letter to Grimm, Jan. 20th, 1776 (Sbornik).

Frant' (my best friend), or even '*Min Bruder*,' forms which he never used in addressing any other person. The favourite's answers are couched in equally familiar terms, and—this detail is very significant—he never adds any formula of respect before his signature, although Shérémétief himself always signed '*Naiposliédnieishyĭ rab tvoĭ*' (the lowest of your slaves).¹

According to general contemporary opinion, there was something more than mere friendship in this connection. Peter's indifference to imputations of a vicious nature was, and always remained, very singular. A master-at-arms, in the Préobrajenskiĭ regiment, convicted, in 1702, of having spoken in the most open manner on this odious subject, was merely relegated to a distant garrison. Such incidents happened several times over.²

Yet the favourite certainly had mistresses—two sisters, Daria and Barbara Arsénief—both of them maids of honour to the Tsarevna Nathalia, the Sovereign's favourite sister. He wrote them common letters, and they may be concluded to have thought it better not to betray any sign of jealousy. He ended by marrying the eldest, in connection with whom Peter appears to have had some personal obligation of a doubtful character. When Menshikof led Daria to the altar, he did so in obedience to a sort of order from his august friend, inspired by some mysterious scruple. Here we have an unexplained case of conscience, a confused and darkly-shadowed corner in the Tsar's personal history, full of dubious secrets and strange promiscuities, which tempt and yet repel the enquiring student. In 1703, the two friends, 'although unworthy,'—so runs Peter's letter to Apraxin,—were made Knights of St Andrew, on the very same day.³ And then *Alexashka's* wonderful fairy tale began.

In 1706, he was a Prince of the Holy Empire; the following year, after his victory over the Swedish general Mardefeldt, at Kalisz, he assumed the rank of a sovereign Russian prince (*Vladičielnyiĭ rousskiĭ Kniaz*), with the title of Duke of Ijora, and the whole of Ingria as his hereditary appanage. He was also Count of Dubrovna, of Gorki, and of Potchep; hereditary Sovereign of Oranienbaum and of Batourin; Generalissimo; Member of the Chief Council; Marshal of

¹ *Writings and Correspondence of Peter the Great*, vol. iii. pp. 780-782.

² Russian Archives, 1875, vol. ii. p. 236.

³ *Ibid.*

the Empire; President of the Military Administration; Admiral of the Red; Governor-General of St Petersburg; Lieutenant-Colonel of the Préobrajenski Regiment, and also of the two regiments of the Body Guard; Captain of the Bombardier Company; and Knight of the Orders of St Andrew, St Alexander, the Elephant, the White and the Black Eagle.

Even this did not suffice him. In 1711, he was negotiating with the Dowager Duchess of Courland to buy up her title and her Duchy. The next year, being confident of success, he caused the officials of the country to make their subjection to him.¹ Though obliged, by the indignation of the Polish Court, to delay taking definite possession of the Duchy, he would not renounce his hope of ultimate success, and revenged himself on the Polish lords, by forcing them to sell him huge tracts of country at an enormous sacrifice. He added enormous wealth to all his other splendours. In the Ukraine he bargained with Mazeppa for the whole district of Potchep, and even took possession of property there, which actually belonged to Cossack officers. A stake adorned with his arms, set up in any village, equalled a proprietary title. He had no hesitation, in case of necessity, about adding a gallows. He undertook commercial speculations, too, which, backed as they were by his almost absolute power, could not fail to be lucrative. In conjunction with Tolstoj and the Jew Shafirof, he set up factories, which he endowed with arbitrary privileges.²

The only limit his power knew, was the Sovereign's periodical repentances, which were always followed by measures of repression directed against the favourite's abuses. With these exceptions, his dictatorship was, in a sense, more absolute than Peter's own, for it was never limited, in Menchikof's case, by any higher considerations. If the Imperial resident, Pleyer, is to be believed, he even went so far as to countermand the Tsar's own orders. He would ill-treat the Tsarevitch in his father's presence, seizing him by the hair and throwing him on the ground. The *Tsarevny* all bowed down before him.³

What was the real value of the man, and how was it that

¹ Despatch from de Bie to the States General, 26th April, 1712 (Archives of the Hague).

² Karnovitch, *Great Russian Fortunes*, p. 120, etc.

³ Oustrialof, vol. iv. part ii. pp. 613, 628, 656.

he dared and possessed so much? From the military point of view, he had neither knowledge nor even bravery. 'He lacked experience, knowledge, and courage,' to quote Whitworth.¹ But he showed great endurance in bad fortune, was full of dash when the fickle goddess smiled, and in any case his energy never failed him. 'Active, enterprising,' says Campredon, adding, 'far from discreet, inclined to falsehood, ready to do anything for the sake of money.'² That strange mixture of serious-mindedness and puerility, which was so characteristic of Peter, was equally evident in the case of his *alter ego*. In August 1708,—when just about to cross the Beresina, and to fight a battle, which the Swedes ardently desired, and which he himself desired to avoid,—I find him absorbed in the new liveries for the German servants he was sending to his wife. This matter of detail seems to have had enormous importance in his eyes. While he measured gold lace and sketched out pocket flaps, Charles XII. manœuvred in such a manner that the battle became inevitable. Yet, in the result, it was less disastrous for the Russian troops than might have been expected. The steadiness with which they resisted the shock gave presage of their future victory. The favourite had pulled himself together. In later years, Patiomkin would appear to have been much of the same school.

At Poltava he wasted twenty-four hours before undertaking a pursuit, which, if it had followed more immediately on the defeat of the Swedes, would infallibly have left Charles and the remnants of his beaten army in their conqueror's hands. By the time he came up with Löwenhaupt on the banks of the Dnieper, the king had reached the other bank, and the favourite, who only had a strong body of cavalry with him, found himself in a somewhat awkward position. But his lucky star and his audacity combined to save him. He made as though the whole victorious army were close upon his heels. The enemy, already beaten and demoralised, allowed itself to be deceived, and Löwenhaupt capitulated.

In the administrative department he chiefly used his talents to enrich himself. He was a bold and, for the most part, unchecked thief. In 1714, the excess to which he

¹ Despatch, Sept. 17, 1708 (Sbornik, vol. 1. p. 64).

² May 3rd, 1725 (French Foreign Office).

carried his depredations did, indeed, bring about an enquiry, which dragged on indefinitely. But he was crafty. He produced old accounts, according to which the Treasury owed him far larger sums than those claimed from him. And when, after four whole years, he found himself without an answer to a fresh accusation, he betook himself to Peter's presence, and addressed him somewhat after the following fashion :—' These accusers and examiners of mine, none of them know what they are talking about, nor what they do ; they are making a fuss about trifles. If they choose to call the personal use I may have made of certain sums, of which I had the handling, a robbery, they are out of their reckoning altogether. Yes, I stole the 100,000 roubles of which Nieganovski speaks. I have stolen a great deal more,—how much, I do not know myself. After Poltava I found considerable sums of money in the Swedish camp. I took some 20,000 roubles for my own use. Your steward, Kourbatof, a very honest man, has several times over given me other sums, drawn from your exchequer, both in coin and bullion. At Lubeck I received 5000 ducats, and double that sum at Hamburg ; in Mecklenburg and the German Swedish possessions, 12,000 thalers ; at Dantzic, 20,000, and more that I have forgotten. I have used the authority you gave me after my own fashion. I have done, on a large scale, what other men about you do on a small one. If I have been wrong, I should have been warned before.'

Peter was disarmed. He felt the blame was partly his, and once more he passed the sponge across the slate. But fresh accusations came pouring in. A credit of 21,000 roubles, assigned in 1706, for cavalry remounts, had utterly disappeared. The same thief had done the work. This time the military authorities interfered, and the favourite was condemned to loss of his military rank and functions. Once more Peter forgave him. But the original enquiry went on, and others were added to it, arising out of the Imperial minion's breaches of trust in Poland, in Pomerania, in the government of St. Petersburg,—everywhere, in fact, where he could lay his hand, and there was hardly a province or an administrative department which escaped it. The Tsar grew weary at last. His favourite's insatiable greed threatened to cause diplomatic friction. The Dutch Resident accused Zotof, the governor of Revel, of

squeezing the merchants belonging to his country, and dividing the produce of his exactions with Menshikof. Year by year Peter's regard grew colder. Little by little the old familiar intercourse died away. One day at last, in a fit of displeasure, he threatened to send the incorrigible thief back to his old life. That very evening, Menshikof entered his presence, dressed as a pastry-cook, with a basket on his head, calling out, 'I sell fresh-baked *piroguis*.' The Tsar burst out laughing. The traitor had more than one string to his bow. He had Catherine's constant, unvarying, faithful support. She had been his mistress, and she never forgot it. He also played on the Tsar's passionate affection for his second wife's son, little Peter Petrovitch. He never neglected, during the sovereign's absences, to send him constant news of his 'priceless treasure,' telling how he played at soldiers, repeating his childish phrases, and going into ecstasies over his charms. But, above all things, he was the one man on whom, putting integrity apart, Peter could absolutely reckon to second him, or supply his place, with a vigour, a resolution, and resourcefulness which never failed. An army sent into Finland, under Apraxin, was in danger of being starved to death. Peter was away. The Senate, when appealed to, came to no decision; the merchants refused to deliver food, unless it was paid for; and the treasury was empty. Menshikof ordered the stores to be broken open, laid hands on all the provisions he could find, and sent them off to Abo. There was a desperate outcry; the senators, who were all more or less interested in the corn trade, threatened to have the favourite arrested. He faced the storm bravely, and had no difficulty, when the Tsar returned, in justifying his action. His bold stroke had saved the troops in Finland.

And lastly, the unworthiness of his accusers was in his favour. One of them, Kourbatof, was himself convicted of fraud in 1721, and heavily fined. Thus, till the end, Menshikof held his own, more and more closely threatened, but always contriving to float. In 1723, when for the twentieth time, Catherine ventured to take up the cudgels for him, Peter broke in roughly, 'Menshikof came into the world just as he has lived, his mother bore him in sin, and he will die a knave. If he does not amend his ways, he will end by having his head cut off.' The old affection had quite died out.

Even the favourite's wit, which had so often wrung the Tsar's forgiveness from him, no longer served him as it once had done. Peter, coming into his palace, saw the walls bare, and the great rooms stripped of furniture. He enquired the reason of this desolation. 'I have had to sell my hangings and my furniture to pay the fines imposed upon me.' 'Well, buy them back, or I will double the fine.'

The charm was broken. Menshikof was removed from the presidency of the military administration; he was forced to disgorge the 15,000 serfs he had stolen in Mazeppa's former domains.¹ At the time of Peter's death, he was living in semi-disgrace. When Catherine succeeded, he attained to yet greater position and power, saw his daughter on the very steps of the throne, and then, on the eve of that supreme triumph, his fortune crumbled beneath his feet, and he ended his days in exile, on a daily pittance of a few copecks. I have no concern, in this place, with that latter half of his career; I may perhaps return to it on a future occasion.

I cannot, whatever may have been imagined and asserted on this subject, accept this collaborator of the Tsar's as a man of great intelligence; but he must be recognised and appreciated as a force which,—used by Peter, serving as it did the mightiest will known in modern history before Napoleon's time, and so sent whirling across the wild uncultivated steppes of the Russia of those days, to open up that wilderness,—had a special value of its own. It overthrew all obstacles, it broke down all resistance, and, like some fiercely-rushing, muddy river, it carried fruitful germs in its mire-stained and turbid waters.

The man himself, haughty, brutal, covetous, and cruel, was neither loveable nor loved. When, in 1706, his house at Moscow was burnt down, the whole town openly rejoiced.² Peter did not complain. He always had a secret leaning towards those of his servants who could not rely on anything, or any person, save himself.

¹ For Menshikof's biography see Essipof, Solovief, vol. xvi, p. 231, etc.; Golikof, vol. vi, p. 407, etc.; Nartof, p. 47, etc.; Posselt, vol. i, p. 545, etc.

² Russian Archives, 1875, part ii. p. 49 (Essipof).

II

I now come to the second order of the Tsar's collaborators. Some of them, and these not the most interesting, belong to the old nobility. Feodor Aléxiéievitch Golovin, who was called, after Lefort's death, to the chief place at the Admiralty, and to the head of the Office of Foreign Envoys (*Posolskoi Prikaz*),—the Foreign Office of those days,—was neither a sailor nor a diplomat. His only claims to distinction consisted in the fact that his brother Alexis had married one of Menshikof's sisters, that one of his minions, named Iagoujinski, was later to be specially favoured by the Tsar, and that he wore the distinctive symbol of his naval dignity, a compass, with a most majestic air. Apraxin, who succeeded him as Lord High Admiral, in 1706, possessed more serious qualities, but a great part of his success and superiority was due to the presence of the Norwegian sailor, Cruys, at the Admiralty Board. He was heartily jealous of his subaltern, and seized an opportunity of getting rid of him, which presented itself in 1713, with shameful eagerness. A court martial, presided over by the Lord High Admiral, condemned the foreign sailor to death, in consequence of the loss of a ship caused by some misunderstanding about a signal. This ancestor of a noble family, the aristocratic pretensions of which are, it must be confessed, disputed by many genealogists, was anything but chivalrous! Cruys, whose sentence was commuted by Peter to one of perpetual banishment, was soon back in St. Petersburg; nothing went right at the Admiralty after he left it.

The Presidency of the *Posolskoi Prikaz*, with the title of Chancellor, passed from Golovin to another mere figurehead, Gabriel Ivanovitch Golovkin. Peter, who inaugurated the system which Catherine II. was largely to develop, had a fondness for separating titles from their functions, and found this an easy means of gratifying his taste for low-born favourites. Having reduced the titular minister to a mere dummy, he caused the actual work of his foreign policy to be performed by such men as Ostermann and Iagoujinski. Gabriel Ivanovitch, who had been one of the Sovereign's childish playfellows, and later one of his most constant boon companions, and, who, it may be added,

was related to him through the Naryshkin, had a fine aptitude for taking his master's tone. He thus addresses him in an official letter—'Your Majesty has condescended to insinuate that my gout was the result of too much devotion to Venus. I owe it to your Majesty to inform you of the real truth, which is, that in my case the trouble rather arises from excess in drinking.' In the matter of honesty he was no better than his fellows. He was generally supposed to be in Mazeppa's pay, and in December 1714, Peter reproached him, before the assembled Senate, with the frauds, of which he had been convicted in conjunction with Menshikof, with regard to military supplies.¹

Peter found some better servants, as far, at all events, as intelligence went, among the ranks of the old aristocracy. Tolstoï, who belonged to this class, fully justified the Tsar's remark—'Any one who has anything to do with him had better put a stone in his pocket with which to draw his teeth.' And this other, dropped with a kiss on the formidable politician's brow, 'Oh! head, head, if I had not known you to be so clever, I should have cut you off long ago!' Tolstoï's services, shameful, some of them, but all of them remarkable in their way,—he acted at one time as a diplomat at Vienna and Constantinople, at another as a spy on the unhappy Alexis,—earned him the blue ribbon of knighthood, a seat in the Senate, and an enormous landed property. His teeth were not drawn until after Peter's death. When he was eighty-two years old, he came into conflict with Menshikof, and ended by tasting the bitterness of exile, on the inhospitable shores of the White Sea.²

Another aristocrat, Boris Ivanovitch Kourakin, appears on the threshold of the eighteenth century,—the earliest and already supremely attractive incarnation of the high-born Russian diplomatist, with whom, since those days, Europe has grown familiar,—full of Oriental cunning and Slavonic adaptability,—as much in love with literature as a frequenter of the Hotel Rambouillet,—and as passionately fond of every kind of elegance as a Versailles courtier. He entered the Tsar's family by his marriage with Xenia Lapouhin, the sister of Peter's first wife. He contrived to make the most of this relationship, at the favourable moment, and,

¹ De Bie to the States General, Dec. 21, 1714 (Archives of the Hague).

² Popof, *Study of Tolstoï (Old and New Russia)*, 1875.

later on, to cause it to be forgotten. He began his career at a very early age—first of all as the representative of Russia in London, at the Court of Queen Anne, then in Hanover, at that of the future King of England, and finally in Paris, during the Regency, and the early years of Louis XV.'s reign. He died in 1727, before he had reached the age of fifty. In the course of his diplomatic career he strikes us as having been sorely puzzled, more than once, as to his personal behaviour, but he always contrived to maintain his own dignity and that of his country, hiding his ignorance and awkwardness under a mantle of pride and charm, which never failed him.

But I must keep this list within limits. The most interesting figure in the group is certainly that of Basil Nikititch Tatishtchef, descended from Rourik, through the Princes of Smolensk, and the progenitor of a race of men as turbulently active as himself. Here we have the *député par excellence*,—Peter's best pupil. He was brought up in a school at Moscow, kept by a Frenchman. When he left it, Peter sent him abroad, with Niéplouief, and a number of other young men, to complete his education. Some of these, Niéplouief amongst the number, were already married. Travelling by Revel, Copenhagen and Hamburg, they went to Amsterdam, where they found a whole colony of Russian students. Twenty-seven of their number were forthwith despatched to Venice, where they were to take service with the fleets of the Republic. Thus Niéplouief took part in an expedition against the Island of Corfu. The whole of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic coast from Cadiz to Genoa was dotted, in those days, with these Russian student apprentices. Special agents,—Béklémishef for Southern Europe, Prince Ivan Lvof for Holland, and one of the Zotofs for France,—were deputed to overlook and direct their travels, and their work. When they returned home, Peter awaited them in his cabinet, and at six o'clock in the morning, candle in hand,—for it was mid-winter and the sun had not risen—he verified their geographical knowledge, by the map, treating them very roughly, if they did not do themselves credit, and showing them his toil-worn hands, which he had hardened purposely 'as an example to all the world.'¹

¹ Niéplouief's *Memoirs*, p. 103. Piekarski's *Science and Literature in Russia*, pp. 141, 142.

Thus prepared, Niéplouief served his country as a diplomat in Turkey, as Chief of the Administration in Little Russia, and as Director of Mines in the Ural. Tatishchev far surpassed him in many-sidedness, in the ease with which he applied his powers to every kind of duty, and in untiring activity. He was a model pupil, who spent his whole life reciting his well-learned lesson. Like his master, he was perpetually on the move, and had his finger everywhere,—in military matters, diplomacy, finance, administration, science, trade and manufactures. Like him, he was an eager worker, deeply sensible of his own responsibility. Like him, he lived a life of perpetual activity, and was perpetually stirring others up to action. Like him, he was universal, superficial, and minute; like him too,—though bound to the East with bonds that still held him closely,—he deliberately turned his face, and mind, in the very opposite direction. He was present at the taking of Narva in 1704. In 1711, while accompanying Peter along that fatal road which was to lead them to the banks of the Pruth, he made all sorts of enquiries and archæological excavations, in the hope of discovering the tomb of Igor, Rourik's legendary son. Then, going abroad again, he spent several years in Berlin, Breslau and Dresden, immersed in fresh studies, and busily collecting a library. A little later, I find him performing diplomatic functions at the Congress of Aland. Then, again, he engages in a huge undertaking—that of preparing a general atlas of the Russian dominions. And later yet, Peter, just starting for his Persian Campaign, is offered a book to peruse on the journey, a 'Chronicle of Mourom,' written by the *Diétiétiel*, who suddenly appears in the character of a historian. And even this did not suffice. He was sent into the Ural, where the search for copper mines had not been crowned with complete success. He started without delay, reported serious flaws in the local administration, denounced the oppression which the native tribes had suffered at the hands of the agents of the Central Power, founded the town of Ekaterinenburg—destined to play such an important part in the future development of the mining industry—established schools for the people, and yet found time to learn French, with the help of a grammar received during his stay at Aland.

At the time of Peter's death he was still a young man. He continued to take an active and personal share in affairs

of the most varied kind, and at his death, left behind him a considerable literary work, which has been published by Muller. It comprises three volumes of Russian history, to which—thanks to a discovery of Pogodin—two others were later added, and an Encyclopædic Dictionary, carried up to the letter L. The value of these literary efforts, which was sharply attacked by the eighteenth century historians, led by Schlözer, has been considerably vindicated since their time.

Tatishtchef was no exception to the common rule. He was removed from his offices by his master in 1722, in consequence of accusations brought against him by Nikita Demidof, and, like so many others, died in exile, though more stoically than most of his fellows. When he was seventy years old, feeling his end approaching, he mounted his horse, rode to the parish church, heard Mass, went on to the graveyard, chose his own place there, and bespoke the priest's attendance for the following day. He breathed his last at the very hour he had foretold, just as the last sacraments were being administered to him.¹

Peter was honoured, and singularly fortunate, in having a man of so much real worth and moral character about him, at a period when he was surrounded by such beings as Zotof and Nadajinski, that strange Confessor, whose hand he would kiss at the close of Mass, and whose nose he would pull five minutes afterwards;² a man whose drinking powers he backed, while in Paris, against those of Dubois' secretary,—also a priest, and a noted toper. When, within an hour, the French Abbé rolled under the table, Peter cast his arms about the victor's neck, and congratulated him on having 'saved the honour of Russia.' This Nadajinski left enormous wealth behind him. Other men, and of a very different stamp, happily, helped Peter to lay the foundations of his country's greatness.

III

Tatishtchef's character and origin have both earned him a special place in the list of the contemporary 'makers' of the great reign.

¹ Popof, *Tatishtchef and his Times*. Bestoujet-Rioumin, *Study in Old and New Russia*, 1875.

² Pollnitz's *Memoirs*, 1791, vol. ii. p. 66.

Iagoujinski, the son of an organist and schoolmaster, employed by the Lutheran community in Moscow, began by performing the functions of a boot-black, to which he added others on the subject of which 'decency,' so Weber puts it, 'forbids' him 'to enlarge.'¹ Thus it came about that Count Golovin, one of his employers, bethought him of placing the boot-black in Peter's service, with the object of counteracting Menchikof's influence. The new comer was superior, in one respect, to the old favourite. Like him he was a thief, but he made no secret of his thievery, and kept it, too, within more reasonable limits. When the Sovereign spoke, in his presence, of having every peculator hanged, he made that celebrated answer, 'Does your Majesty desire to get rid of all your subjects?'

He was faithful, too, after a fashion of his own; he never betrayed the cause which his protector had sent him to champion. He fought resolutely against Menshikof, and was not afraid to enter into open struggle with the favourite's great protectress, Catherine herself. His courage, far exceeding his talents,—which indeed appear to have been very moderate,—was his only claim to his position as Public Prosecutor; one in which he showed a world of energy, and a severity for other people's weaknesses, only equalled by the indulgence he claimed for his own. But the great favourite, who felt his own omnipotence encroached on, had his revenge at last, and, after Peter's death, Iagoujinski was seen in a state of intoxication—for he practised every kind of excess—stretched upon the newly-closed coffin, tearing the funeral pall with his finger nails, and calling up the avenging shade of the mighty dead.

Like Iagoujinski, Shafirof (Peter Pavlovitch) was of Polish-Lithuanian origin, but his antecedents are more shadowy and obscure. His grandfather, who had settled at Orsha, in the Province of Smolensk, was called Shafir, and bore the surname common amongst his Jewish kindred, down to the present day, of Shaïa or Shaïoushka. He was a broker, an individual who even now would seem an indispensable adjunct to the surroundings of most Russian country gentlemen. The long greasy gaberline he wore, unmistakably indicated the functions he performed, and

¹ H. Hermann, *Peter der Grosse und der Tsarevitch Alexei*, 1880, p. 178.

the race from whence he sprung. Peter Pavlovitch discarded the gaberdine, but he preserved all the other distinctive qualities of the type. The Tsar took him out of a shop at Moscow, and bestowed him on Golovkin, to assist him with his correspondence;—all Jews, Polish or otherwise, have a talent for languages. When, after the Battle of Poltava, Golovkin was made Chancellor, his assistant rose with him, and the former cloth-merchant's clerk became Vice-Chancellor. He really directed all the foreign relations of the country. And he did his work well. In that perilous business on the Pruth, his talents worked a miracle, and saved, or something very like it, both the Tsar and his Empire. This put him on the pinnacle of his glory. He had grown rich, of course,—he had been made a baron,—equally of course,—he had married five of his daughters into the greatest families in the country, Dolgorouki, Golovin, Gagarin, Hovanski, and Soltykof. Suddenly, there came a gust of wind,—and he was swept away. Menshikof, whose own harvest he had prematurely reaped, the Chancellor Golovkin, whose accession he had too openly coveted, and Ostermann,—himself a parvenu, who desired to stand in the Vice-Chancellor's shoes, took advantage of one of Peter's prolonged absences, to plot his ruin. On the 15th of February, 1723, he was actually on the scaffold, his head already laid on the block, and 'the executioner's assistants pulling at his feet, so that his great belly might touch the ground.'¹ But he escaped death. One of Peter's secretaries arrived, just in time, with a letter commuting his sentence to perpetual banishment. He attended the Senate for the ratification of this letter, and, according to the testimony of an eye-witness, 'trembling still, and with death in his face,' he received the congratulations and hand-clasps of his colleagues, who had unanimously sentenced him to execution. He took measures, of course, which resulted in his not being sent to Siberia, was imprisoned at Novgorod, and there patiently awaited Peter's death. The moment this event took place, he recovered his liberty, re-entered political life, as President of what we should call the Board of Trade, and, by means of new commercial operations, soon recovered his confiscated fortune.

¹ *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xxi. p. 195. Solovief, vol. xviii. p. 141.

His father's sister married another baptized Jew, who, under a borrowed name, became the progenitor of another family of agents, which played a prominent part in the diplomatic history of the reign, the Viesselovski.

The *Prybyshtchiks*,—agents specially connected with the Exchequer, and inventors of new sources of revenue (*Prybyle*, profit)—form a class apart in the great category of the *Diétiats*. Of this class, Kourbatof was the most eminent representative. His figure, a new one then to Russia, and even to Europe in general, is that of the true modern financier, greedy of gain, but always desirous of preserving a nice balance in fiscal matters. Peter himself could not always rise to the level of this advocate of wise economic formulas, and ended by sacrificing him to the spite of that fierce Inquisitor, Romodanovski, whose sanguinary excesses Kourbatof had ventured to disapprove. The man was certainly not immaculate, and his conduct in the unimportant position of Vice-Governor of Archangel, to which he was finally relegated, even appears to have justified his disgrace. None the less, he appears before us as the victim of that struggle between two worlds, two conceptions of the State, and two ideas of social existence, the right side of which the great Sovereign himself did not always succeed in keeping.

This struggle is even more sharply and more dramatically defined in the story of the unfortunate Joseph Aléxiéievitch Solovief, the son of an Archangel merchant, whom Peter first of all appointed a Director of Customs, and afterwards, his commercial agent and banker in Holland. Solovief, whose financial operations had attained considerable importance, was involved, in 1717, in the disgrace which befel one of his brothers, who filled a modest position in Menshikof's household. He was prosecuted, extradited, given over to the Secret Police, and finally acknowledged innocent. But his legs and arms had been broken in the Torture Chamber, and all his fortune, somewhere about a million of roubles, had utterly disappeared.

Solovief was but a 'common fellow.' Possoshkof, who shared this disability, gives an amusing, though a sad enough description of the relations of people of his own class with the mighty ones of the day. Here is his own story of his adventures with Prince Dimitri Mihaïlovitch

Galitzin, from whom he requested permission, in 1719, to establish a brandy distillery. At that period the Russian Montesquieu, who had some private property, possessed influential relations, and was Kourbatof's partner in several industrial enterprises, had already attained a certain importance. Yet no one, to judge by the answer his petition received, would dream it. Without a word of explanation, he was laid violent hands on, and cast into prison. At first he was astounded, then he bewailed his fate, and finally, after a week, ventured to recall the fact of his existence to the absent-minded Boyard. 'Why am I in prison?' he asked. 'Why the devil is this man in prison?' enquired Galitzin; and as no one could answer the question, he signed an order for Possoshkof's release.

This love of summary methods, and haughty scorn of individual rights, was equally acceptable to the old Russian spirit, and to the revolutionary tendencies of the modern party. Possoshkof himself was their accomplice. He was a violent partizan, both of Peter's reforms and of the extreme measures he employed to ensure their success. He would gladly, even, have increased their merciless severity. In his eagerness to inculcate the theories of that economic school, of which the *Prybyshtchiks*, led by Kourbatof, were the practical exponents, he would fain have called all that intolerance, over-haste, and excessive zeal, so dear to all sectarians, to his aid. His fate resembled that of most of his fellows. Nothing, he believed, but the iron ploughshare and the devouring fire could suffice to open the soil of his native land, which for ages had lain fallow and briar-grown. The terrible machine he helped to set in motion crushed and destroyed himself. How did it come about that, although from one end to the other of his career, and by the solitary effort of a thought which evidently sprang from the same source, he walked, as it were, on Peter's flank, he never succeeded, even temporarily, in entering into close relations with him? In this respect his case was an altogether special one. He had ideas to dispose of, and Peter seems to have had a settled determination never to accept anything of the kind from his own people. Apart from that, the general tendency of the reign was towards equality, and the great Tsar would have had no scruple about taking a *moujik* to be his helper, and even his closest companion. Of this the

story of the Demidofs gives clear proof. The history of the beginnings of the Demidof fortune—the doubtful anecdote of the pistol marked with the name—in those days a celebrated one—of Kuchenreiter, and confided to a workman at Toula, who had undertaken to mend it, and the Tsar's colloquy with the young gunsmith,—is in common knowledge.

The Tsar: 'Ah! if we could only make pistols like that.'

The Gunsmith: 'That's no very difficult matter.'

The Tsar (with an oath and a box on the ear): 'Do the work first, rascal, and then you may boast.'

The Locksmith: 'Look closely first, Batioushka, and see. The pistol you admire is of my making. Here is its fellow.'

The gunsmith was then known as Antoufief; his father, Demid Grigorévitch, a serf of the Crown, working as a blacksmith in a village of Parshimo, in the district of Alexin, and province of Toula, had settled in the principal town of his province towards the year 1650. In 1694—the date usually assigned to this first meeting with the Sovereign, the reputed source of the proverbial riches of the Demidof family, and of the present development of the mineral industry in Russia,—the old blacksmith's son, Nikita, was nearing his fortieth year.¹ He was a married man, and Peter, so we are told, after having duly apologised, invited himself to dinner in his cottage. The meal was a cheerful one, and the Tsar paid the reckoning with a concession of ground in the neighbourhood of Toula, in which an iron mine was to be opened and worked. This was a mere beginning. By degrees the activity and enterprising spirit of Nikita and his son Akinfy (Hyacinth) were welcomed in all the mines in the Ural. In 1707, Nikita was personally ennobled under the name of Demidof. In 1720 his honour was made hereditary, but he kept to his peasant dress; and Peter, though he always treated him with the greatest consideration, continued to address him by his rustic and familiar name of Demidytych. It was not only as a commercial and business man, the founder of numerous works at Shouralinsk, Vynorsk, Viershniétagilsk Nijniétagilsk, and Douhomsk, that the Tsar valued Nikita. His gay and jovial character, his turn for satire, and his biting wit, made

¹ Russian Archives, 1878, vol. ii. p. 120. Karnovitch, *Great Russian Fortunes*, p. 163, etc.

him a worthy follower of Lefort. He died at Toula in 1725, at the age of 68, leaving behind him an immense fortune, and—a prodigious and almost unique fact in those surroundings, and at that period—a reputation for perfect honesty. Russian industry has more reason to congratulate itself on this forefather than the Russian navy on the ancestor with which it pleased Peter to endow it, in the person of Golovin.

Another peasant's name, one of the greatest in modern Russian history—equally eminent in literature and science, but connected also with much industrial endeavour and success—here rises to my memory. When Poushkin asserted that Lomonossov—historian, rhetorician, mechanic, chemist, mineralogist, artist, and poet—was 'the first Russian University,' he hardly said enough. The active period of Lomonossov's life (he was born in 1711) was not actually contemporary with Peter's. Yet he belongs to that great period; he was its direct outcome and its worthy fruit—the very personification of its genius, with all its civilising virtues, its deficiencies, and its contradictions. His humble origin, though he never forgot it, and rather took pride in it, did not prevent his praising even the laws of serfdom, the rigour of which the Reformer greatly increased, and from claiming—peasant as he was himself—200 peasants for the perpetual service of a factory he had founded. Son of the people though he was, the songs and ceremonies and popular legends of his country were nothing to him but a remnant of a distant past, long since gone by, and devoid of any save an historic interest. One of the deepest and most expressive forms of the national poetry, the *Epyllines*, traces of which may even now be discovered in some of the northern provinces, entirely escaped this poet's notice. He had no ear nor soul for anything but the classic poetry of the west, with its strict forms, so soon to fall out of date—the ode, the panegyric, the heroic poem, the tragedy, and the didactic epistle. In literature, as in science, he was very apt to consider his activity as a duty to be performed in the Tsar's service, a kind of official task. The universal process of requisitioning and enrolment, which Peter's system tended to carry even into matters of individual intellect, and activity, is clearly denoted in this peculiarity.

Yet Lomonossov played an important part in that swift

and general transformation, out of which modern Russia rose. He imparted a powerful and definite impulse to that mighty effort whereby the broken links of a chain which parted in the thirteenth century, were welded afresh, and his native country re-endowed with the intellectual patrimony common to the whole civilised world.¹

IV

Most of Peter's foreign collaborators,—so far, at least, as appearances went,—were mere subalterns. They often did all the work, but they generally remained in obscurity. Peter would never have committed a fault, the crushing responsibility of which the Empress Anne was to assume in later days,—that of putting his country under the direct power of such a man as Bühren. As long as the great Tsar reigned, Ogilvy, the Scotchman, might plan the battles, which ended by checkmating Charles XII., but it was Shérémétief who won them.

These foreigners, whether Scotchmen, Germans, or Dutch, assimilated themselves to their local surroundings,—became Russianized, in fact,—with the most extraordinary facility. That shifty and eminently porous soil rapidly absorbed all their native originality. The only thing which distinguished Andrew Vinnius, the Russian-born son of a Dutch emigrant, from his Muscovite surroundings, was his superior education. He professed the religion of the country, he spoke its language, he had even adopted its moral habits. He might be Menshikof's superior in such particulars as the casting of cannon, and the manufacture of gunpowder,—but in the matter of filling his own pocket, he was very little better indeed. And his fellows in the tumultuous stream of foreign adventurers, which Peter let loose upon his country, belonged, as a general rule, to the same order, and betrayed all the defects of their profession. The germs of corruption and degradation, which the Tartar conquest had sown in the national soul, sprang into life, in answer to their touch.

James Bruce, a Scotchman, who passed at Court for a chemist and astronomer of genius, and was held in the city

¹ Biliarski, *Materials for Lomonossov's Biography* (St. Petersburg, 1865), Lamanski, *Lomonossov, Biographical Studies* (St. Petersburg, 1864).

for a sorcerer, had none of the qualities of a Newton or of a Lavoisier, but many of the peculiarities of an ordinary sharper. Endless lawsuits,—for abuse of authority, speculation, dishonesty in the supply of his department (he was at the head of the artillery),—brought him to loggerheads with justice. The Tsar always ended by forgiving him. There was a certain dilettantism, and self-taught quality about the rascal's knowledge, which was irresistibly attractive to Peter, and which, in those surroundings, possessed a certain value of its own. A whole legend had grown up round the light which streamed, on long winter nights, from the windows of his laboratory in the Souharef Tower. His astronomical discoveries bordered closely on astrology, and his celebrated Calendar, published in 1711, is all moonshine. But it was Bruce who organized and directed the Tsar's schools of navigation, artillery, and military engineering; he presided over the Board of manufactures and of mines; he was the real inspirer of the learned correspondence which Peter made believe to keep up with Leibnitz, and, on the occasion of the Treaty of Nystadt, he gave proof of remarkable diplomatic powers.

They were all much alike, ready for anything, doing many useful things indifferently well, and remarkable, especially, for cunning and energy.

At Nystadt, Bruce, whose success won him the title of Count, and the grade of Marshal, had a colleague, Ostermann, a Westphalian, whose two years at the University of Vienna had given him a reputation for learning. Campredon, writing in 1725, thus sums up his capabilities: 'He knows German, Italian and French, and thus makes himself indispensable; otherwise, his principal cleverness consists in pettifoggish chicanery, cunning, and dissimulation.' These talents sufficed,—in a country where Golovkin was chancellor,—to obtain him the dignity of vice-chancellor, in succession to Shafirof, in 1723. But Campredon overlooks one of his qualities—a most remarkable power of work. Ostermann, to humour his master's suspicious instincts, would cypher and decipher his own despatches, sitting at them whole days and nights, without ever going out of doors, or taking off the red velvet dressing-gown, which he wore even on the 18th of January, 1724, when he ascended the scaffold which his predecessor had mounted before him,

Like that predecessor, he was pardoned, and ended his days in exile.

Beside the Polish Jew, Shafirof, we perceive the grotesque outline of the Portuguese Jew, Devier. Peter picked him up in Holland, where he was serving as cabin boy on board a merchant ship, in 1697. In 1705, he was an officer in the Guard; in 1709, he was Camp Commandant. In 1711, desiring to marry well, he fixed his choice on one of Menshikof's sisters, who was both old and ugly. The favourite, looking on his request for this lady's hand as a deliberate insult, ordered his lacqueys to thrash the insolent suitor. Three days later, the little Jew led the betrothed of his choice to the altar. He had got out of the scrape, no one quite knew how, alive, though sorely damaged in person, and covered with blood as he was, had carried his complaint before the Tsar, who promptly avenged him. Yet, crafty, supple, humorous, and intensely servile as he was, he did not succeed in escaping fresh reverses. He was evidently predestined to physical chastisement. In 1718, he was the first holder of a post,—then a new one in St. Petersburg,—of general chief of police, and, in this quality, he had to accompany Peter on a tour of inspection through the streets of the capital. A broken-down bridge (Peter had consented to have bridges built over the numerous canals, which he had caused to be cut through the town) stopped the Tsar's carriage. He alighted, and sent for materials with which to repair the breach. He even put his hand to the work himself, then, when it was finished, laying down his tools, he seized his *doubina*, and, without a word, bestowed a hearty thrashing on the chief of his police. This done, the sovereign returned to his carriage, beckoned to Devier to take his place beside him,—‘*Sadis brat,*’ (sit down, brother),—and quietly took up the thread of a conversation which had been interrupted by the incident. And, yet again, that scarred back was to feel the lash. In 1727, after Peter's death, Menshikof, the Jew's unwilling brother-in-law, was to write his vengeance there in bloody stripes. At the foot of the decree which condemned the former chief of police to exile, he added the words, ‘*Bit knoutom,*’ (let him be knouted).¹

My readers will remark the uniform and monotonous

¹ Shoubinski, *Historical Sketches*, p. 77. Loupakof, *Monograph*, in the *Journal of the Moscow Polytechnic Exhibition*, 1872, No. 99.

tendency of all these brilliant careers, towards the same final and inevitable crash, in which some great historical verdict and punishment would always seem to overshadow mere personal revenge and petty spite. Whatever their origin, whatever the line they took, these men, who none of them cared for law or gospel, or for any principle of rule, save that of their own interest and ambition, invariably ended by falling into the same abyss.

They came from every corner of Europe. Münich, a Bavarian, who began his extraordinary career as the constructor of the Ladoga Canal, elbowed François Guillemotte de Villebois, a gentleman from Lower Brittany, who had begun his career in France as a smuggler. Villebois' Memoirs, which are full of exaggerations, and of assertions, the falsehood of which have been clearly proved, are of little value, either as regards Peter's history or his own.¹ According to his story, he saved the vessel which carried the Tsar from Holland to England from shipwreck. The Russian Sovereign, 'who loved extraordinary men,' at once engaged his services, and, from the subaltern position he then occupied, Villebois, at a bound, became aide-de-camp, and captain in the navy. I will not undertake to follow him too closely through the details of the adventure for which, two years later, he was condemned to the galleys. Having been sent by Peter, during very cold weather, from Strelna to Kronstadt, with a message to Catherine, and having drunk a great deal of brandy on the road to warm himself, the sudden change of temperature, when he entered the Tsarina's bed-chamber, completely overcame him. At the sight of the disordered couch and of the beautiful woman stretched upon it, he lost his head and all his self-control, and calmly recounts the consequences of his frenzy, which even the Sovereign's screams, and the presence of her ladies in an adjoining chamber, could not avert. Catherine is said to have suffered severely from this outrage. As for Peter,—in spite of his wife's condition, which necessitated careful surgical treatment,—he appears to have taken the catastrophe very philosophically. 'The brute,' he said, 'did not know what he was doing, so he is innocent; but we must make an example of him,—let him go to the galleys for a couple of years.'

¹ Published, with certain omissions, in the *Revue Retrospective*, 3rd series, vol. xviii. p. 351, etc. The manuscript is in the Bibliothèque Nationale. Paris.

The only absolutely certain historical point about this story is the condemnation to the galleys. Yet Villebois does not seem to have stayed there more than six months. At the end of that time he was pardoned, married, by the Tsar's good offices, to the daughter of Glück, the former pastor of Marienburg, and thus brought into close connection with the Sovereigns. In Elizabeth's reign he was rear-admiral, and commandant of the port of Kronstadt.

Two other well-born Frenchmen, André and Adrien de Brigny, fought beside this Corsair in the ranks of the Tsar's army; but, brave as they were, they were quite devoid of the spirit of intrigue indispensable, in those days, to success, and never rose to any prominent position. Englishmen,—perhaps on account of the fastidiousness, angular-mindedness, and lack of adaptability of the race,—were in a minority in the motley crowd of foreigners, through whose means Peter endeavoured to inoculate his subjects with western culture. The celebrated Perry, who entered the Tsar's service as an engineer, and soon left it in disgust, only spent a few years in the vicinity of his comrade in misfortune, Fergusson. This last had been engaged to direct a mathematical school, and never succeeded in getting one kopeck paid him for his services.¹ Otherwise every nationality was represented. There was even a negro.

This dusky henchman of the Tsar, who was born about the year 1696, was carried off from his own country at the age of seven years, and taken to Constantinople, where Count Tolstōi, the Russian ambassador, purchased, him in 1705. Through all the course of a singularly active life he was haunted by a painful vision, the memory of his beloved sister Lagane, who had cast herself into the sea, and swum for a considerable distance behind the ship which was bearing him from her. On the shores of the Bosphorus he received the surname of Ibrahim. During the Tsar's visit to Vilna, in 1707, he was baptised,—Peter standing godfather, and the Queen of Poland godmother,—and was thenceforward known as Abraham Petrovitch Hannibal. He began his Russian life as page to the Sovereign, and, though he made intimate acquaintance with the *doubina*, he gained his master's favour both by his pretty tricks, and his singularly bright intelligence. He was a negro prodigy. In 1716, he was sent to

¹ Perry, *Present Condition of Russia*, p. 257, French edition (Amsterdam, 1718).

Paris to complete his education. He had already learnt Dutch, and soon won himself a reputation in the French army, in the ranks of which he at once took service. During the campaign against the Spaniards, in 1720, in the course of which he received a wound on the head, he was promoted lieutenant. When he returned to Paris, he found himself a kind of celebrity, much sought-for in drawing-rooms, where he is said to have had considerable success. But his serious tastes soon drew him away from frivolous gaiety. He entered the School of Engineering, and did not leave it until 1726, when he returned to Russia, was made lieutenant in the Bombardier Company, which Peter once commanded, and shortly married. His wife, a very beautiful woman, the daughter of a Greek merchant, brought a *fair-haired* child into the world. He forced her to take the veil, had the child brought up with every care, found her a husband, gave her a fortune, but never would see her face. A very jealous, violent, loyal, upright, and exceedingly avaricious man. After Peter's death, he fell out, like everybody else, with Menshikof. Like almost everybody else, he was sent into exile, and did not return from Siberia till Elizabeth's time, when he became a full general, and died in 1781, at the age of eighty-three years.¹ Another glory has added itself, since those days, to his name and history. He was Poushkin's paternal great-grandfather.

V

As a matter of fact, the Tsar's circle, whether native or foreign, was almost entirely made up of 'utility men' and 'lay figures.' We do not find one really great name, or towering figure. The principal actor, and the part he played, probably took up so much room on the stage, that this was inevitable. My opinion is confirmed by what I notice of the sovereign's relations with the only man in the contemporary European world of equal stature with himself,

¹ Helbig, *Russische Günstlinge* (Tübingen, 1809), p. 135. Bantich-Kamienski, *Biographical Dictionary*. Zazykof, *Lexicographical Encyclopædia*, 1838, vol. xiv. p. 289. Longuinof, *Russian Archives*, 1864, pp. 180, 181. Opatovitch, *The First Wife of Abraham Hannibal*. *Russian Antiquities*, 1877, vol. xviii. p. 69. Poushkin, *Genealogy of the Poushkin and Hannibal Families*, collected works (1887 edition), vol. v. p. 148.

with whom he had intercourse. I have already had occasion to mention Leibnitz's first attempts to attract the Tsar's attention, and the hopes he built on their success. Yet these relations, when once he succeeded in establishing them, brought no particular good fortune to either party,—both indeed would seem to have somewhat lost dignity by them.

From the moment when Peter's first journey through Germany revealed him to the eyes of Europe, Leibnitz seemed possessed with a perfect monomania. All his talk was of Russia and of the Tsar. He was in a state of perpetual excitement, and full of endless plans, all more or less unreasonable, and all tending to the same object, that of attracting the monarch's attention, and winning his esteem. This feverish restlessness may be very naturally explained. The great savant, as is well-known, claimed Slavonic origin, of an ancient and noble nature, common with that of the Polish family of Lubieniecki. He himself inserted, in an autobiographical notice, the following words:—'*Leibnitiorum, sive Lubenecziorum, nomen slavonicum, familia in Polonia.*' When he quarrelled with the town of Leipzig, he published the following protest:—'*Let Germany lower her pride! The genius that was born with me is not exclusively Teutonic, it is the genius of the Slavonic race, which woke in my person, in this Fatherland of the Scholastics.*' And to this distant bond of consanguinity he appealed, when he first addressed Peter, at Torgau, in 1711. '*Sire,*' he is reported to have said, '*our point of departure is a common one. Slavs, both of us, belonging to a race, the destinies of which no man can foresee,—we are both of us the apostles of future centuries.*'¹ This conversation, unfortunately, turned off to other subjects, and the intercourse thus begun, ended by falling to a much less elevated standpoint. In 1697, when Leibnitz was meditating a scientific plan of campaign for Russia, he still kept at a dignified level. But there was a great come-down in this very year, 1711, when his chief anxiety was to get himself accepted as the Tsar's representative at the Court of Hanover. A taste for diplomacy was one of his weaknesses, and it increased

¹ A letter from Count John Lubieniecki, lately published in the '*Kraj*,' a Polish review, confirms, by information drawn from family documents, the truth of Leibnitz's Polish origin, which even the German editors of the great savant's works, Klopp, Guhrauer, and Fertz, have not attempted to deny.

with age. We see him piling application on application, and intrigue on intrigue,—worrying Peter's minister at Vienna, Baron Urbich,—tormenting the Duke of Wolfenbüttel, whose grand-daughter had just been affianced to the Tsarevitch Alexis. All he was able to get was the promise of a *tchin* and of a pension. The fulfilment of this promise was long in coming, and at Karlsbad, in 1712, he came back to the charge, offering his good offices to reconcile Austria with Russia, a magnetic globe of the world, which he had caused to be constructed for the Tsar, and an instrument to be used in planning fortifications. This time he contrived to obtain the title of Privy Councillor, and a gift of 500 ducats, which satisfied him until 1714, when a vacancy in the Russian Diplomatic Service at Vienna once more threw him into a state of agitation. In 1716, he was at the springs of Pyrmont, to which the Russian sovereign had betaken himself,—with a bundle of half-scientific, half-political memoranda in one hand, and a wooden apparatus for the Tsar's paralysed arm in the other,—calling out about his pension, which had never been paid, 'although it had been talked of all over Europe,' piling up expressions of admiration and proofs of devotion,—altogether a wonderful, and pitiable, and most insufferable beggar. Peter strikes me as having been almost indifferent always to the brightness of this great intelligence, which never seems to have succeeded in coming into contact with his own.¹ Within a few months of the visit to Pyrmont, Leibnitz was dead.

A considerable share in the establishment of the Collegial Administration of Russia has been ascribed to him. A letter on which this organisation was based, was long believed to be his composition. But this is far from being true. The original document, which is preserved in the Moscow archives, is not in his handwriting, and other authentic writings of his do not mention it. Three other documents on the same subject, which have also been attributed to him, are certainly not his work. He never, whatever may be said to the contrary, had anything to do with the foundation of the Academy of Sciences at St. Petersburg. Peter

¹ See preface of Guerrier's *Selections* (St. Petersburg, 1873), p. 23, and compare Foucher de Careil on *Peter the Great and Leibnitz* (Reports of the 'Académie des Sciences, Morales, et Politiques,' June 1874).

requested another German, Christian Wolff, to organise and direct this institution, but met with a curt refusal. Wolff thought the climate of St Petersburg too cold, and the pay offered to the Director of the Academy altogether too small; besides which, he was all for replacing the Academy by a university. 'Berlin,' he said, 'has an Academy of Sciences, the only thing lacking is the learned men.'¹ He refused to act in the matter, and restricted himself to recommending some of his friends, Bernoulli, Bülfinger, and Martini, to the Tsar. This circle of hardworking, if not transcendently brilliant, men, surrounded the cradle of knowledge in Russia, to the great ultimate advantage of the country.

The plan finally adopted by Peter for his Academy, was based on a report written by an obscure personage of the name of Fick, a former secretary to the Duke of Luxemburg. Leibnitz's plans went much too far, they extended beyond the Tsar's line of vision, and also, probably, beyond the possibilities of the time and place. Peter never adopted any of the great savant's extreme views. Absorbed as he was, till 1716, by the anxieties connected with his struggle with Sweden, all Leibnitz's proposals fell on an inattentive ear. He never went beyond some appearance of intellectual intimacy, and a scientific correspondence, which he kept up with the assistance of Bruce. Perhaps, too, the doubtful and undignified side of his would-be helper's attitude displeased him, and put him on his guard. The man of genius may have been utterly hidden, under the courtier, and the hungry petitioner.

Yet Leibnitz, that great sower of ideas, did not pass in vain down the furrow traced by the great reformer's plough. The seed he so lavishly cast in all directions, may have been carried away by the winds, and lost in space,—but, in due time, it reappeared. I see fruitful traces of it, in the great work accomplished, at a much later date, under the auspices of the Russian Government, with regard to the study of the Slavonic languages; and Alexander Humboldt's researches on terrestrial magnetism, carried right across Russia, into Central Asia, were certainly inspired by his illustrious predecessor. The influence of such men as Leibnitz, and Peter the Great, is not measured by the limits of their earthly life.

¹ Briefe von Christian Wolff (St. Petersburg, 1860.) Piekarski, *History of Science and Literature in Russia*, vol. i. p. 33.

CHAPTER II

THE FEMININE ELEMENT

- I. The King's Mistress and the Tsar's—Peter a Don Juan—His indifference to propriety—A daring uncle—The women of his circle—Princess Galitzin—Brutality and cynicism—Bestiality and debauchery—Another side of his relations with women.
- II. His marriage—Eudoxia Lapouhin—The honeymoon—Disagreements—An ill-assorted couple—Separation—The cloister—The recluse's romance—Major Glebof—Lovers' correspondence—The investigation—The trial—The lover's fate—The mistress' punishment—Catherine's jealousy—Prison—Eudoxia's turn at last.
- III. The earliest favourite—Anna Mons—Peter's liberality—Deception—Consolations—Menshikof's gynæceum—The Favourite's sisters—The Arséniefs—Catherine Vassilevska.
- IV. Maids of Honour—Madame Tchernichof—Eudoxia—Marie Matviéief—*Terem* and *Harem*—Marie Hamilton—Lover and executioner—A lesson in anatomy at the foot of the scaffold—Catherine's last rival, Marie Kantémir—The wife and sovereign triumphs—A friend—The Polish lady—Madame Sieniawska.
- V. The influence of women on Peter's life, and his own influence on the destiny of Russian women—Russian feeling in the seventeenth century—Hatred of women—Causes and effects—The National genius and foreign influences—Byzantium and the East—The current of asceticism—Family life—Marriage—The Domostroi—Barbarous habits—When woman is sacrificed, man grows vile—The current of emancipation—Peter's reforms—His failures—The importance of his work—A saviour.

I

THE King: 'Ah, brother, so I hear you too have a mistress?'

The Tsar: 'Brother, My . . . do not cost me much, but yours costs you millions of crowns, which might be better spent.'

This scene, which occurred in 1716, at Copenhagen, whither Peter had gone to visit his ally the King of Denmark, is reported in a grave diplomatic document.¹ At first sight, it would appear to give a very fair idea of the part played

¹ Despatch from Loss to Manteuffel, Copenhagen, 14th Aug. 1716. Sbornik, vol. xx. p. 62.

by women in the great Reformer's life. He was too busy, and too coarse, to be a lover worthy of the name—or even a decent husband. He fixed the price of the favours bestowed on his soldiers in St. Petersburg at *one kopeck for three kisses*; and, after his first interview with Catherine, the future Empress, he enriched her with a solitary ducat.¹ Not that he was altogether incapable of appreciating the more delicate charm to be found in the society of the fair sex. We must never forget that Russian feminine society was one of his creations. The presence of ladies at the *Sloboda* gatherings, was the first and most powerful attraction which drew him there. In 1693, when two of the fair guests, at a *fête* given by Lefort, ventured to leave the company unobserved, he sent his soldiers to bring them back by force.² In 1701, when his care for his budding navy kept him at Voronège, a great number of these ladies joined him there, for the Easter festivities, and were most graciously received. When one or two of them fell ill, he gallantly put off his own return to Moscow.³ If the historical interest of this chapter depended on the memory of such gallantries, my respect, both for women and for history, would lead me to suppress it. But there is another question. In such a character as Peter's,—so hugely complex, from the moral point of view,—surprises burst on us at every turn. As far as external matters go, this side of his personality, in spite of his sociableness, stamps him a boor and a cynical debauchee. He has no care for the woman's dignity, or his own, and he is too ill-bred to have the smallest regard for propriety. Observe this anecdote, related by Baron Pöllnitz, as to the Sovereign's visit to Magdeburg in 1717: 'As the King (of Prussia) had given orders that he was to be treated with every imaginable honour, the different State bodies waited upon him with their presidents. When Cocceji, the brother of the High Chancellor, who was at the head of the Regency, went, with his colleagues, to pay his respects to the Tsar, he found him leaning on two Russian ladies, and caressing them in the most familiar manner. This he continued to do during the whole time of Cocceji's address.'⁴ And here is another, describing his meeting with the Duchess of Mecklenburg, his niece, at Berlin. 'The Tsar rushed to meet the Princess, kissed her

¹ Duclos' *Memoirs* (1839 edition), p. 615.

³ Oustrialof, vol. iv. part ii. pp. 555, 562.

² Korb. p. 77.

⁴ *Memoirs*, 1791, vol. ii. p. 65.

tenderly, and drawing her into an adjoining room, indulged in everybody's presence—even in that of the Duke of Mecklenburg—in the grossest familiarities.¹ Pöllnitz, who declares that he received this information both from the King himself, and from two other eye-witnesses, adds many not less expressive details, as to the great man's habitual intercourse with the female element at his Court. 'Princess Galitzin was his *doura*, or female fool. Everybody vied in teasing her. She often dined with the Tsar, he would throw the remains of his food at her head, and would make her stand up so that he might pinch her.' According to some other witnesses, the shameful vices of the Princess may have justified, to some extent, the ignominy of the treatment to which she was subjected. A letter from the Prussian Envoy, Mardefield, contains a curious reference, in this connection, to the French Duchesses and the pages in whom they took such great delight,—congratulating them on their being content with these alone. Princess Galitzin had no page,—I will not go the length of repeating Mardefield's explanation of how she supplied this want.²

According to Nartof—generally a fairly reliable witness as to the Tsar's private life—Peter was of a very amorous disposition, but the fit never lasted more than half an hour. He would not, as a rule, force a woman's inclinations, but, as he was apt to cast his choice on servant girls, he very seldom met with any resistance. Nartof mentions one rebel, a laundress; but Bruce relates, in much more dramatic fashion, the story of the daughter of a foreign merchant at Moscow, who, to escape the sovereign's amorous pursuit, was obliged to fly her parents' house, and hide herself in the forest.³ One of the documents published by Prince Galitzin describes the Tsar's struggle with a gardener in Holland, who used his rake to drive away the monarch from the neighbourhood of a garden-girl, whose work he was interrupting.

These details, to which I refer with much diffidence—believing such reference to be part of a historian's duty—repugnant as they are, are not the worst. The Tsar's intercourse with Menshikof was even more revolting. And Menshikof was not the only favourite.

¹ *Memoirs*, 1791, vol. ii. p. 65.

² Herrmann, *Peter der Grosse und der Tsarevitch Alexei*, p. 209.

³ *Memoirs*, p. 93.

II

Peter's first beginnings were commonplace enough,—a very early marriage, followed by some years of tolerably happy married life, and then a gradual cooling of mutual affection. The honeymoon once over, the husband and wife saw but little of each other, for the Tsar was almost always away. But the letters which passed between them were fairly affectionate, and the pet names in which lovers delight may frequently be noticed on their pages. *Lapoushka*, (little hand) was the sobriquet bestowed on Peter, and willingly accepted by him. He was not to be the last person to bear it. Two children came into the world, Alexander, who died in infancy, and Alexis, born under an unlucky star. After the death of Nathalie in 1694, things began to go wrong. Peter, who then had been married for five years, had already contracted some extra-conjugal intimacies in the *Sloboda*, or elsewhere. But he had conducted these affairs with a certain amount of prudence. He was a dutiful son, and Nathalia a very vigilant parent. When her influence was replaced by that of Lefort, two female forms, members of the group of beauties,—none of them, probably, over strict in conduct,—which surrounded the young sovereign at the *Sloboda* gatherings, rose like stars on the horizon of his reign. Both these ladies sprang from the middle class: one was the daughter of Bötticher, a goldsmith; the other, the child of a wine-merchant, named Mons. Political disagreements helped to disturb the harmony between Peter and his wife. Eudoxia belonged to a violently Conservative family; her relations, who were all inclined to oppose the new order of things, then just coming into existence, soon fell into disgrace, lost their positions at Court, and underwent all kinds of ill-treatment. One of them, the Tsarina's own brother, who ventured to insult the favourite, was publicly beaten by the Tsar; another was put to the torture, and horrible things were reported concerning the sufferings he endured. Peter, it was said, soaked his garments with spirits of wine, and then set him on fire. One point, at all events, is certain,—he died in prison.¹ When the Tsar started on his first European tour, Eudoxia's father, and her two brothers, were sent into practical exile, as the governors of remote provinces.

¹ Jeliaboujski's *Memoirs*, p. 40. Solovief, vol. xiv. p. 6 (annexed matter).

In the course of his journey, Peter ceased corresponding with his wife, and suddenly, while he was in London, two of his confidants, L. K. Naryshkin and T. N. Streshnief, were charged with a mission which clearly explained his silence. They were to induce Eudoxia to take the veil. This was the usual expedient, at that period, in the case of ill-assorted marriages, and Peter would appear to have set his heart upon it. His intercourse with the West had settled the poor forsaken lady's fate. She belonged to a very different world, and was doomed to disappear.

Yet she was not without a certain amount of charm. She may not have been pretty,—and even on that subject it is not easy to come to any decision. Catherine herself, her future rival—judging by the pictures, flattered, no doubt, which still exist, and which made a very different impression upon Peter—would appear to us a perfect monster of ugliness. Eudoxia was certainly not a fool. When she reappeared at Court, after her merciless husband's death, she struck those who met her as a kind-hearted old lady, fairly well informed on interesting subjects, and not altogether ignorant of State affairs.¹ Her correspondence with Glebof, of which some extracts are given on a later page, prove her to have been a tender, passionate, and loving woman. Intellectually speaking, she resembled the generality of Muscovite women of that period, who had grown up within the *Terem*; she was ignorant, simple-minded and superstitious. And this was the rock on which her fate was to be wrecked. Evidently she was no fit companion for Peter, incapable as she was of understanding him, following his ideas, and sharing his existence.

When Peter reached Moscow, on his return from his great journey, at six o'clock on the evening of the 26th of August 1698, he went to see some of his friends—Gordon, amongst others—and then paid a visit to the Mons household. But he did not see his wife for some days, and then only in the house of a third person, that of Vinnius, the postmaster-general. The sole object of this meeting was to give his verbal confirmation of the decision already announced through Naryshkin and Streshnief. Eudoxia's answer was what her husband might have expected—an uncompromising refusal. 'What had she done?' she demanded, 'to deserve

¹ Lady Rondeau's letters (Letters from an English Lady), 1776.

such a fate? What fault had he to find with her?' As a matter of fact, she does not even appear to have been suspected of any participation in the political intrigues in which the Tsarevna Sophia and the Tsar's other sisters were implicated. The revolt of the *Streltsy*, which Peter was then preparing to drown in a sea of blood, broke out without the smallest complicity, moral or otherwise, on her part. But the Tsar's mind was finally made up. If he could find no pretext, he was resolved to do without one. He angrily repulsed the Patriarch's intervention in favour of his lawful wife, and, after three weeks of parleying, he cut the Gordian knot. A closed carriage, drawn by two horses, (contemporary chroniclers lay special stress on this detail, which, in a country where the smallest country gentleman never left his house without the escort of a whole troop of horsemen, cruelly aggravated the injustice and hardship of the whole proceeding)—a hackney coach, in fact, carried the unhappy Tsarina to Souzdal, where the doors of the nunnery of the Intercession of the Blessed Virgin (*Pokrovskii Dítvitshyi Monastyr*) closed upon her.

Innocent though she was, she was more severely treated than others who had been guilty. When Peter imprisoned her sisters, whose connivance with the rebels had been generally recognised, if not absolutely established, he left each of them an income and a certain household. He gave his wife nothing at all; she was his wife no longer. She had ceased to be the Tsarina; she had lost her very name. She was nothing but Helen, the nun, with only one maid to wait on her, and she was forced to appeal to the charity of her own relations, to save her from starvation. She writes to her brother Abraham, 'I do not need a great deal, still I must eat; I drink neither wine nor brandy, yet I fain would be able to offer . . .'. This last touch is a curious one, eloquently expressive of one of the most attractive qualities of the old patriarchal mode of life in Russia. Personal suffering was a misfortune of a kind, but inability to show the accustomed hospitality was a supreme distress. The letter continues: 'There is nothing here, everything is rotting away. I know I am a trouble to you, but what can I do? As long as I live, for pity's sake, give me meat and drink! Give garments to the beggar!'¹

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iii. p. 187, etc. Compare Korb, p. 74.

She was only six-and-twenty, and for twenty years yet she was to beat her anguish and despair against the walls of the convent cell, where her life and passion had been entombed. When she left it, with her youth blighted and her heart broken, it was only to endure a still more cruel fate.

Twenty years later, in 1718, the trial of the Tsarevitch Alexis quickened Peter's inquisitorial zeal. It occurred to him that Eudoxia's influence might have been one of those which had incited his son to rebellion. Forthwith, he ordered a descent upon the nunnery, and an enquiry. The secret police drew the cover blank, as far as Alexis was concerned, but this disappointment was atoned for by another discovery. Innocent as she was, politically, Eudoxia was first suspected, and then found guilty, of a criminal love affair with Major Glebof. She had broken down at last. In her downfall and her misery, she had sought for consolation. Major Glebof, who had been sent to Souzdal on recruiting duty, had been touched by her sad fate. She suffered from the cold of her cell: he sent her some furs, and her deeply-grateful letter of thanks paved the way for a dangerous intimacy. He went to see her, to receive her personal thanks, returned again and again, and so they fell in love—she, with an enthusiastic, ardent, and all-absorbing passion; he, far more cautiously, with an affection full of ambiguous reservations. The young man was probably very ambitious; he reckoned on some distant change of fortune, thought of changing his own career, and entering the world of politics. He was in money difficulties too,—he was married, and found his wife a great encumbrance. Eudoxia, poor lady, would have had him leave the service, so that he might remain near her, and belong to her alone. She was always endeavouring to satisfy his needs, and relieve the straits she more than suspected. She was ever ready to bestow the paltry sums which she contrived to wring from the parsimony or the poverty of her own relations upon him. Who could refuse to help him? She sent him money. Did he need more, and yet more? 'Where thy heart is, my *batko*,' (a still more caressing form of *Batiushka*—Little Father) 'there too is mine; where thy tongue is, there is my head; thy will is always mine.'

But, bound by his duties, military or conjugal, and perhaps a little tired of her already, *Batko's* visits grew rarer. Then came despairing and distracted appeals. Had he forgotten

her already? Had she not been able to please him? Had she not done enough? Had not her tears watered his face, his hands, every limb of his body, and every joint of his feet and of his fingers? She has a language of her own, of the most exuberantly pathetic description, which, in the most strange and flowery style, expresses feelings often enough fantastic, and almost incoherent, but always throbbing with evident sincerity,—the brilliant colours of the East, mingled with the rustic tints of her Russian home. ‘My light, my *batiushka*, my soul, my joy, has the cruel hour of separation indeed struck already? Rather would I see my soul parted from my body! O my light! how can I live on earth apart from thee? How can I endure existence? My unhappy heart had long foreseen this moment: long have I wept over it, and now it has come, and I suffer, and God alone knows how dear thou art to me! Why do I love thee so much, my adored one, that without thee life has no value for me? Why, O my soul! art thou angry with me? Yes, so angry that thou dost not write to me. At least, O my heart! wear the ring I gave thee, and love me a little—just a little! I have had another ring like it made for myself. But what! it is by thy will that we are parted? Ah! it is long since I began to see a change in thy love. But why, O my *Batko*! why comest thou not to see me? Has anything happened to thee? Has any one spoken evil of me to thee? O my friend! O my light! my *lioubonka*’ (from *Lioubit*, to cherish), ‘have pity on me! Have pity on me, O my lord! and come to see me to-morrow! O my whole world, my adored one, my *lapoushka*’ (it will be recollected that she had originally applied this name to another person), ‘answer me, let me not die of grief! I have sent thee a cravat; wear it, O my soul!—thou wilt not wear anything that I send thee; is that a sign that I cannot please thee? But forget thy love,—I cannot do it! I cannot live without thee!’

But *Batko* continues hard-hearted, and her complaints grow more and more distracted. They are like the continuous monotonous cry of a wounded creature.

‘Who has done me this wrong, poor wretch that I am! who has stolen my treasure? who has shut out the light from my eyes? for whom hast thou forsaken me? to whom hast thou abandoned me? how is it that thou hast no pity

for me? Can it be that thou wilt never return to me? Who has parted thee from me, unhappy that I am? What have I done to thy wife? how have I harmed her? how have I offended you? Wherefore, O dear soul! didst thou not tell me how I had displeased thy wife? and why didst thou listen to her? Why hast thou forsaken me? Assuredly I would never have separated thee from thy wife. O my light! how can I live without thee? how can I remain in this world? Why hast thou caused me this anguish? Have I been guilty without knowing it? Why didst thou not tell me of my fault? Why not have struck me, to punish me,—chastised me in any way, for this fault I have committed in my ignorance? In God's name, do not forsake me! Come to me! without thee I shall die!'

And some days later :—

'Why am I not dead? Would that thou hadst buried me with thy own hands! Forgive, forgive me, O my soul! do not let me die! I will kill myself! Send me, O my heart! send me the waistcoat thou hast often worn. Why hast thou forsaken me? Send me a morsel of bread into which thou hast bitten with thy teeth! How utterly hast thou forsaken me! what have I done to displease thee, that thou shouldst leave me thus, orphaned, broken-hearted . . .'

Nine of these letters were produced at the enquiry. They were not written by Eudoxia herself. She had dictated them to a nun named Kaptelina, her confidant, who added postscripts, in which she endeavoured to induce the faithless swain to take pity on the sufferings of the *Matoushka*.

But the imprudent lover had endorsed every one of them, 'Letter from the Tsarina Eudoxia.' The two rings were also found in the possession of the guilty couple. The depositions of the nuns and the servants in the Convent, many of whom were examined, were quite conclusive. Glebof had constantly visited the Tsarina, both in the day-time and at night; they had frequently kissed each other in the presence of witnesses, and were often alone together for many hours. Finally Eudoxia confessed everything.

And Glebof? The popular legend describes him as having behaved like a hero, deliberately, in the midst of the most frightful tortures, taking every other sort of crime upon his shoulders, and even confessing imaginary faults, while steadily refusing to admit anything that could sully

Eudoxia's honour.¹ But the minutes of the enquiry, which are still preserved in the Moscow archives, prove the exact contrary.² Glebof was dumb as to all the other matters whereof he was accused. The only absolute confession he seems to have made concerned this love affair, which dated eight years back. Eudoxia was then 38 years old.

I hasten to say that none of these depositions nor confessions really prove anything. Skorniakof-Pissaref, the Examining Judge sent by Peter to Souzdal, caused fifty nuns, some of whom died under the lash, to be flogged. They said anything and everything he desired. Eudoxia and Glebof were both of them examined in the question chamber. Such frightful tortures were inflicted on the unfortunate officer that it was decided to put him to death on the 16-27th of March, 1718,—the doctors declaring they could not prolong his life for more than twenty-four hours.³ A story was current, that the poor wretch had been imprisoned in a dungeon, the floor of which was covered with sharp spikes, made of very hard wood, on which he was forced to walk barefoot. The final form of execution selected by Peter was impalement. As there were twenty degrees of frost, the unhappy man was wrapped in a fur pelisse, and given fur boots, and a warm cap, so as to make his torture last as long as possible. It began at three o'clock in the afternoon, and continued till half-past seven o'clock on the evening of the following day.⁴ A story, which does not appear altogether credible, relates that when the victim had suffered several hours, Peter approached, and endeavoured to draw fresh confessions from him. The only answer Glebof vouchsafed, was to spit in the monarch's face.⁵

Eudoxia escaped with her life, but she was placed in a

¹ Allainval's *Anecdotes*, 1745, p. 31. The reports of the foreign diplomats resident at Moscow, which echo current opinion, are all in the same sense. Herrmann, *Peter der Grosse und der Tsarewitsch Alexei*, pp. 135 and 207. Despatch from De Bie to Fagel, March 28, 1718 (Archives at the Hague). *Mémoires et Documents* (French Foreign Office), vol. i. p. 129, etc. *Manuscript Reports in the Gotha Library*, etc., etc.

² Partially published in Oustrialof, vol. vi. p. 469, etc.

³ Despatch quoted by De Bie.

⁴ *Ausführliche Beschreibung der in der Hauptstadt Moscow . . . vollzogenen grossen Execution* (Riga, 1718). See also the romantic story of Eudoxia and Glebof, as told by Siemiewski, *Eudoxia Lapouhin*, in the 'Messenger Russe,' 1859, vol. xxi. pp. 219-265. Also, 1860, vol. xxx. pp. 559-599; 1859, vol. xxiii. pp. 299-300, *Study by Snidgref*.

⁵ Dolgoroukof, vol. i. p. 32. Lady Rondeau, p. 32.

still more lonely nunnery, on the shores of Lake Ladoga, where she was yet more closely watched. According to one authority, she was condemned, ~~before being~~ sent to her new prison, to be whipped, by a Court of Bishops, Archimandrites, and other ecclesiastics, and this sentence was carried out by two monks, in presence of the whole Chapter.¹

What can have inspired Peter to bring his consort and her lover to trial, and more especially, to treat them with such ferocity? We cannot suppose him to have been jealous of the wife he had repudiated and forgotten, and left to grow old in the loneliness of her convent. And his habitual indulgence for weaknesses of that particular nature,—especially in cases which bore no reference to political matters,—is well known. Now political matters do not appear to have had the slightest connection with this business. Eudoxia's correspondence with her lover, which never refers to anything but her love, is a clear proof of their perfect innocence in this respect. The Ex-Tsarina had indeed allowed herself to be tempted to resume her worldly garb, and had even permitted those about her to encourage her in the hope of a return, more or less distant, to her former splendours. But there was never more than a hope of this, in any quarter.² May not Eudoxia have been the victim of the jealousy and hatred of a third person? Let us pass over the next seven years. Peter died at last, and this event, instead of being a happy one for the prisoner, was the signal for a fresh aggravation of her cruel fate. She was dragged from her convent, taken to the fortress of Schlüsselburg, and there cast into a subterranean dungeon, which swarmed with rats. She fell ill, and the only person she had to wait on her, was an old dwarf woman, herself in need of service and assistance. Thus two years passed. Who did this thing? Catherine I., the reigning Sovereign. And here, perhaps, we may find the answer to my question regarding Peter. At the end of the two years, a change came. Suddenly, as though in a dream, the door of the dungeon was thrown open, gentlemen

¹ French Foreign Office, *Mémoires et Documents*, vol. i. p. 129.

² De Bie does indeed mention a plot and a cyphered correspondence, the key to which Glebof refused to give up; but this is a mere repetition of stories current at the time.

in court dress appeared upon the threshold, and bowing to the ground, requested the captive to follow them. Thus led, she entered a luxurious apartment, prepared, so they informed her, for her special use, in the house of the Commandant of the Fortress. A bed, with sheets of the finest Dutch linen, replaced the damp straw pallet she had lately occupied; the walls were hung with splendid stuffs, the table was covered with gold plate, 10,000 roubles awaited her in a casket, courtiers stood in her antechamber, carriages and horses were at her orders. What did it mean? It meant that Catherine I. was dead, and that the new Tsar, Peter II., was the son of Alexis, and the grandson of Eudoxia. The poor grandmother, whose hair had whitened in her prison, went to Moscow to be present at the Coronation of the new monarch. There she took precedence of all the other princesses; she was surrounded with pomp, and treated with the deepest consideration and respect. But it was all too late; her life was broken, and of her own free will, she went back to her nunnery. She ended her days, in 1731, in the *Novodiévitchy Monastyr*, that refuge for great misfortunes, where Sophia spent her life after the day which saw all her ambitions crumble into dust. According to another tradition, Eudoxia spent her last years in the family residence of the Lapouhin, at Sérébrianoïé, but even there, she had access, by a gallery, to the neighbouring cloister of St. George.¹ Her tomb is in the Moscow Monastery, and her memory lives even in the present day, in the popular legends and songs of the country.² In spite of all her downfall and disgrace, she has kept the sorrowful sympathy of those humble ones of the earth who are all too well acquainted with bitter suffering.

III

The moment Eudoxia was safely interned in her convent, Peter installed his first 'maitresse en titre.' This position was occupied by Anna Mons, or Monst, or Munst,—*Domicella Monsiana*, as Korb calls her. Her father, before he came

¹ Russian Archives, 1873, p. 652.

² *Memoires of the 'Académie des Sciences' at St. Petersburg*, 1864, vol. v. book ii. p. 206 (Podossouf).

to Moscow, had been a wine merchant, or, as others say, a jeweller, at Minden. The family, therefore, was really of Westphalian origin, although, in later years, it tried to boast of Flemish ancestors, and affixed the particle 'de' before the name it added to its original appellation,—'Mons,' or 'Moens, de la Croix.'¹ The young lady, who began her career as Lefort's mistress, soon forsook the favourite for his master. She accompanied the Sovereign even on occasions of public ceremonial. Neither he nor she shrank from attracting attention. When he stood godfather to the Danish envoy's son, he desired that she should be godmother.² He had a fine house built for her in the *Sloboda*, and the dreary archives of the *Préobrajenski Prikaz* bear witness to the too loudly expressed astonishment of a German tailor named Flank, concerning the glories of a bedroom which was the chief ornament of the dwelling, and in which the Tsar, as it was well known, frequently appeared.³ In 1703, somewhat unwillingly and remorsefully it must be said, he endowed the lady with a property of considerable extent, called Doubino, in the district of Kozielsk. She was a most barefaced beggar, perpetually soliciting the somewhat unready generosity of the Sovereign, in a succession of notes, written by a secretary, to which she added postscripts in bad German. She backs one of these requests by calling on the name of a person whose good offices she could hardly have expected. 'For the love of your son, Alexis Petrovitch, give me that estate!'⁴ Now, Alexis, as my readers will recollect, was Eudoxia's child. Her letters were occasionally accompanied by very modest gifts. Thus she sent her lover, then detained at the siege of Azof, four lemons and as many oranges. He had serious thoughts of marrying her, even although he was carrying on doubtful relations with one of her friends, Helen Fademrecht, from whom he received letters, too, addressed, 'To my Universe,—to my little darling Sun,—my beloved, with black eyes and eyebrows of the same colour.' The Mons affair—a very commonplace one,—lasted till 1703, and closed in an equally commonplace fashion. The Saxon Envoy Königseck, who had only lately

¹ Mordovtsef, *Russian Women* (St. Petersburg), p. 3, portfolio No. lxxxvi. in Peter's 'Cabinet.' The documents of the Minden Municipality here preserved give various spellings of the name.

² Korb, p. 84.

³ Nos. 1243, 1258.

⁴ See extracts from this correspondence in Mordovtsef's work.

arrived at the Tsar's Court, was accidentally drowned, at the beginning of a campaign. In his pockets certain notes were found, the writing and the style of which, Peter easily recognised. He was simple-minded enough to lose his temper, the *Domicella Monsiana* went to prison, and only came out by dint of urgent prayers, and cunning wiles. On recovering her liberty she was forced to content herself with becoming the mistress of Keyserling, the Prussian Envoy, who ended by marrying her. She had a taste for diplomacy, and not sufficient prudence to keep herself out of difficulties. She found herself back in prison, and only contrived to save a few poor remnants of the monarch's former liberality. Amongst these was his portrait, with which she sharply refused to part, on account—some people hinted—of the diamonds in which it was framed. Peter kept his grudge against her for years. The enquiry in connection with this sorry business was still going on in 1707, and Romodanovski had thirty prisoners implicated in it—how, neither they nor he could fairly explain,—under lock and key. A year later, Keyserling, who had already married the lady, took advantage of a moment of good humour to intercede with the Tsar in favour of one of her brothers, who was petitioning for employment. His remarks were very ill-received. Peter cut him short roughly, and spoke his mind with his usual frankness. 'I brought up Mons for myself; I meant to marry her; you have seduced her, and you can keep her. But never dare to speak to me of her or of her relations again.' When the Prussian would have persisted, Menshikof intervened: 'Your Mons is a —; she has been my mistress, and yours, and every one's. Don't let us hear any more about her.' This scene took place, it is only fair to say, after supper, at an entertainment given by a Polish nobleman in the neighbourhood of Lublin. It ended unpleasantly for Keyserling. Peter and Menshikof fell on him with their fists, turned him out of the room, and threw him down stairs. He made a formal complaint, but the business was decided against him, and ended with excuses,—which he was obliged to make.¹

¹ Sbornik, vol. xxxix. p. 410 (Whitworth's Despatches). Siémiewski, *The Empress Catherine* (St. Petersburg, 1884), p. 33, etc. (Keyserling's Despatches). Essipof, *Life of Menshikof* (Russian Archives, 1875). Kostomarof, *Russian History told in Biographies* (St. Petersburg, 1881), vol. ii. p. 618. Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 145, etc. Solovief, vol. xvi. p. 67. Lady Rondeau, p. 11. Kosto-

Madame Keyserling, who became a widow in 1711, inspired a fresh passion—the admirer, this time, was a Swedish officer named Miller,—but she died only a few years after her husband.¹

Peter may have been a rancorous, but he was by no means an inconsolable lover. Menshikof, who took Lefort's place in his intimate circle, was as skilful as his predecessor in supplying his master with consolations. Like Lefort, he had his own female following—his two sisters, Marie and Anne, whom he had placed in the household of Peter's favourite sister Nathalia, and two young ladies, Daria and Barbara Arsénief, who also belonged to the Tsarevna's Court, which Court bore a strong resemblance to a harem. A daughter of the Tolstói family completed this group, and, about 1703, a sixth recruit appeared, who was to take a place apart in the Sovereign's life, and give quite an unexpected turn to the hitherto trivial history of his love affairs. The real name of this young girl is as uncertain as her origin. In the first authentic documents which mention her, she is sometimes called Catherine Troubatshof, sometimes Catherine Vassilevska, and sometimes Catherine Miharílof. Menshikof took her for his mistress, while, at the same time, he made love to Daria Arsénief, whose sister had attracted Peter's attention. His plan was to make Barbara Tsarina, and himself thus become the Tsar's brother-in-law. With this object, he gave himself much trouble about the education of the new favourite. 'For heaven's sake,' he wrote to Daria, 'induce your sister to study both Russian and German closely, she has no time to lose.' Villebois describes Barbara as a plain woman, full of wit, and as spiteful as she was clever. He thus relates the beginning of her intercourse with the Tsar. Peter, who was dining with her and her companions, thus addressed her: 'Thou art so ugly, my poor Barbara, that I do not believe any one has ever thought of making love to thee. But strange exploits are those which please me best, and I will not have thee die without —' and forthwith he suited the action to the word. The loose morals of the Tsar's circle give us reason to believe in the truth of the story. I have already indicated the ambiguous

marot comes nearest the truth, though he is mistaken as to the date of Königs-
seck's death. (See Peter's letter to Apraxin, April 17th, 1703, in *Writings and
Correspondence*, vol. ii. p. 152.)

¹ Siémiewski, *ibid.* p. 60.

nature of the intercourse between these lovers and their mistresses—the strange confusion and community of sentiments and intimate relations. Peter and Menshikof perpetually appear as taking each other's place, or cumulating rights which might have been held the exclusive property of one or of the other. During their absences, this condition of things is perpetuated in collective messages, which carry tender recollections and endearing words, pell-mell, from one group to the other, frequently accompanied by presents,—cravats, shirts, and dressing-gowns, made by the fair ladies' own hands. Daria Arsénief adds to her signature the words 'the Fool.' Anna Menshikof adds, 'the very thin one.' As for Catherine, she signs, in 1705, 'with two others,' a sentence explained by a passage in the common letter, 'Peter and Paul salute you, and ask your blessing.' Peter and Paul were the two children she had already borne the Tsar. In 1706, the Tsar gathered the whole gay company at Narva, where the Easter festival was spent, and then brought the ladies back with him to St Petersburg, where, as he wrote to Menshikof, 'he was in paradise, in such fair company.' But Menshikof, who was kept in the south with the army, and found it very dull, would gladly have shared that paradise. He wrote to Peter, that as, when he left St Petersburg, he could not well travel about with such a company of ladies, he might as well send them to his friend. But Peter decided otherwise. He brought the whole party in his train from St Petersburg to Smolensk, and from Smolensk to Kief, and it was not until the month of August that he suffered his favourite to meet him in the latter town, where he had a surprise in store for him. Menshikof had promised marriage to Daria Arsénief, and he was now to keep that engagement,—Peter having decided, on his part, to carry out, at a future date, his own promise to the mother of the 'two others.' The favourite was expected to set him an example, and was not to leave Kief until the deed was done. When the ceremony was over, the common treasure was divided. Peter took his way back to St Petersburg with Catherine Vassilevska and Anisia Tolstoi. Menshikof was left at Kief with his wife, his sister Anne, and his sister-in-law Barbara.¹

¹ Essipof, p. 244, etc., *Peter the Great's Writings and Correspondence*, vol. iii. pp. 283, 322, 540, 770, 816, 1058. Solovief, vol. xvi. p. 68.

IV

A separate chapter of this work is devoted to Catherine Vassilevska. She must not be confounded with the legion of chance mistresses, who flit across the personal history of Peter the Great. Even after her marriage, and her elevation to the throne, she had a daily struggle with rivals, who sometimes threatened her very existence, as wife and sovereign. This occurred in 1706, during Peter's visit to Hamburg, when, a Lutheran pastor having refused to sacrifice his daughter to the Tsar's passion, the monarch promised to repudiate Catherine, and marry the girl. Shafirof, it is said, actually received orders to prepare the wedding contract. But, unluckily for herself, the too confiding maiden consented to grant her admirer an instalment on account of the promised wedding joys, before the hymeneal torch was actually lighted,—and was shortly dismissed, with a gift of a thousand ducats.¹ The heroine of another and less passing fancy is also currently believed to have approached very near to definite triumph, and corresponding rank. Eudoxia Rjevski was the daughter of one of Peter's earliest partizans, who, in spite of that fact, came of a family which claimed the same ancient and illustrious origin as the Tatishtchef, and was devotedly attached to Sophia and her interests. The girl had been the Tsar's mistress before she was fifteen. At sixteen, Peter married her to Tchernishof, an officer seeking advancement, but this did not interrupt his own relations with her. She had four daughters and three sons by him. He passed, at all events, as their father, but the mother's loose conduct rendered the paternity of her children more than doubtful, and compromised her own chances with the Tsar. Her crowning feat, so the scandal-mongers averred, was to call forth the celebrated order given to her husband by her lover,—who had fallen ill, and was inclined to ascribe his sufferings to her,—‘to go and flog Eudoxia.’ The Tsar's usual name for her was ‘Avdotia boi baba’ (Eudoxia ‘the fighter’.) Her mother was the famous ‘Princess-Abbess.’²

Her case, if it were an isolated one, would be hardly worth relating. Unluckily,—and here comes in the interest, sad as

* Report by Count Rabutin, Envoy of the German Emperor, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xi. p. 490.

² Dolgoroukof's *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 175.

it is, of this particular page of history,—she is a typical figure, representing a period, and a state of society. Her story was much the same as that of Maria Matviéief, the daughter of one of the greatest noblemen of that time, who, as I have already said, ultimately became the wife of Roumiantsof. More beautiful than Eudoxia Rjevski, and more loveable, full of wit and charm of every kind, Maria Matviéief, like her, became one of the Empress's maids-of-honour. The position, such an honoured one in our days, almost amounted, at that time, to a vocation of shame. Catherine's female associates had replaced Nathalia's feminine circle. The *terem* no longer existed in the Imperial palaces; the *harem* remained, a legacy from the Oriental past. Complaisant husbands had taken the place of complaisant fathers. Shortly after Peter's death, Maria Roumiantsof bore a son, who was to be the hero of the next great reign, the victorious General of Catherine II.,—recognised by every one as the son of the great Tsar.

Peter's illegitimate posterity was almost as numerous as that of Louis XIV. It may, indeed, have been somewhat exaggerated; there is no historical certainty, for instance, of the illegitimacy of Madame Strogonof's three sons. The mother, a daughter of the house of Novossiltsof, would appear to have been no more to the Tsar than an entertaining, and hard-drinking, boon companion.

The usual story begins again with another maid of honour, Mary Hamilton. There is no truth whatever, I need hardly say, in the sentimental stories in which certain writers have indulged respecting this lady. She seems to have been a somewhat commonplace being, and Peter's particular style of love-making would not appear to have been unsuited to her. My readers are aware that a branch of the great Scotch family of Hamilton, the rival of the house of Douglas, had settled in Russia at a period considerably preceding the emigration of the seventeenth century, and dating from the reign of Ivan the Terrible. This branch, which had married into several of the great families of the country, was almost completely Russianised, before the young Tsar's accession. Mary Hamilton, the granddaughter of Artamon Matviéief, Nathalia Naryshkin's adopted father, went to Court, like other girls of her class, and, being a pretty girl, she shared the usual fate. But

Peter's passion for her was of the most ephemeral description. He forsook her after the shortest acquaintance. She consoled herself with his *Dienshtchiks*, and, several times over, she secretly got rid of the children who were the results of these intimacies. In her desire to keep her hold on one of her faithless lovers, young Orlof,—a very sorry fellow, who ill-treated and fleeced her,—she stole the Tsarina's money and jewels. A mere chance brought about the discovery of these crimes, both small and great. A somewhat important document disappeared from the Tsar's cabinet; suspicion fell on Orlof, who had been aware of its existence, and who had spent the night abroad. When he was brought into the Sovereign's presence, and questioned, he lost his head, fancied that his intercourse with Hamilton was the real object of the enquiry, fell on his knees, crying '*Vinovat*' (pardon), and confessed everything,—both the thefts by which he had profited, and the infanticide at which he had connived. There was a fresh enquiry and a trial. The unhappy girl was convicted, besides her other crimes, (and this last was a mortal one), of having made spiteful remarks about her Sovereign lady, and jokingly referred to the pimples on the imperial countenance. Catherine, whatever her faults may have been, showed considerable kindness on this occasion. She interceded for the culprit, and induced the Tsarina Prascovia, who enjoyed considerable credit, and whose intervention was all the more weighty, because, as a rule, she was little inclined to indulgence, to follow her example. According to ancient Russian ideas, infanticide was a crime which circumstances might easily be held to palliate, and the Tsarina Prascovia was in many respects an old-fashioned Russian. But Peter was inexorable. 'He would not,' he said, 'be either Saul or Ahab, nor violate the Divine Law by an excess of kindness.' Had he then such a mighty respect for Divine Law? My own belief is that he scoffed at it, but—and this, in his eyes, was an unpardonable fault—he fancied himself cheated of several soldiers. After having been put to the question time after time, in the Tsar's own presence, and having steadily refused to give up the name of her accomplice, whose only thought had been to clear himself by casting the guilt on her—he was but a poor creature, that ancestor of the great Catherine's future favourite—Mary Hamilton mounted the scaffold, on the 14th March 1719,

dressed, so Staehlin tells us, 'in a white silk gown, trimmed with black ribbons.' Peter, with his love of theatrical effect, certainly had something to do with this last piece of ghastly coquetry. He was present at the execution, and even,—passive he never could be, anywhere,—had courage to play an active part in it. He embraced the condemned woman at the foot of the scaffold, exhorted her to pray, and supported her in his arms when she bent forward, fainting. Then he stepped aside. When she raised her head, the headsman had taken the Tsar's place. Scherer adds some terrible details to the story. The Tsar, according to him, reappeared when the axe had done its work, and picking up the bloody head, which had rolled into the mud, he calmly began an anatomical discourse, drawing the attention of those present to the number and nature of the organs severed by the steel, especially pointing out the section of the spine. When this was over, he touched the pale lips he had so often kissed before, with his own, let the head drop, crossed himself, and departed.¹

I am not at all inclined to believe that there is any truth in the assertion that Menshikof thought it wise to push on the prosecution and sentence of this unhappy woman, in the interests of his own protectress, the Empress Catherine. This rival never was a dangerous one. A short time afterwards, the Tsarina had much more serious cause for alarm. In one of Campredon's despatches, dated 8th June 1722, the following lines appear:—'The Tsarina fears that if the Princess bears a son, the Tsar may be induced by the Prince of Wallachia to repudiate his wife and marry his mistress.' The mistress in question was Maria Kantémir.²

Prince Dimitri Kantémir, who had been one of Peter's allies during the unfortunate campaign against the Turks in 1711, had lost his sovereignty by the treaty of the Pruth. He had been given hospitality at St. Petersburg, and there waited wearily for the compensation he had been given reason to expect. For a considerable time his daughter appeared more than likely to obtain this for him. When

¹ Siémiewski, *Słowo i Działo*, p. 185. Korobanof, *Study in Russian Antiquities*, 1871, vol. iii. p. 465. Golikof, vol. vi. p. 68. Tatishtchef, Notes on the *Soudiëbnik* (Code) of Ivan Vassilevitch. Herrmann, *Peter der Grosse und der Tsarevitch Alexei*, p. 207. Mordovtsof, *Russian Women*, p. 57. Scherer, vol. ii. p. 272; the account given by Lubomirski (*Tsar, Archduchesses, etc.*) is a mere work of imagination.

² French Foreign Office.

Peter started for his Persian Campaign in 1722, this love affair had already lasted several years, and seemed to threaten a *dénouement* which might be fatal to Catherine's interests. Both the ladies started with the Tsar, but Maria, who was near her confinement, was obliged to stop at Astrakhan. Her condition increased the confidence felt by her partisans. Since the death of little Peter Petrovitch, in 1719, Catherine had no son whom Peter could make his heir, and it was generally believed that if his mistress bore him one, during this expedition, he would not hesitate to get rid of his second wife, as he had got rid of his first. Catherine's friends, if Scherer is to be believed, took means to avert this danger.¹ When Peter returned, he found his mistress in bed, after a miscarriage, which had seriously threatened her life. Thus Catherine triumphed, and the love affair which had so nearly overthrown her fortune, ended in the same commonplace manner as so many of its predecessors. A short time before the Sovereign's death, a complaisant individual, belonging to the same class as Tchernishof, and Roumiantsof, was found, ready to become the nominal husband of the Princess, who, though still much courted, had forfeited all her ambitious hopes.²

Catherine came victoriously out of all her difficulties, and a solemn coronation finally set her above all attack. The mistress, wife, and sovereign, rehabilitated by marriage, the vigilant guardian of the conjugal hearth, who shared all the honours of the supreme rank, won the day at last, and took her place above the mob of female figures in which we see servant-girls elbowing the daughters of Scotch lairds, and Moldo-Wallachian princesses.

And a yet more unexpected figure now appears in that strange throng—a chaste and respected friend. Yes, even that delicate flower bloomed in the miry slough! The woman who played this part, was that most seductive of all human creatures—a well-born Pole—Slav by her birth, Latin by her education. I have already described Peter as spending long hours in the Gardens of Jaworow in the company of Elizabeth Sieniawska. They built a boat together, rowed on the water, and talked endlessly. It

¹ Vol. iii. p. 259.

² *Mémoires et Documents*, vol. i. p. 119, etc. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Paris).

was a perfect idyll. This lady, a Lubomirska, who had married a great Court dignitary and eager partisan of Augustus against Leszczyński, flits across the turbulent life of the brutal conqueror, without being assailed by any breath of scandal. It was not so much her beauty,—that was far from remarkable,—which attracted Peter, it was her unusual intelligence. He delighted in her society, he listened to her advice, not always very convenient, for she supported Leszczyński against the Tsar's own *protégé*, and against her husband's master. He talked of his plan for dismissing all the foreign officers in his service; she forthwith taught him a lesson by dismissing the German leader of an orchestra of Polish musicians, which at once gave forth such discordant sounds that even the Tsar's far from sensitive ear suffered. He spoke of turning the provinces, Russian or Polish, through which Charles XII. would have to pass, to reach Moscow, into deserts; and she interrupted him with a story of the gentleman who, to disoblige his wife, had himself made into a eunuch.¹ She was a charming woman, and he was swayed, fascinated and tamed by her charm; he grew nobler in her company, transfigured, as it were, by contact with her pure and delicate, tender, and yet resolute, nature.

V

Women played a large and very varied part in Peter's life. But far more important, from the historical point of view, was the part he himself played in the destinies of Russian women in general. In justice to the great man, this part must be summarily described.

The Tsar Alexis once gave solemn audience, in his castle at Kolomenskoïe, near Moscow, to the ambassador of a foreign power. A murmur of soft voices, and a rustling of silken stuffs, coming from a half-open door, attracted the diplomat's attention. The ceremony was being watched by invisible spectators,—the inhabitants of the mysterious *terem*, driven by curiosity into a sort of semi-violation of their retirement. Suddenly, with a violent push, the door flew open, and a handsome, dark-eyed woman, blushing and confused, with a little boy clinging to her skirts, appeared, and

¹ Staehlin, p. 119, etc.

straightway vanished, to the courtiers' general astonishment and alarm. The dark-haired beauty was the Tsarina Nathalia, and the little three-year old boy, so rough and impetuous already, that heavy doors flew open at his touch, was one day to overthrow the walls of the *terem* itself. In later years, this picturesque scene was taken to be an omen.¹

In the seventeenth century, national feeling in Russia was full of suspicion, almost of hatred, of the weaker sex. This is proved by many popular proverbs of the period: 'A woman's hair is long, but her understanding is short.—A woman's mind is like a house without a roof.—A man should flee a woman's beauty, just as Noah fled the deluge.—A horse must be managed by the bit, and a woman by threats.—The woman who is visible is made of copper, the woman who is invisible is made of gold.'

Modern Russian historians are inclined to hold this peculiarity as one of foreign origin, quite contrary to the natural tendency of the national spirit, which is rather inclined to proclaim the equality of the sexes. As a matter of fact, Russian legislation and the present habits of the country, are altogether opposed to that subjection of women, which still characterises Western laws and customs. A Russian wife, in the absence of any special stipulation in the marriage contract, has the sole control of her fortune. The ideas in vogue before Peter's accession, and the corresponding institutions and habits, including the *terem* itself, were probably of Byzantine origin, the outcome of that great current of monkish and religious asceticism, which left such an indelible mark on the intellectual and moral development of the country. The *terem* was no *harem*. The confinement of women within its walls was the result of a very different sentiment, dictated, not by jealousy, but by the fear of sin and scandal, by a religious conception of human life, according to which the cloistered existence was the ideal one, that which was most pleasing in God's sight. The idea, if not the actual form, of the *terem* was absolutely Byzantine.² This is my theory.

But, however that may have been, the prison was a prison, and a severe one. Women, young girls especially,

¹ Oustrialof, vol. i. pp. 10 and 261.

² Zabielin, *Private Life of the Russian Tsarinas*, p. 83, etc. Kostomarov, *History of Russia*, vol. ii. p. 475.

were mere captives; they vegetated, deprived of light and air, in rooms which were half dungeon and half cell, behind windows covered with thick curtains, and heavily padlocked doors. There was no means of separate exit. The only way of getting out was through the father's or the husband's room, and the father or husband kept the keys in his pocket, or under his pillow. On festival occasions, when the guests were at table and the round '*pirogui*' had made their appearance, the wife of the host stood, for a moment, on the threshold of the women's apartment. Then the men rose and kissed her, but she retired immediately. As for the unmarried daughters, no male eye, not even that of an affianced husband, saw them till they were married. A bride married without ever beholding her husband or being seen by him. A betrothal strongly resembled the game of hot cockles. There was indeed an individual, called the *Smotritchitsa*, generally a relation of the suitor, who inspected the girl, and reported accordingly,—but she only acted for the suitor. No young girl permitted herself to wonder what her future husband might be like. Her father, when he informed her that her marriage was arranged, showed her a whip, fit emblem of the authority he was about to transmit to her husband, and the only glimpse of him she was permitted, before being led to the altar. She went to church in deep silence, covered with a heavy veil; not a gesture, not a word, except to answer the priest, and then only, for the first time, the husband heard her voice. At the repast which followed the ceremony, the couple were separated by a curtain. The bride's conjugal existence did not begin until the first part of the feast was concluded. Then her bridesmaids led her to the nuptial chamber, undressed her, and assisted her to bed. There she waited, till the husband was sufficiently drunk. The groomsmen, when they thought this point attained, led him to the bride's apartment, carrying torches, which they planted round the bed, in barrels filled with wheat, barley, and oats. The bed itself was laid on sheaves of rye. Then came the crucial moment. The bride's face was seen at last. To welcome her new master, she rose from her bed, wrapped herself in a furred robe, went several paces towards him, bending respectfully, and dropped her veil.

A man who may have believed himself to be marrying a

beautiful girl, would sometimes see that she was humpbacked, sickly, or frightfully ugly. Even if the go-between had done her duty conscientiously, there was always the chance of her having been deceived, by the substitution of another girl for the real one; such cases not unfrequently occurred. The husband's only resource, in such an event, was to invite his new-made bride, upon the spot, to rid him of her person by straightway taking the veil. But being, in all probability, far from sober, he did not look too closely, and this fact probably accounts for the habit of making the bridegroom intoxicated on such occasions. He did not realise his misfortune until after the marriage was consummated, and become an accomplished fact.

The result of such marriages may easily be conceived. The chronicles of the scandal-mongers, and the judicial records of the period, teem with information on the subject. Husbands would leave their homes, and take refuge in the peace of the cloister; wives, driven distracted by ill-treatment, would use steel and poison to free themselves from an unendurable yoke. The punishment allotted to such crimes, terrible as it was, did not, as we may judge by the engravings of that period, prevent their frequent occurrence. The guilty woman was buried in the earth up to her waist, and there left till death came to release her. The culprit would sometimes have to wait ten days, before her agony was ended,—tortured all the time by hunger and thirst, and half devoured by worms.¹

All these customs were either connected with, or the direct outcome of, a social condition defined by the *Domostroi*, a code of laws drawn up, if not actually written out, by the Russian pope Sylvester, Ivan the Terrible's chief confidant, during the closing years of his life. Whether the details owed their origin to Tartar, Byzantine,² or native sources, the same indelible mark, the brand of barbarism, was on them all. Woman was sacrificed, and man thereby debased. To amuse themselves in their cloistered loneliness, ladies of the higher ranks dressed themselves up like idols, painted themselves to their very

¹ See illustrations to Korb's book. Also the description given by Weber, in Herrmann's *Peter der Grosse*, p. 98 (Aug. 13th, 1717).

² According to M. Nekrassof (*Origin of the Domostroi*, Moscow, 1872), only portions of the work can be ascribed to Sylvester. The manuscript was not published by Golovastof till 1849.

eyes, and drank to excess. When an Embassy was sent to Copenhagen, in 1630, to negotiate the marriage of Princess Irene, the daughter of the Tsar Michael Féodorovitch, with the Prince of Denmark, the Envoys laid particular stress on the fact that the Tsarevna 'did not drink brandy.' The poorer women, who could not afford to dress up, consoled themselves with drink alone,—and all these wives were the mothers of many children. With this condition of things Peter was resolved to do away. And to have succeeded in that matter, alone, would have covered him with glory.

Before his time, it is true, a steadily widening breach had been made in the old tradition. Alexis' second marriage, with its touch of romance, proves the existence of a new current of ideas and feeling. Nathalia appears beside the husband whom she had won by her own beauty and grace, in a very different position from that of former Tsarinas,—frozen, all of them, into a traditional attitude, shut up in the dreariness of their lofty isolation. She took a certain share in her husband's external occupations. She sometimes went out hunting with him, and she was present at the performances given by foreign actors, drawn thither by Matviéief, under the very walls of the ancient Kreml. She even drove with the Tsar in an open carriage, and thereby almost caused a revolution. Under the rule of Alexis' feeble and sickly successor, the current of freedom ran yet stronger. Féodor's sisters did not fail to take advantage of his weakness, and of the general confusion resulting from it. And then Sophia came into power, and inaugurated an era of feminine government in this stronghold of female slavery.

Peter did more, and better still,—or tried to, at all events. His Ukases with reference to marriage were directed against an abuse of power, and against defects of domestic organization, amongst the lower classes, which had grown intolerable. Until his time, only a few days,—sometimes only a few hours,—had been allowed to elapse between the betrothal and the actual marriage. He decreed an interval of at least six weeks, so as to give the betrothed couple time to make acquaintance. This remedy was, of course, neither absolutely, nor immediately, efficacious. Only a few decades before our own time, according to Mielnikof's novel

'*In the Forests*,' the ancient traditions still survived, and were clung to, in certain circles, with the most unconquerable tenacity. Nevertheless, an immense amount of good was done. According to the laws in existence before Peter's time, the head of the household, father or husband, had absolute power—short of capital punishment, at all events,—over the women of his household, whether wife or daughters. A high-born lady, Princess Saltykof, the sister-in-law of the Tsarina Prascovia, was driven, after a long martyrdom, during which she had been beaten over and over again, and tortured by hunger and by cold, to take refuge in the house of her father, a Dolgorouki. Enquiry proved that she had reached it half dead, and covered with wounds,—yet her husband and tyrant claimed her, and all she could obtain, after a long and weary trial, was leave to bury herself, for the rest of her life, in a cloister.¹ My readers may argue, from this case, as to the condition of things in the lower classes. The strongest resistance of the old Russian party was made on this point. The autocratic and despotic feeling was so profoundly enrooted in the national soul, that Peter himself dared not make any direct attack upon it. Some of the laws, made between March and October 1716, would seem to betoken his approval of the old-fashioned customs; but the new spirit which he bore with him, and spread around him, was so utterly opposed to it, that, by degrees, this iniquitous law fell into disuse, was treated as null and void, and finally disappeared from the written code of the country. The *Svod Zakonov* does not refer to it, and quite latterly, it was utterly abolished, by the Court of Appeal.²

In the upper classes of society, Peter, so to speak, took women by the hand, led them into the circle of common life, whether in private or in general society, and there gave them their own special and well-defined position. He was resolved the feminine element should be present in all future gatherings. He would have women show their beauty, talk, dance, and make music. In December 1704, astounded Moscow witnessed an extraordinary sight. On an occasion of public rejoicing, young girls, scattering flowers, and singing odes, took part in a procession through the public streets.³

¹ Mordovstef, p. 133.

² 1869, Sokolowski trial.

³ Golikof, vol. ii, p. 512.

The Reformer even endeavoured to do as much for his Boyard's daughters, as he was doing for their sons. He would have sent them abroad to complete their education, but he was forced to relinquish this point in face of the parents' fierce opposition. He did his best, at all events, to secure them some teaching, and set the example in his own family. He gave his daughters, Anne and Elizabeth, a French governess. He was occasionally present at their lessons, and took care they should assume a European appearance, and that their dresses and head-coverings should be copied from Parisian fashions. When his sister-in-law Prascovia ventured to criticise these innovations, he told her that 'her house was an asylum for fools and weak-minded persons,' and finally carried her along with him. Tsar Ivan's widow thus ended by personifying a sort of transition type in the history of Russian women, the direct outcome of Peter's reform. She gave her daughters French masters, and she had a German tutor for herself. But she kept her Russian costume, and with it, her savage instincts. She used to beat her maids-of-honour, and one day,—to force one of her servants to plead guilty to some trifling fault,—she poured the bottle of brandy she always kept in her carriage over his head, set it on fire, and then struck the poor wretch with her cane, on the horrible wounds the burning brandy had made.¹

The road before Peter was too long for him to reach the goal he had, doubtless, set before him. And indeed his native coarseness and depravity did not, it must be acknowledged, make him the best of guides. He often forgot himself, lost sight of the real object of his journey,—and such digressions were fatal to his end. He was too apt to behave like a trooper, and a rough one, in the drawing rooms he had called into existence, and before the eyes of the recluses he had released from the bondage of the *terem*. The moral character of Russian women will long bear traces of the strange fashion in which Peter the Great introduced the sex into social life.²

The same reproach must be applied to the whole of the great man's work, and certainly detracts both from its merit

¹ Siémievski, *The Tsarina Prascovia*, p. 151.

² See M. N——'s study of *Russian Women in the Days of Peter the Great*. Novosti, 1872, No. 152.

and his glory. Yet the female world, now-a-days, in its more or less legitimate revolt, not in Russia only, against the injustice and cruelty, real or imaginary, of its fate, must recognise Peter the Great as one of its most effectual saviours, —just as civilization in general must acknowledge him one of its most powerful makers.

Brutal and cynical though he was, woman was more to him than mere beautiful flesh. His conception of her part in the family, and in society, was so high as to approach within measurable distance of our modern ideal. And, even if the woman of whom I am now about to speak had never appeared in his feminine circle, this fact, alone, would atone for many faults.

CHAPTER III

CATHERINE

- I. Her arrival in Russia—The siege of Marienburg—Her origin—Pastor Glück's family—Shérémétief's camp—Menshikof's house—Catherine Troubatshof—*Piétroushka's* mother—The marriage—The servant girl becomes the sovereign.
- II. Contemporary opinion—Baron Von Pöllnitz—The Margravine of Baireuth—Campredon—The portraits in the Romanof Gallery—Neither pretty nor distinguished looking—An active temperament and a well-balanced mind—An officer's wife—Her influence over Peter—She fascinated and tamed him—Their correspondence—Their conjugal intimacy—The Tsarina's share in politics—Her good actions and her faults—Clouds on the domestic horizon.
- III. These clouds are dispersed—The steady rise of Catherine's fortune—The death of Alexis—The mother of the heir—She brings in her family—The Riga postilion—The Revel courtesan—The shoemaker—All of them are given titles—The pinnacle of glory—Catherine's coronation—The succession to the crown—On the edge of the abyss—A criminal intimacy—The Chamberlain Mons—The punishment—Inquiries and threats—A dubious reconciliation—Peter's death—and Catherine's triumph—She does not turn it to the best account—Reign of sixteen months—A Comedy Queen.

I

AT the beginning of the Swedish war, in July 1702, General Shérémétief, whose orders were to occupy Livonia, and take up a strong position in that country, laid siege to Marienburg. The town was reduced, after a few weeks of gallant resistance, to the last extremity, and the commandant resolved to blow himself up with the fortress. He called some of the inhabitants together, and privately warned them of his decision, advising them to decamp forthwith, unless they desired to share his fate, and that of his troops. Amongst the persons thus warned, was the Lutheran pastor of the place. He fled at once, with his wife, his children, and his servant maid, carrying nothing with him but a Slavonic Bible, which he hoped might serve as safe conduct through

the enemy's lines. When he was stopped by the Russian outposts, he brandished his book, proved his linguistic talent by quoting several passages, and offered to serve as an interpreter. The authorities agreed, and undertook to send him to Moscow with his family. But how about the servant girl? Shérémétief had cast an approving eye on her fair and opulent beauty. With a knowing smile, he gave orders that she should stay in camp, where her society would be more than welcome. Peter had not yet thought, as he did later, of forbidding the presence of the fair sex with his armies. The attack was to be made on the morrow, but in the mean time the troops were taking what pleasure they could find. The new comer was soon seated at table, in gay company: she was cheerful, anything but shy, and was received with open arms. A dance was just about to begin, and the hautboys were tuning up. Suddenly, a fearful explosion overthrew the dancers, cut the music short, and left the servant maid, fainting with terror, in the arms of a dragoon. The commandant of Marienburg had kept his word. Thus it was,—to a noise like thunder, and close clasped in a soldier's embrace—that Catherine I. made her first appearance in Russian history.¹

She was not, at that time, called 'Catherine' at all, and no one knows what name she really bore, nor whence she came, nor how she had reached Marienburg. Both as regards her family, and the country of her birth, history and legend are at variance. The only point on which documents, more or less authentic, and traditions, more or less worthy of credit, unite in agreeing, is in a general affirmation that her life and destiny were the most extraordinary to which any woman was ever called—no romance of an empress, some story, rather, out of the *Arabian Nights*. I will try to relate—not the certainties, for there are hardly any certainties—but the most probable facts, in this unique career.

She was born in a Livonian village, whether in Swedish or Polish Livonia, no one knows, some say in that of Vyshki-Oziero, in the neighbourhood of Riga, others, at Ringen,

¹ Weber, *Memoirs of the Reign of the Empress Catherine*, 1728, pp. 605-613; Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 128, etc.; Grot, *Examination of the Origin of the Empress Catherine*, in the *Memoirs of the 'Académie des Sciences' of St. Petersburg*, 1877, vol. xviii.

in the district of Derpt (now known as Iourief).¹ In 1718, on the 11th of October, the anniversary of the capture of Noteburg, a Swedish town, Peter wrote,—‘*Katerinoushka*, greeting! greeting on the occasion of this happy day, on which Russia first set foot on your native soil!’ Yet, Catherine would rather seem to have come of some Polish family. Her brothers and sisters, who appeared on the scene in later years, were called Skovoroshtchenko or Skovorotski, which for the sake of euphony, doubtless, has been turned into Skovronski.² We may suppose these emigrants, as they may have been—mere peasants, in any case—to have fled the yoke of serfdom, grown intolerable in their native land, to seek some less oppressive servitude elsewhere. In 1702, Catherine was seventeen years old, and an orphan. Her mother is believed to have been the serf, and the mistress, of a high-born Livonian named Alvendhal. Of this connection—possibly a very temporary one—Catherine was the fruit. Her legitimate father and mother died, her real father disowned her, and when still a mere child, she was received and sheltered by Pastor Glück. He taught her the catechism, but she did not learn her alphabet. She never could do more, in later years, than just sign her name. She grew up in her protector’s house, making herself useful, as she grew older, sharing the household duties, and taking care of the children. Glück received foreign pupils, and she helped to wait on them; two of these pupils declared, in later years, that she always stinted them in their bread and butter. This instinct of economy never deserted her. In certain other matters, according to some historians, and from a very early age, she was more than liberal. A Lithuanian gentleman of the name of Tiesenhausen, and other lodgers in the pastor’s house, are reported to have enjoyed her favours. She is even said to have brought a girl into the world, who died when only a few months old. Not long before the siege, her master thought it best to put a stop to these irregularities, by finding her a husband. The husband or the betrothed—

* A paper was published in Westermann’s *Illustrirte Monatschrift*, in 1857, with the object of proving that Catherine was born at Riga, and belonged to the Badendik family, from which the writer of the paper, Herr Tversen, was descended.

² Arsénief, *Catherine’s Reign*, vol. i. pp. 74, 75. Andréief, *The Representatives of Authority in Russia, after Peter I.* (St. Petersburg, 1870), p. 5.

there is some uncertainty on this point—a Swedish Lifeguardsman named Kruse, disappeared after the capture of the town, having been taken prisoner by the Russians, and sent far away, or, according to a better established version, he escaped the catastrophe, having been sent towards Riga, with his regiment, either just before, or just after, the consummation of the marriage. Catherine, after she became Tsarina, sought him out, and gave him a pension.¹

Meanwhile, she was the joy of that portion of the Russian army which was engaged in the Livonian campaign. She began as the mistress of a non-commissioned officer, who beat her, and finally, passed into the possession of the general himself, who soon grew weary of her. The question of how she came into Menshikof's household is one on which opinions vary. Some authorities declare she was first engaged to wash the favourite's shirts. She would seem, in one of her letters to Peter, after she had become his wife, to allude to this fact in her past career: 'Though you doubtless have other laundresses about you, the old one never forgets you.' And Peter answers gallantly, 'You are mistaken, you must be thinking of Shafrof, who mixes up his love affairs with his clean linen. That is not my way, and besides, I am growing old.' One thing is certain, her original position in her new protector's house was a somewhat humble one. When Menshikof wrote, in March 1706, to his own sister Anne, and to the Arsénief sisters, to come and meet him at Witebsk for the Easter festivities, foreseeing that their fear of the bad roads might prevent them from obeying his call, he begged them, at all events, to send him Catherine Troubatshof and two other girls.² This name of Troubatshof may be an allusion to Catherine's husband or betrothed, for the Russian word *Trouba* means *trumpet*.

But an important event had already occurred in the existence of the person thus so unceremoniously disposed of.

¹ Arsénief, Russian Archives, 1875, vol. ii. p. 240.

² Oustrialof refuses to admit that this letter can refer to the future Tsarina, and appeals to the testimony of Gordon, according to whom the girl bore the name of *Catherine Vasilovna* until it was converted, on her conversion to the Greek Church, into that of Catherine Aléxiéievna, but Peter himself, and other contemporary authorities, give her different and very varied names, in perfectly reliable documents (Oustrialof, vol. iv. part. ii. p. 329. Compare Peter's *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. iii. p. 283.

Peter had seen her, and had proved himself far from indifferent to her charms. There are many different stories as to this first meeting. The Tsar, we are told, paid a visit to Menshikof, after the capture of Narva, and was astonished by the air of cleanliness visible in the favourite's person and surroundings. He enquired how he contrived to have his house so well kept, and to wear such fresh and dainty linen. Menshikof's only answer was to open a door, through which the sovereign perceived a handsome girl, aproned, and sponge in hand, bustling from chair to chair, and going from window to window, scrubbing the window panes.¹ The picture is a pleasing one, but I notice one drawback. Narva fell in August 1704, and at that date, Peter had already made Catherine the mother of at least one child. During the month of March, in the following year, she bore him a son, the little *Pietroushka*, of whom Peter speaks in one of his letters. Eight months later, she had two boys.²

These children were certainly dear to the great man, for, he thought of them even among the terrible anxieties which then devoured him. But he does not appear, as yet, to have cared much for their mother. There has been a world of hair-splitting over the circumstances of Catherine's removal from the favourite's household, to that of the Tsar. All sorts of dramatic incidents have been invented. According to one story, the lady, after an agreement between the two friends, and a formal cession of Menshikof's rights to his master, took up her residence in her new home, where her eye shortly fell on certain magnificent jewels. Forthwith, bursting into tears, she addressed her new protector: 'Who put those ornaments here? If they come from *the other one*, I will keep nothing but this little ring; but if they come from you, how could you think I needed them to make me love you?'

In all human probability, matters were arranged after a far simpler fashion. I cannot conceive any such disinterestedness on her part, nor such prodigality on his. This scene, too, is supposed to have occurred at a period when the fair Livonian and her august lover were already bound together by the existence of two children. During the succeeding

¹ *Mémoires et Documents*, vol. i. p. 163 (Paris Foreign Office).

² See letter signed 'Catherine and two others,' Oct. 1705; also see *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. iii. p. 283.

years, I can perceive no evident change in the humble and dubious situation occupied by her in that common harem, where Peter and Menshikof were wont, either turnabout, or together, to take their pleasure. Sometimes she was with the Tsar, and sometimes with the favourite. At St. Petersburg, she lived, with all the other ladies, in Menshikof's house. She was still no more than an obscure and complaisant mistress. Peter had many others, and she never ventured to object. She went so far as to pander willingly to the faults, and even to the infidelities of her female rivals, and made up, by her own unfailing cheerfulness, for their caprices of temper. Thus, slowly, and almost insensibly, she endeared herself to the Sovereign, and above all, she grew into a habit with him. She took root in his heart, entrenched herself there, and ended by making herself indispensable. In 1706, he would seem to have feared, for a moment, that she might slip through his fingers, after the fashion of Anna Mons. He began to consider the drawbacks likely to result from the promiscuity in which, up to that time, he and Menshikof had mingled their pleasures and their rights. I notice a sort of dim uneasiness about him, and pricks of conscience which may have been nothing but hints of unconscious jealousy. He had joked for years over Menshikof's promise to marry Daria Arsénief, and held it null and void. In 1706, he declared it valid and sacred, and wrote to his *alter ego*, 'For God's sake, for my soul's sake, remember your oath and keep it!' ¹

Menshikof set him the example, and Peter followed it, though not till much later. Catherine is, indeed, said to have been united to him, at this time, by a secret marriage. After the year 1709, she never left him, and in Poland and Germany, whither she accompanied the Tsar, she was treated almost like a Sovereign. Two other children, daughters both, had bound her still more closely to her lover. But, officially speaking, she was nothing but a mistress. In January 1708, when Peter departed from Moscow to rejoin his army, and take part in what promised to be a decisive campaign, he left this note behind him: 'If, by God's will, anything should happen to me, let the 3,000 roubles which will be found in Menshikof's house, be given to Catherine Vassilevska and her daughter. *Piter.*' They had not

¹ Russian Archives, 1875, vol. ii. p. 245.

travelled very far beyond the ducat bestowed after their first meeting!¹

How then, and when, did Peter finally decide on the apparently wild and impossible folly of making this woman his legitimate wife and Empress? The resolution is said to have been taken in 1711, after the campaign of the Pruth. Catherine's unfailing devotion, her courage, and her presence of mind at critical moments, had overcome his last hesitation. She conquered him, and he, at the same time, perceived the means by which the choice of such a partner and such a Sovereign might be excused in his subjects' eyes. The intervention of the former servant girl had saved the Russian army and its leader from irreparable disaster, and inextinguishable shame. Peter, if he led her to the altar, and placed the Imperial diadem on her brow, would only be repaying the common debt. And this was clearly expressed in the manifesto he addressed to his own people, and to the whole of Europe.

But here, again, alas! we have nothing but an ingenious hypothesis, contradicted by all the facts and every date. The part played by Catherine on the banks of the Moldavian river, when the Russian army was surrounded by the Turks and the Tartars, dates—if it ever took place at all, and this is very doubtful—somewhere in the month of June 1711; at that moment she had already, for over six months, been publicly acknowledged as Peter's wife. The Tsar's son Alexis, who was then staying in Germany, had heard the news early in May, and had written his stepmother a congratulatory letter.²

The great reformer was not likely to seek more or less valid excuses for any decision or act of his. Later, it is true, —*ten years later*,—on the occasion of Catherine's coronation, he thought fit to recall the already distant memory of the peril she had helped to avert in 1711. But, it may be fairly believed, that his object in so doing was to indicate the sense and bearing of this unusual ceremony, whereby, failing a direct successor to the Crown, he desired to invest her, in a manner, with his inheritance, and to ensure the execution, after his own death, of a will which, in his lifetime, owed no

¹ Russian Archives, 1875, vol. ii. p. 58.

² Oustrialof, vol. vi. p. 312. Juel, *En Rejse til Rusland* (Copenhagen, 1893), p. 422.

account to any one. It was at this moment that the manifesto to which I have already referred was published, and by it Peter condescended to reckon with those who might survive him.

It is my duty to add, that the very fact of this marriage has been denied ;¹ but we possess very reliable testimony on the subject, in the shape of a despatch written from Moscow on the 20th February (2nd March) 1712, by Whitworth, the British envoy. 'Yesterday, the Tsar publicly celebrated his marriage with his wife, Catherine Aléxiéievna. Last winter, about two hours before his Czarisch Majesty left Moscow, he summoned the Empress Dowager, his sister the Tsarevna Nathalia, and two other half-sisters, to whom he declared this lady to be his empress, and that they should pay her the respect due to that quality, and in case any misfortune might happen to him in the campaign, should allow her the same rank, privileges, and revenue as was usual to the other dowagers, for that she was his real wife, though he had not the time to perform the ceremonies according to the custom of his country, which should be done at the first opportunity. The preparations have been making for four or five days, and on the 18th Mons. Kykin, a Lord of the Admiralty, and Adjutant-General Iagusinski, two persons in a good degree of favour, were sent about to invite the company to his Majesty's *old wedding* (for these were the terms they were ordered to use). 'The Tsar was married in his quality of rear-admiral, and for that reason, not his Ministers and nobility, but his sea officers, had the chief employments, the Vice-Admiral Cruys and the rear-admiral of the galleys being the bridegroom's fathers, and the Empress Dowager, with the vice-admiral's lady, were the bride's mothers. The bridesmaids were two of the Empress Catherine's own daughters, one above five, and the other three years old. The wedding was performed privately, at seven o'clock in the morning, in a little chapel belonging to Prince Menshikof, where no one assisted but those who were obliged to do it through their offices.'²

In spite of this, Whitworth tells us that in the course of the day, there was a great reception at the Palace, a State dinner, a ball, and a display of fireworks. And the Dutch Resident, De Bie, mentions an entertainment given in honour

¹ Dolgoroukof's *Memoirs*. vol. i. p. 38.

² London Records Office.

of the occasion by Prince Menshikof.¹ Thus the event was marked by a certain amount of publicity. Peter's motives, and the progressive course of ideas and sentiments which led up to the extraordinary *dénouement* of this *liaison*, would seem to me clearly proved by a comparison of the English Minister's despatch with those I have already quoted. His evident desire was to ensure the future of his partner and his children, and his duty in this respect appeared to him clearer and more pressing, in proportion, doubtless, to the increase of his affection for his children, and his tenderness and regard for her. Before the campaigns of 1708 and 1711, he simply endeavoured to set things in order, and clear his own conscience, without any regard to the effect his action might produce. In the first instance, a gift of 3000 roubles appeared to him sufficient; in the second, he thought it right to ensure Catherine the benefits of a reputed marriage. Finally, feeling himself bound, in honour,—but not until another year had passed away, and until, probably, he had undergone some pressure both from Catherine herself and from some of the persons cognisant of the circumstances of this domestic drama, among whom, doubtless, the *ci-devant* Livonian peasant had made herself a certain number of friends,—he kept his word, without, however, surrounding the event with any remarkable lustre or display.

It may be objected that as no ecclesiastical authority had broken Peter's first marriage with Eudoxia, and as the ex-Tsarina was still alive, this second alliance was radically void. I fully admit it; but Catherine was accepted, none the less, as a legally married woman. Let us pass on to what her contemporaries thought and said of the new Empress.

II

Baron Von Pöllnitz, who saw her in 1717, thus describes her:—‘The Tsarina was in the prime of life, and showed no signs of having possessed beauty. She was tall and strong, exceedingly dark, and would have seemed darker but for the rouge and whitening with which she covered her face. There was nothing unpleasant about her manners, and any one who remembered the princess's origin would have been disposed

¹ Despatch, dated March 5th, 1712 (Archives at the Hague).

to think them good. There is no doubt that if she had had any sensible person about her she would have improved herself, for she had a great desire to do well. But hardly anything more ridiculous than the ladies of her Court can well be imagined. It was said that the Tsar, a most extraordinary prince, had taken pleasure in choosing out these persons, so as to mortify other ladies of his Court more worthy to fill such offices. . . . It might fairly be said that if this princess had not all the charms of her sex she had all its gentleness. . . . During her visit to Berlin, she showed the queen the greatest deference, and let it be understood that her own extraordinary fortune did not make her forget the difference between that princess and herself.'

The Margravine of Baireuth, whose recollections date from a year later, shows, as might be expected, less good nature :

'The Tsarina was short and huddled up, very much tanned, and quite devoid of dignity or grace. The very sight of her proved her low birth. She was muffled up in her clothes like a German comedy actress. Her gown had been bought in some old clothes' shop, it was very old-fashioned, covered with heavy silver embroidery, and with dirt. The front of her skirt was adorned with jewels, the design was very peculiar. It was a double eagle, the feathers of which were covered with tiny diamonds. She had a dozen orders, and as many portraits of saints and relics, fastened all along the facings of her dress, so that when she walked she jingled like a mule.'

But the Margravine was a perfect viper.

Campredon, who is by no means over-disposed to indulgence, acknowledges the Tsarina's political instinct and insight. Whether or not she saved the army, in the campaign of the Pruth, she certainly served it well during the Persian expedition. The story, as told by the French Minister, is not very flattering to Peter. During the great summer heats, the Tsar gave his troops orders to march, and would then go to sleep himself. When he woke, he found that not a man had moved, and when he asked what general had dared to countermand his orders: 'I did it,' said the princess, coming forward, 'because your men would have died of heat and of thirst.'¹

¹ January 6th, 1723.

I have already said that the portraits of Catherine, preserved in the Romanof Gallery in the Winter Palace, give no indication of the physical charms which made her fortune. They betray no sign either of beauty or distinction. The face is large, and round, and common; the nose hideously turned up. She has goggle eyes, an opulent bust, and all the general appearance of a servant girl in a German inn. The sight of her shoes, which are piously preserved at Peterhof, was to inspire the Comtesse de Choiseul-Gouffier with the reflection that the Tsarina's earthly life had been spent 'on a good footing.'¹ The secret of her success must be sought elsewhere. This coarse-looking, and, to us, unattractive woman, possessed a physical organisation, as robust and indifferent to fatigue as Peter's own, and a moral temperament far better balanced than the Tsar's. Between 1704 and 1723 she bore the lover, who ultimately became her husband, eleven children, most of whom died in infancy. Yet her physical condition scarcely affected her exterior life, and never prevented her from following the Sovereign whithersoever he went. She was a typical officer's wife—*Pahodnaïa Ofitserskaïa jëna*, is the Russian expression—well able to go on active service, lie on the hard ground, live in a tent, and make double or treble stages on horseback. On the Persian campaign she shaved her head, and wore a grenadier's cap. She would review the troops; she would pass down the ranks, before a battle, dropping cheering words, and bestowing bumpers of brandy. A bullet struck one of the men in close attendance on her, but she never blenched.² When, after Peter's death, the town of Revel was threatened by the allied squadrons of England and of Denmark, she would herself have embarked on one of her warships to drive them back.

She was not devoid of vanity; she dyed her fair hair black, to increase the brilliancy of her high-coloured complexion. She forbade the ladies of her court to copy her dresses; she was a beautiful dancer, a first-class performer of the most complicated pirouettes, especially when the Tsar himself was her partner. With others she generally contented herself with walking through her steps. She was a mixture of subtle womanliness, and of almost masculine

¹ *Reminiscences*, 1862, p. 340.

² Pylaïef, *The Forgotten Past*, p. 441. *Mémoires et Documents* (Paris Foreign Office), vol. ii. p. 119.

activity. She could make herself most amiable to those who approached her, and she knew how to control Peter's savage outbreaks. Her low extraction caused her no embarrassment. She never forgot it, and frequently spoke of it to those who had known her before her elevation,—to a German tutor, who had been employed by Glück when she had been a servant in the pastor's house,¹ and to Whitworth,—who may indeed have been carried away by vanity when he insinuates that he had been in her closest intimacy, but whom she certainly invited one day to dance with her, enquiring whether he had not 'forgotten the *Katiérinoushka* of former days.'²

The very considerable influence which she exercised over her husband was partly due,—according to contemporary opinion,—to her power of calming his fits of nervous irritation, which were always attended by excruciating headaches. At such moments the Tsar would pass alternately from a state of prostration to one of fury, not far removed from downright madness, and every one fled his presence. Catherine would approach him fearlessly, address him in a language of her own, half tender and half commanding, and her very voice seemed to calm him. Then she would take his head, and caress it tenderly, passing her fingers through his hair. Soon he grew drowsy, and slept, leaning against her breast. For two or three hours she would sit motionless, waiting for the cure slumber always brought him. He always woke cheerful and refreshed.

She endeavoured to curtail the excesses of all sorts, the night orgies and drinking bouts, to which he was addicted. In September, 1724, the launch of a new ship was, as usual, made the pretext for an endless banquet. She went to the door of the cabin in which Peter had shut himself up to drink undisturbed with his boon companions, and called out, '*Pora domoi, batiousehka!*' (it is time to come home, little father), he obeyed, and departed with her.³

She would appear to have been full of real affection and devotion, although the somewhat theatrical manifestation of her grief after the great man's death, cast a certain doubt on her sincerity. Villebois mentions two Englishmen, who went every day for six weeks to watch the Tsarina in the chapel

¹ Coxe, *Travels*, 1785, vol. i. p. 511.

² Whitworth, *An Account of Russia* (London, 1771), prefac., p. xx.

³ *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xxii. p. 492.

where the corpse of the Tsar was laid in state; and he declared the sight touched his own feelings like a performance of the *Andromache*. This sorrow did not prevent the Tsarina from claiming her right to inherit from the Tsar, with the utmost vigour, and the most absolute presence of mind. Peter's affection is less dubious. It may have been coarse in fibre, but there is no doubt about its strength. His letters to Catherine, on the rare occasions when they were separated, express the deep attachment of the 'old fellow,' as he was pleased to call himself, for his *Katiérinoushka*—for the friend of his heart (*drouh serdesh-nioukiï*) (*sic*), for the mother of his dear *Shishenka* (the little Peter) with most evident sincerity. Their usual tone is cheery and even joking. There are no fine sentences, nothing but heartfelt words; no passion, much tenderness; no blazing heat, a gentle, equal warmth, never a discordant note, and always a longing to return, on the first opportunity, to the beloved wife, and, yet more, to the friend and companion, in whose society he feels so happy. He is longing to get back to her, he writes in 1708, 'because he is dull without her, and there is nobody to take care of his shirts.' Her answer expresses her conviction that his hair must be very ill-combed in her absence. He answers that she has guessed aright, but that if she will only come he will find some old comb or other with which to put things in order, and meanwhile he sends her a lock of his hair. Frequently, as in former years, his letters were accompanied by gifts. In 1711, there is a watch bought at Dresden; in 1717, lace from Mechlin; on another occasion, a fox and two pairs of doves sent from the Gulf of Finland; writing from Kronstadt in 1723, he apologises, on the score that he has no money, for sending her nothing. While passing through Antwerp, he sends a packet covered with seals, and addressed to *Her Majesty, the Tsarina Catherine Aléxiévna*. When the box was opened, all *Shishenka's* mother found in it was a slip of paper with these words written in capital letters: 'April 1st, 1717!' Catherine too would occasionally send trifling gifts, such as fruit, or a warm waistcoat. In 1719, one of Peter's letters closes with the expression of a hope that this summer will be the last they will have to spend apart. Some time after, he sends her a bunch of dried flowers, and a newspaper cutting, containing an account of

an aged couple, a husband who had reached the age of 126 years, and a wife only a year younger. In 1724, the Tsar, arriving in St. Petersburg in the summer season, and finding that Catherine had gone to one of his many country houses, forthwith sent a yacht to bring her back, and wrote, 'When I went into my rooms, and found them deserted, I felt as if I must rush away at once. It is all so empty without thee!'

His absence would seem to have affected her to the same extent. Princess Galitzin, who was in attendance on her at Revel, in July 1714, addresses the following expressive note to the Sovereign:—'Sire, my dear *Bati-oushka*, we long for your return at the earliest possible moment, and truly, if your Majesty delays much longer, my life will grow very hard. The Tsarina will never deign to fall asleep before three o'clock in the morning, and I never leave her Majesty, and Kirillovna stands beside her bed and dozes. From time to time the Tsarina condescends to say, "Art thou asleep, *Tiétoushka*?" (little aunt), she answers, "No, I'm not asleep, I'm looking at my slippers," and Maïa comes and goes in the room, and makes her bed in the middle of the room, and Matrénà walks about the rooms, and squabbles with everybody, and Krestianovna stands behind the chair and looks at the Tsarina. Thy return will release me from the sleeping chair!'¹

The only letters belonging to the first period of the *liaison*, which have been preserved, are those addressed by the Sovereign, in common, to Catherine and to Anisia Kirillovna Tolstoï, on whom he bestowed the nickname of 'Aunt,' Catherine he called 'Mother.' He wrote the Dutch word *Muder*, in Russian characters. Catherine kept that nickname till 1711, after which Peter speaks of her in more and more familiar, affectionate, and personal terms; *Katicrinoushka*, *Herzensfreundchen*, etc. She did not venture, until much later, to imitate him in this respect. She called him 'Your Majesty' until 1718, and then he too becomes her *Herzensfreundchen*, her *Batioushka*, or simply *mein Freund* (my friend). On one occasion she even goes so far as to imitate his waggish ways, and address her letter, in German, to 'His Excellency, the very illustrious and very eminent Prince-General, Inspector-General, and Knight of the crowned Compass and Axe.'

¹ Peter's Cabinet papers, portfolio ii. No. 20.

This correspondence never has been, and never can be, published in its integrity. Certain portions of it are far too coarse. Peter unscrupulously indulged in obscenities of thought and language, which are quite impossible in print; and Catherine followed his example with an air of the most perfect unconcern. 'If you were with me here,' she writes during one of his absences, 'there would very soon be another *Shishenka*!' This is the general tone of the correspondence, but its actual expression is frequently far less modest.¹

In 1724, when Peter was celebrating the anniversary of his marriage at Moscow, he himself composed the set piece of fireworks, to be lighted under the Empress's windows. This displayed his cypher and hers entwined, within a heart, surmounted by a crown, and surrounded by emblems of love. A winged figure, intended to represent Cupid, bearing a torch and all his other symbols, except the bandage across the eyes, shot across the darkness, and ignited the rockets. The special Cupid which would seem to have habitually presided over the intercourse of these two lovers, was a wingless one. But commonplace, and even debased, as their affection would occasionally appear, it still has certain sympathetic and touching qualities. It is replete with artless, full-flavoured good nature. After the Peace of Nystadt, Peter joked his wife about her Livonian origin, saying, 'According to the terms of this treaty, I am to return all prisoners to the King of Sweden; I don't know what is to become of thee?' She kissed his hand and answered: 'I am your servant, do with me as you will, yet I do not think you are inclined to send me back.' 'I will try,' he replied, 'to settle it with the King!'² This anecdote may not be absolutely true, but it certainly typifies the real nature of their relations. Yet there seems to have been some slyness, and a certain amount of feminine cunning, about Catherine. We are assured that when she was staying at Riga with the Tsar, she contrived to show him an old parchment, drawn from the archives of the town, containing a prophecy that the Russians would never have possession of that country until a most improbable event—a marriage between a Tsar and a Livonian—had taken place. Often too, as

¹ See Siémiewski, *The Empress Catherine*, p. 89. Brückner, *Peter's d. Grossen Briefwechsel mit Catharina* (Raumers Taschenbuch, 5th Series).

² Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 132.

I notice, she would draw his attention to the fact that success never came to him until he knew her, whereas, since that event, he had gone from victory to victory. This was firm, historical ground, and the fact was much more likely to impress the Tsar's sturdy mind, than the prophecy above referred to.

He had no desire, indeed, to send back the prisoner he had taken at Marienburg. In a thousand ways, she made herself agreeable, useful, indispensable. As in past years, she watched her lord's amorous caprices with a vigilant, though far from jealous, eye, solely desirous of staving off too serious consequences, always interposing at the right moment. Nar-tof tells the story of a fellow country-woman of Catherine's, a laundress belonging to Narva, whose attraction for the Sovereign took on alarming proportions. Peter, to his astonishment, beheld the girl, one day, in the Tsarina's room. He pretended not to recognise her, and enquired whence she came. Catherine calmly replied, 'I heard so much of her beauty and of her wit, that I made up my mind to take her into my service, without consulting you.' The Tsar was dumb, and turned his attention to quite a different quarter.

Catherine never aspired to interfering in State affairs, she had no taste for intrigue. 'As for the Tsarina,' writes Campredon, in 1721, 'although the Tsar is most attentive to her, and is full of tenderness for the Princesses, her daughters, she has no power as regards public business, in which she never interferes. She applies herself solely to keeping the Tsar's good graces, to restraining him, to the best of her ability, from those drinking and other excesses which have greatly weakened his health, and to calming his anger when it seems ready to break forth against any particular person.'

Her intervention in the catastrophe on the Pruth, if it ever did occur, was quite an isolated case. Her correspondence with her husband proves, that though she was aware of his anxieties, her information was of a very general nature. He writes to her about trifling commissions, such as buying wine or cheese, which he desires to give away, or the engagement of foreign artists or artisans. His tone is frequently very confidential, but he keeps to generalities, and very seldom enters into detail. In 1712, he writes: 'We are well, thank God, but it is a hard life; I cannot do much with my left hand, and my right has to hold sword and pen at once. Now thou knowest on how many persons I can reckon for help.'

She took a line, and assumed an office, her choice of which proves that this peasant-born woman had a most wonderful and instinctive comprehension of her true position. There is a hint of this, in the French diplomatic document which I have just quoted. She realised that,—beside the great Reformer playing out his part as a merciless judge, to the bitter end,—there was another accessory and necessary rôle, instinct with pity and mercy, to which she, the humble serf, who had sounded every depth of human misery, was clearly called. She saw that if she did this work, if she strove to win pardon for others, her own sudden elevation would be more willingly forgiven her; and that if, amidst the spite and hatred raised against the Tsar by the violent nature of his reforms, she could gather a circle of grateful sympathy round her own person, she might one day, if some change of fortune overtook her, find in it a protection and a welcome shelter. She came to need it, and did thus find a shelter, and more than a shelter, after Peter's death.

Like Lefort, in the old days, but with infinitely more consistency and tact, she constantly interposed in the sanguinary conflict which the Tsar's chosen work had roused between himself and his subjects;—a conflict marked by the daily use of the axe, the gallows, and the knout. Peter was occasionally reduced to concealing the punishments he decreed from his wife's knowledge. Unfortunately, as it would seem, she did not continue satisfied with the distant and ultimate reward this line of conduct promised. She began, after a time, to seek for more immediate profit. She grew to imagine, or she was made to believe, that she must settle her fortunes on a firm financial basis. She was convinced, or allowed herself to be persuaded, that the day would come when she would need money—and a great deal of money—to pay for necessary co-operation, or anticipate probable failure. And then she began to fleece all those who sought her protection. Any one who desired to escape exile or death, through her intervention, was forced to open his purse. Thus she amassed large sums, which, after Menshikof's example, and probably by his advice, she invested, under assumed names, at Amsterdam and Hamburg. This intrigue soon attracted Peter's attention, and his discovery of it was probably not unconnected with the clouds that darkened the close of their conjugal existence. In 1718, Catherine undertook to save Prince

Gagarin, the Governor-General of Siberia, who had been found guilty of enormous peculations, from the gallows. He paid her considerable sums, part of which were employed in corrupting Prince Volkonski, to whom the enquiry had been entrusted,—a scarred old soldier, who, in spite of his glorious career, was not proof against such vile temptations. When Volkonski was arrested, he defended himself by alleging that he had not dared to repulse the Tsarina's advances, for fear of making a quarrel between her and the Tsar. To this, Peter is said to have made the following characteristic reply: 'Idiot! you would have made no quarrel between us! I should only have given my wife a sound conjugal punishment. She will get it now, and you will be hung!'¹

III

The tragic close of the quarrel between the Tsar and his eldest son was, to the stepmother of the unhappy Prince, a crowning victory, a sudden impulse towards the giddiest heights of destiny. She has been accused, and not unnaturally, of having had a more or less direct share in bringing about this *dénouement*. To this point I shall have to refer in a later chapter. It was her own son who thus became heir presumptive to the throne, and another bond was forged between herself and the father of the boy. She even succeeded, to a certain extent, in forcing her family, obscure Lithuanian serfs, upon the Tsar. Chance is reported to have helped her in this matter. A postillion, working on the road, between St. Petersburg and Riga, having been ill-treated by a traveller, loudly complained, and affirmed his close connection with persons in the highest quarters. He was arrested, and the facts laid before the Tsar, who ordered enquiry to be made, and found himself unexpectedly enriched with a whole tribe of brothers and sisters-in-law, nephews and nieces, whom Catherine had somewhat too easily forgotten. The postillion, Féodor Skovronski, was her eldest brother. He had married a peasant woman, by whom he had three sons and three daughters. Another brother, still a bachelor, worked in the fields. The eldest sister was called Catherine, —the second, who had been raised to the throne under that

¹ Dolgoroukof's *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 31.

name, had formerly been known as Martha. The real Catherine, it was said, lived at Revel, and there carried on a shameful trade. A third sister, Anne, was the wife of an honest serf, Michael-Joachim, a fourth had married a freed peasant, Simon-Henry, who had settled at Revel, and worked as a shoemaker.

Peter caused the postillion to be brought to St. Petersburg, confronted him with his sister, in the house of a *dienshtchik*, named Shépiélof, and when his identity had been established, gave him a pension, and sent him back to the country. He took measures to ensure a modest competence to each member of the family, and made a bargain that he was to hear no more of them. The Revel sister-in-law, who was too compromising to be endured, was put under lock and key. Catherine had to wait for the Tsar's death, before she could do anything more for her own people. When that occurred, the ex-postillion, the ex-shoemaker, and all the other peasants, male and female, appeared at St. Petersburg, disguised under new names and titles, and dressed in court apparel. Simon-Henry became Count Simon Léontiévitsh Hendrikof, Michael-Joachim was called Count Michael Efimovitch Efimovski, and so with the rest. All were given large fortunes.¹ A Count Skovronski made a great figure in the reign of Elizabeth, and married his daughter to a Prince Sapieha, a member of an illustrious Polish family, well known in France.

But meanwhile, Catherine's fortunes rose steadily higher. A collective vote of the Senate and the Synod, given on the ~~23rd of December 1728, endowed her with the title of~~ Empress. Two years later, Peter himself decided on the formal coronation of the *ci-devant* servant girl. This ceremony was quite a novel one in Russia, and surrounding circumstances imparted considerable importance to it. The history of the country only furnishes one precedent for such a step—the coronation of Marina Mniszech just before her marriage with Dimitri. But the object, in that case, was to give a kind of presumptive consecration to the rights of the haughty daughter of the Polish magnate, imposed on the Russian nation by the victorious policy of the Waza. Dimitri, who was supported by the armies of the Republic, merely as, and because he was, Marina's husband, took quite

¹ Karnovitch, *Great Russian Fortunes*, p. 179.

a secondary place. Since those days, no Tsarina had been more than the Tsar's wife, none had ever received any political investiture or prerogative. But the death, in 1719, of the sole heir to the crown, had raised the question of the succession. During the following years it was constantly to the front. When, in 1721, the Peace of Nystadt conferred some leisure on the Sovereign, this question became, for a time, his chief anxiety. Shafirof and Ostermann, in obedience to his commands, held several private conferences with Campredon, in the course of which they proposed an alliance with France, based on a guarantee as to the succession to the Russian throne to be given by the French king. For whose benefit? Campredon imagined Peter had chosen his eldest daughter, whom he was supposed to intend to marry to one of his subjects and near relations,—probably to a Naryshkin. This opinion was confirmed by Shafirof.¹ The most varied suppositions on the subject were current amongst the general public, up to the period of the coronation. The novel nature of that event seemed, in the eyes of the majority, to settle the question in Catherine's favour. This idea was finally shared by Campredon himself.²

The crown, which was specially ordered for the occasion, was far more magnificent than any used by former Tsars. It was adorned with diamonds and pearls; there was an enormous ruby on the top; it weighed four pounds, and was valued at one and a half millions of roubles. It was made at St. Petersburg, by a Russian jeweller, but the new capital was quite unequal to supplying the Tsarina's dress. This was sent from Paris, and cost 4000 roubles. Peter himself set the crown on his wife's head. Catherine knelt before the altar, weeping, and would have embraced the Tsar's knees. He raised her smilingly, and invested her with the orb, the symbol of sovereignty (*dierjava*). But he kept the sceptre, the token of power, in his own hand. When the Tsarina left the church, she entered a coach, sent, like her dress, from Paris, richly gilt and painted, and surmounted by an Imperial crown.³

This ceremony was performed on the 7th — 19th — May. Just six months later, an event took place in the Winter Palace, which set the Tsarina, crowned and anointed

¹ Campredon's Despatches, Oct. 29, Nov. 17 and 21, 1721 (French Foreign Office).

² Despatch, dated May 26th, 1724.

³ *Biischings-Magazin*, vol. xxii. pp. 447, 463. Golikof, vol. x. p. 64.

as she was, on the very brink of a precipice. Peter, on his return from an excursion to Revel, received warning of a suspicious intimacy which had existed for some time between Catherine and one of her chamberlains. It is curious that this warning should not have reached him sooner, for the Tsarina's *liason* with young William Mons had, according to reliable witnesses, long been in public knowledge.¹ Peter might easily have gathered this fact from a secret examination of the chamberlain's correspondence. He would have found letters signed by the greatest persons in the country, Ministers, ambassadors, and even bishops, who all addressed the young man in terms which clearly indicated the place they believed him to hold in the imperial household.² But the inquisitorial policy of the great Tsar had begun to bear its final fruit,—the consequence and penalty of the excess to which it had been carried. Universal espionage had engendered universal watchfulness against possible spies. Men did as they were done by, and Peter paid for his too great eagerness to know the secrets of other houses, by being left in ignorance of what was occurring in his own.

Mons was the brother of Peter's former mistress. He was one of that race of bold and successful adventurers of whom, so far as Russia was concerned, Lefort was the historical ancestor. His education was of the most scanty description, but he was intelligent, shrewd, a gay companion, and, occasionally, something of a poet. He was very superstitious, and wore four rings: one of pure gold, one of lead, one of iron, and the last of copper. These were his talismans, and the gold ring stood for love. One of his sisters, Matréna, had married Féodor Nikolaiévitch Balk, who belonged to a branch of the ancient Livonian house of the Balken, which had been settled in Russia since 1650. This Balk held the rank of Major-General, and was Governor of Riga, and his wife, who had gained great favour with Catherine, had been one of her ladies of honour and her closest confidant, ever since the coronation. Matréna looked after her brother's interests, and arranged the meetings between the lovers. Nor was this all. She had contrived, with the assistance of Anna Féodorovna Ioushkof, another great favourite of the Tsarina's, of Princess Anne of Courland, and of some

¹ Campredon's Despatch, Dec. 9th, 1724 (Paris Foreign Office).

² Siémievski, *The Empress Catherine*, p. 109.

other ladies, to set up a kind of camarilla, and little by little the Tsar had been hemmed in with moving quicksands of jobbery and intrigue, of hidden influences, and obscure machinations. Weakened as he was by illness, and harried by haunting suspicion, his actions were literally paralysed. William Mons was the soul of this circle, and himself took a woman's name to veil his correspondence with a certain lady named Soltykof, who was one of its members.¹

Female government was already beginning to take up its place in Russia.

Peter's powers, both as judge and as inquisitor, failed him here, completely and simultaneously. He long remained in ignorance of what he ought to have known, and even when he was warned, he could not strike, and mete out just punishment for the most unpardonable offence which could have been offered him. The first intimation reached him from an anonymous source. A long-prepared trap was laid, so some people assert. Catherine is supposed to have dallied, one lovely moonlight night, within an arbour in her garden, before which Matréná Balk mounted guard, and there Peter discovered her.² I regret to have to point out that this summer scene is at variance with the season of the year imposed by historical accuracy,—the month of November, and, in all probability, at least twenty degrees of frost. According to official documents, Peter learnt the fact on the 5th of November. The informer, a subordinate of Mons, who was quickly discovered, was at once arrested. The Tsar held a hasty enquiry in the torture-chamber of the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, but, contrary to the general expectation, he failed to act with his usual lightning rapidity. Though both his honour and his life were affected,—for the informer had spoken of a plot, and intended attempt on his life,—he seemed to hesitate. He concealed his rage. It almost looked as though this man,—impatient and impulsive beyond all others, as a rule,—were seeking to gain time. On the 20th of November, he returned to the palace without a sign of perturbation on his countenance, supped as usual with the Empress, and held a long and familiar conversation with Mons, who, like every-one else, felt quite reassured. At a somewhat early hour he complained of weariness and enquired the hour. Catherine

¹ Mordovtsef, p. 130.

² Scherer, vol. iv. p. 78.

consulted her repeating watch—the one he had sent her from Dresden—and replied, ‘Nine o’clock.’ With a sudden flash of anger—his first—he took the watch, opened the case, gave the hands three turns, and, in the well-known tone which no one ever dared to answer, he replied, ‘You are quite mistaken! It is midnight, and every one will go to bed!’

The lion was awake again, with his mighty roar and cruel claws,—the tyrant who claimed to rule every one and everything, and even time itself!

The company separated, and, a few moments later, Mons was arrested in his own room, Peter himself, so we are told, acting as his jailor and his examining judge. But throughout all the examination, Catherine’s name was never mentioned. He deliberately put her outside the question. The enquiry resulted in the culprit’s conviction of other guilty practices,—of abuse of influence and criminal traffic, in which Matréná Balk was also involved. For two successive days, on the 13th and 14th of November, a crier passed through the streets of St. Petersburg, calling upon all those persons who had paid bribes to declare them, under pain of the most heavy punishment. But Mons himself gave full information. In later years, he was described, like Glebof, as having stoically poured forth every other sort of avowal, in his desire to protect his mistress’s honour. Such heroism, had it really existed, can scarcely have been of the finest temper. Even in Peter’s reign, there was less risk for the man who acknowledged embezzlement, than for him who posed as the Tsar’s rival in love. This fact had been proved by Glebof’s terrible end, and William, handsome as he was, seems to have had nothing of the hero about him. According to the minutes of the official enquiry, he fainted away as soon as he was arrested and brought into the Tsar’s presence, and he ended by confessing whatever he was desired to confess. There cannot possibly have been any difficulty about drawing information from him, for, as we are significantly informed, he was never put to the question. As for Matréná Balk, she made some resistance at first, but the first blow from the knout quite broke it down.

Mons was beheaded on the 28th of November, 1724. The Saxon Resident in St. Petersburg declares that, before the execution, Peter went to see him, and expressed his great

regret at being obliged to part with him. The young man went bravely to the scaffold. The great Tsar's reign, like another and later reign of terror, at all events taught men how to die. The story that the guilty man begged his executioner to take a miniature framed in diamonds from his pocket, to destroy the picture (Catherine's portrait) and to keep the setting, is an evident and clumsy invention.¹ We may take it for certain that prisoners, in those days, were searched within their prisons. Matréná Balk was given eleven blows with the knout, did not die under them (which proves that she was tough), was sent for life to Siberia, and returned after Peter's death. Nothing was perpetual at that period. Once a culprit escaped with life, he or she had a fair chance of rising again, even out of the darkest depths. Around the place of execution, placards, bearing the names of all the persons with whom Mons and his sister had done business, were fixed on posts. The whole hierarchy of Russian official life, headed by the High Chancellor Golovkin, was there represented, coupled with the names of Prince Menshikof, the Duke of Holstein, and the Tsarina Prascovia Féodorovna.²

Catherine behaved, all through this ordeal, with a courage which is almost terrifying. On the day of the execution, she affected the greatest cheerfulness. In the evening, she sent for the princesses, summoned their dancing-master, and practised the minuet with them. But in one of Campredon's despatches I find these words: 'Although the Princess hides her grief, as far as that is possible, it is clearly written on her countenance . . . so much so that all the world wonders what is going to happen to her.'³

On that very day, she had a somewhat disagreeable surprise. A ukase written by the Tsar's own hand, and addressed to all the Administrative Bodies, forbade them, in consequence of the abuses which had arisen *without the Tsarina's knowledge*, to obey any order or recommendation of hers in future. At the same time the offices through which her private affairs were directed, were laid under an interdict; her fortune was taken from her, under pretext of its being managed for her, and she found herself so pinched for money, that when she wanted to give a thousand ducats to a

¹ Crusenstolpe, *Der Russische Hof* (Hamburg, 1857), p. 68.

² Mordovtsef, pp. 48, 49. ³ St. Petersburg, Dec. 9th, 1724 (Foreign Office).

dienshtchik, named Vassili Pétrovitch, who was in possession, for the moment, of the Tsar's ear, she was obliged to borrow it from her ladies.¹

And the next day brought her fresh misery. The Tsar, we are told, took his wife out with him in a sledge, and the Imperial couple were seen to pass close to the scaffold on which Mons' corpse still lay exposed. The Tsarina's dress brushed the dead body. Catherine never turned her head nor ceased to smile. Then Peter went further. The dead man's head, enclosed in a vessel of spirits of wine, was placed in a prominent position in the empress' apartment. Catherine endured its horrible proximity, and preserved her apparent calm. In vain the Tsar raged. He broke a magnificent Venetian glass with his fist, saying,—‘Thus will I treat thee and thine!’ She answered, quite unmoved, ‘You have destroyed one of the chief ornaments of your dwelling. Do you think you have increased its charm?’ She contrived thus to subdue and control him, but their relations continued strained. On the 19th of December, 1724, Lefort wrote in a despatch, ‘They hardly speak to each other; they no longer eat nor sleep together.’ And at the same time, public attention was generally attracted to Maria Kantémir. Peter was with her every day. Then it was, so the world believed, that he learned the truth of what had happened at Astrakhan, where, as my readers will recollect, the hopes of the Princess, and, it may be, of her lover as well, had been overthrown by a mysterious miscarriage. The doctor who had attended the young girl, a Greek named Palikala, had been bribed; ‘By whose hand?’ he enquired—and the answer rose of itself to the outraged husband's lips.

Catherine, according to general opinion, was utterly lost. Villebois declares that Peter planned a trial, modelled on that of Henry VIII., and only temporised so as to ensure the future of his children by his unfaithful wife. He hurried on the marriage of his elder daughter, Anne, with the Duke of Holstein, and caused overtures to be made for the union of the second, Elizabeth, with a French prince, or even with the King of France himself. But this plan, which seemed to be taking shape, and was irresistibly attractive to the Tsar, furnished an all-powerful argument for sparing Catherine.

¹ *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xi. p. 494. Description sent by the Emperor's Envoy, Rabutin.

Tolstoï and Ostermann, who were in negotiation with Campredon, laid the strongest stress upon it. The King of France, they said, would never be induced to marry the daughter of a second Anne Boleyn!¹

But Catherine's lucky star was to carry her through. On the 16th of January, 1725, signs of a reconciliation, only skin-deep, perhaps, and somewhat ungracious, on Peter's side, but yet significant enough, were generally observed. Lefort writes, 'The Tsarina has made a long and ample *Fussfall* (genuflection) before the Tsar, to obtain remission of her faults. The conversation lasted three hours, and they even supped together, after which they parted.' Less than a month afterwards, Peter was dead, and carried with him to his tomb, the secret of his anger, and of the vengeance which he may have been nursing, and preparing in secret. I must not, in this place, dilate upon the political use Catherine made of this event. Her subsequent private life justified, only too clearly, the jealous anxiety which poisoned the last days of the great Tsar. We must suppose that after twenty years of continuous effort, and never-ceasing watchfulness, during which all her faculties were incessantly concentrated on, and strained towards, the one end and aim, which she at last attained, there was a sort of sudden weakening of the moral spring, and a simultaneous leaping up of her long repressed taste for coarse sensuality, love of vulgar debauch, and vile instincts, physical and moral. She, who had done so much to restrain her husband from nocturnal orgies, ended by drinking all night long, and till 9 o'clock in the morning, with her casual lovers,—Loewenwalde, Devier, and Sapieha. Her reign, which, happily for Russia, only lasted sixteen months, was a mere casting of the sovereign power to Menshikof, and to short-lived favourites, who scrambled with him for every morsel of profit. The whilom devoted, helpful, and even heroic partner of the great Tsar, became a mere Comedy Queen, a base-born peasant, carried by some improbable chance up to the throne, and there taking her pleasure after her own low fashion.

¹ See for all this episode, Soïovief, vol. xviii. p. 245; Scherer, vol. iv. p. 18, etc.; Sbornik, vol. iii. p. 90 (Leport); *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xi. p. 490, etc. (Rabutin); Villebois' *Memoirs* (manuscript, in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris).

PART III
HIS WORK

BOOK I—EXTERNAL STRUGGLE—WAR AND DIPLOMACY

CHAPTER I

FROM NARVA TO POLTAVA, 1700-1709

- i. Traditional Policy, internal and external—Peter begins with the outside—Russian ambition and enterprise oscillated between the North and the South—The Emperor's refusal drives Peter to choose the North—The interview at Rawa—Intercourse with Augustus—The quadruple alliance—Patkul—Peter resolves to make common cause with Saxony and Denmark against Sweden, but awaits the signature of peace with Turkey—The Treaty of Préobrajenskoie—News from Constantinople—On the march to Narva—Arrival of Charles XII.—Peter's flight—The catastrophe.
- ii. The Tsar's pusillanimity and distress—Charles' advance on Poland gives him time to collect himself, and drives him into closer alliance with Augustus—More war preparations—The interview at Birzé—Fresh reverses and earliest successes—Peter at the mouth of the Neva—'The Key of the Sea'—St. Petersburg—Peter takes possession of Ingria and Livonia, and Augustus loses Poland—Preparations for the decisive struggle.
- iii. A Diplomatic Campaign—Search for a Mediator—Prince Galitzin at Vienna—Matviéief at the Hague and in Paris—Prince Dimitri Galitzin at Constantinople—An alliance negotiated at Berlin—Patkul's career and death—The Swede triumphs over the Livonian—Arved Horn—Altranstadt—The defection of Augustus—Diplomatic duplicity—The Battle of Kalisz—The two Sovereigns attempt to obtain a separate peace—Aurora von Koenigsmarck in the camp of Charles XII.—Peter's Envoys and Emissaries to European Courts—A negative result—Peter is left alone to face Charles—He resolves to fight on his own ground.
- iv. Charles XII.'s Plan of Campaign—Mazeppa—The first obstacle—The Hetman hesitates—Loewenhaupt's march delayed—The summer goes by—Prospect of a winter Campaign.
- v. Charles marches southward—Victory at Holovtchin—Loewenhaupt's disaster at Liesna—Famine—Mazeppa makes up his mind—Too late!—He loses the Ukraine—The Siege of Poltava—Victory or death—Demoralisation of the Swedish army—Charles wounded—Peter increases his chances of victory—The encounter—Defeat of the Swedes—Its consequences—The ruins of the past, and the Russia of the future.

I

PETER THE GREAT was the heir and the follower of predecessors whose merit has been too easily forgotten. He

was certainly, and incomparably, their superior, although, in certain respects, he lacked completeness. From these predecessors he inherited a double programme of internal reform, and external expansion. He first turned his attention to the latter.

My readers will readily understand that I have not allowed myself to be wholly swayed, in the arrangement of this book, by a desire for chronological exactness. The greater number of the reforms which changed the whole face of eighteenth century Russia, politically, economically, and socially, belonged to the last years of Peter's reign. This does not alter the fact that their importance, from the historic point of view, far outweighs that of the victory of Poltava and the Conquest of the Baltic. The foremost place in this work is not occupied by the general minutiae of dates. Quite a different consideration has inspired me. I do not at all believe that the long succession of battles and negotiations, which, until 1721, almost entirely absorbed the Reformer's activity, were the preliminary condition which must necessarily have preceded his reforms. I am, on the contrary, convinced, and I will endeavour to prove it, that they were the indirect, but inevitable, or, as some may prefer to say, the providential, outcome of that struggle. In other words, the existence of the reforms did not depend on the war. But without them, the war could not have been carried on. Thus, all I have done is to put the plough behind the oxen.

From the year 1693, to 1698, Peter, whether in Holland or in England, at Voronèje or Archangel, had turned his first endeavours to becoming a first-rate seaman, a thorough pilot, carpenter, and artillery man. And why? First and foremost because it amused him. This is clear. He played at being a soldier and a sailor, but, by degrees, a more serious idea,—the consciousness of his ancestral traditions and the duties they imposed upon him—was combined with mere amusement, and, in the end, reality won the day. But this reality was actual war. From 1700 to 1709, his one object,—and he had no time to think of any other,—was to vanquish Charles XII., or die fighting him. From 1709 to 1721, his life was one ceaseless struggle, as much to obtain an advantageous peace, as to extricate himself from the fresh difficulties and dangers into which his own presump-

tuousness, and over-confidence, had thrown him. And here we see the result. The Tsar, in the pursuance of the course on which he had so thoughtlessly entered, was driven to call upon his country for an amount of assistance far beyond anything that Russian resources, in their then condition, political, economic, or social, were capable of furnishing. The ancient foundations of the Muscovite edifice snapped and crumbled, weighed down on one side, and undermined on the other, by the huge weight cast on them, and the enormous effort demanded. Thus an abyss opened which had to be instantly filled, no matter how,—for war brooks no delay. So it came about, that, wellnigh unconsciously, and in spite of himself, the warrior grew into an organiser and reformer. His reforms were the makeshift ammunition with which he loaded his cannon, when the contents of his artillery waggons were exhausted.

I shall later dwell more fully on this point of view—an all-important one for the due understanding of the great Tsar's work.

I possess no knowledge of the art of war, and shall not attempt to bring ridicule on myself, by pretending to give a complete picture, or a reasoned criticism, of those campaigns which, between 1700 and 1721, robbed Sweden of her position in Europe, and gave Russia hers. And the intended scope of this work would not, indeed, permit it. My sole endeavour will be to point out the historical bearings of the well-known events which mark this epoch, and so to cast a clearer light on the object of this special study of mine—I mean the personal features of the great man, as I have sketched them in the preceding pages, and those of his reign, which I shall now proceed to consider.

It would appear that it was not till Peter's visit to Vienna, in 1698, that he conceived the idea of attacking Sweden. Up till that time, his warlike impulse had rather been directed southwards, and the Turk had been the sole object of his enmity. But, at Vienna, he perceived that the Emperor, whose help he had counted on, had failed him, and forthwith the mobile mind of the young Tsar turned to the right-about. A war he must have, of some kind, it little mattered where, to give work to his young army. The warlike instincts and the greed of his predecessors, tempted sometimes by the Black Sea, sometimes by the Baltic, and the border provinces of

Poland, had, indeed, always swung and turned back and forward, between the south and the north. These alternate impulses, natural enough in a nation so full of youth and strength, have, since those days, been most unnecessarily idealised, erected into a doctrine, and dignified as a work of unification. It must be acknowledged that every nation has, at one time or the other, thus claimed the right to resume the national patrimony, at the expense of neighbouring peoples, and Peter, by some lucky fate, remained, in this respect, within certain bounds of justice, of logic, and of truth. Absorbed and almost exhausted, as he soon became, by the desperate effort demanded by his war in the North, he forgot or imperilled much that the conquering ambition of his predecessors had left him in the South and West. He clung to the territory already acquired on the Polish side, retired from the Turkish border, and claimed what he had most right, relatively speaking, to claim, in the matter of resumption, on his north-western frontier.

On that frontier, the coast country between the mouth of the Narva, or Narova, and that of the Siestra, watered by the Voksa, the Neva, the Igora, and the Louga, was really an integral part of the original Russian patrimony. It was one of the five districts (*piatiny*) of the Novgorod territory, and was still full of towns, bearing Slavonic names, such as Koréla, Ojéshek, Ladoga, Koporié, Iamy, and Ivangrod. It was not till 1616, that the Tsar Michael Féodorovitch, during his struggle with Gustavus Adolphus, finally abandoned the sea coast, for the sake of keeping his hold on Novgorod. But so strong was the hope of recovering the lost territory, in the hearts of his descendants, that, after the failure of an attempt on Livonia, in Alexis' reign, a Boyard named Ordin-Nashtchokin set to work to build a number of warships at Kokenhausen, on the Dvina, which vessels were intended for the conquest of Riga.¹ Peter had an impression, confused it may be, but yet powerful, of these historic traditions. This is proved by the direction in which he caused his armies to march, after he had thrown down the gauntlet to Sweden. He strayed off the path, swayed, as he often was, by sudden impulses, but he always came back to the traditional aim of his forefathers,—access to the sea, a Baltic port, ‘*a window open upon Europe.*’

¹ Viessiélago, *Summary of a History of the Russian Fleet*, vol. i. p. 7.

His interview with Augustus II. at Rawa definitely settled his wavering mind. The *pacta conventa*, signed by the King of Poland when he ascended his throne, bound him to claim the territories which had formerly belonged to the Republic, from the King of Sweden. For this end the help of Denmark could be reckoned on. The Treaty of Roeskilde (1658), which had been forced on Frederick III., weighed heavily on his successors, and the eager glances fixed by the neighbouring states on Holstein, after the death of Christian Albert, in 1694, threatened to end in quarrel. There were fair hopes, too, of the help of Brandenburg. When Sweden made alliance with Louis XIV. and Madame de Maintenon, that country abandoned its historic position in Germany to Prussia. But Sweden still kept some footing, and was looked on as a rival. The Elector had offered his services at the Königsberg meeting. Further, Augustus had a personal charm for Peter, sufficient, in itself, to prove how much simplicity, inexperience, and boyish thoughtlessness still existed, in that half polished mind. The Polish sovereign, tall, strong, and handsome, an adept in all physical exercises, a great hunter, a hard drinker, and an indefatigable admirer of the fair sex, in whose person debauch of every kind took royal proportions, delighted the Tsar, and somewhat overawed him. He was more than inclined to think him a genius, and was quite ready to bind up his fortunes with his friend's. At the end of four days of uninterrupted feasting, they had agreed on the division of the spoils of Sweden, and had made a preliminary exchange of arms and clothing. The Tsar appeared at Moscow, a few weeks later, wearing the King of Poland's waistcoat, and belted with his sword.¹ Yet, so far, there was no actual plan, either of alliance or of campaign. The two friends and future allies had, each of them, too much to do at home to be able to seek adventures abroad. Augustus had more than enough trouble with his ungovernable Poles, and had not yet settled his account with the partisans of the Prince de Conti. There was headsman's work for Peter to do. The *Streltsy* had chosen that moment to break into open revolt.

Neither monarch was to give the final summons to arms. Neither was to have the merit of giving shape to the triple or quadruple coalition, which, for the next two years,

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iii. p. 622.

was to rise up threateningly before the drawn sword of Charles XII. This was to be the work of a Swede, or at all events of a Swedish subject. The Rawa interview took place in August 1698, and, in October, John Reinhold Patkul appeared upon the scene. This Livonian gentleman, who came into the world, in 1660, in a prison cell (his father, in consequence of the cession of Wolmar to the Poles, had been arrested, and, with his mother, imprisoned at Stockholm, on a charge of high treason), would seem to have been marked from birth for some tragic destiny. Bold and ambitious, passionate and eager, he had all the qualities of a tragedy hero. A rivalry in some love affair early set him at variance with the Swedish Governor of his province, Helmersen. Soon afterwards, goaded partly, no doubt, by personal spite, he became the champion of the Livonian aristocracy against Charles XI. He was a man who could dress his passions up, and then deceive himself as to the reality of the disguise. He was prosecuted, condemned to death by default, in 1696, and took refuge at Prangins, in Switzerland, whence Fleming, Augustus' favourite minister, attracted him to Warsaw. There he arrived, with his coalition plan ready drawn up; he proposed that Brandenburg, Denmark, Russia, and Poland should ally themselves against Sweden, and that the price of Poland's adhesion should be the Province of Livonia. Russia was to be rewarded with the possession of other provinces on the coast, and the Livonian had taken good care minutely to circumscribe the allotted territory. Then, and always, he mistrusted Muscovy, and advised that her 'hands should be firmly tied, lest she should devour the morsel we have cooked.'¹

Augustus was easily enticed. Frederick IV. of Denmark, whose eyes were fixed on Holstein, only needed a little encouragement. The Primate of Poland, Radziejowski, was bought over with the sum of 100,000 ducats; and matters soon began to move. A secret article of the Treaty, signed by Patkul, in the name of the nobles of his country, guaranteed the possession of Livonia to Augustus and his heirs, even in the case of their losing the Polish throne. This article was not communicated to Radziejowski.² The Saxon General, Karłowicz, was sent to Moscow, to arrange matters definitely

¹ *Patkuls Berichte* (Berlin, 1802); Bernoulli, Memoranda dated Jan. 1 and Ap. 7, 1699.

² Szujski, *History of Poland*, vol. iv. p. 169.

with the Tsar, and Patkul accompanied him, under a feigned name. At Moscow they fell in with the Ambassadors of the new King of Sweden, Charles XII., who had come to obtain confirmation of the Peace of Kardis (1660). They had been well received by Peter, who, however, dropped some complaints, now officially formulated for the first time, as to the ill-treatment of his Ambassadors during their temporary stay at Riga. Clearly he was even then seeking a pretext for a rupture, and was only waiting to secure himself on the Turkish side, before throwing off the mask. The Treaty of Karlovitz, which, in spite of the efforts of the French Envoy, Chateauneuf, had been signed on the 26th of January 1699, and which had reconciled the Porte with the Empire and with Poland, had gained nothing for Russia, beyond a two years' amnesty. The Tsar had sent Oukraintsof as his plenipotentiary to Constantinople, to endeavour to convert this amnesty into a definite peace. On the 11th November 1699, Peter, confident of the success of this negotiation, called the Polish and Danish Ministers to his little country house at Préobrajenskoïe, and there signed, with them, a secret treaty of alliance, offensive and defensive. In this Treaty, Augustus only figured as the Elector of Saxony. But the Tsar continued to fondle the Swedes, for Oukraintsof worked but slowly. In the beginning of 1700, Augustus and Frederick, faithful to their engagement, went to war; but Peter, bound though he was to follow their example, neither moved nor stirred. Frederick was beaten, his very Capital was threatened. So much the worse for him! Augustus seized on Dünamünde, but utterly failed before Riga. All the better for the Russians; Riga was left for them! Another Saxon General, Langen, came hurrying to Moscow. The Tsar listened coolly to his reproaches, and replied that he would act as soon as the news from Constantinople permitted it. The negotiations were proceeding satisfactorily, and he hoped shortly to fulfil his promise, and to attack the Swedes in the neighbourhood of Pskof. This was a point on which Patkul had laid great stress, and Peter had studiously avoided contradicting him. It was quite understood between them that the Tsar was not to lay a finger on Livonia.¹ At last,

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iii. pp. 375-377. Van der Hulst, Dutch Resident at Moscow, to the Registrar of the States-General, 3rd Aug., 8th Sept., 1700 (Archives at the Hague).

on the 8th of August 1700, Oukraïntsof's courier arrived with the longed-for despatch. Peace with Turkey was signed at last, and that very day the Russian troops received their marching orders. But they were not sent towards Pskof. They marched on Narva, in the very heart of the Livonian country.

Peter's war manifesto dwells, with superb impudence, on the grievances with which his visit to Riga had armed him. Three weeks later, Matviéief, his Envoy in Holland, who had not yet had time to receive the necessary warning, was still assuring the States General that the Tsar had no idea of taking armed vengeance for the humiliations imposed on his *Ambassadors*.¹ It would now appear that it was the Tsar himself, in spite of his incognito, who had been insulted, and that the Sovereign was going to war to avenge the ill-treatment of Peter Mihaïlof!

The army destined to lay siege to Narva consisted of three divisions of novel formation, under the orders of three Generals, Golovin, Weyde, and Repnin, with 10,500 Cossacks, and some irregular troops,—63,520 men in all. Repnin's division, numbering 10,834 men, and the Little Russian Cossacks, stopped on the way, so that the actual force at disposal was reduced to about 40,000 men.² But Charles XII. could not bring more than 5300 infantry, and 3130 cavalry, to the relief of the town. And, being obliged, when he neared Wesemburg, to which point Shérémétief's cavalry had already advanced, to throw himself in flying column across a country which was already completely devastated, and, consequently, to carry all his supplies with him, his troops arrived in presence of an enemy five times as numerous as themselves, worn out, and completely exhausted, by a succession of forced marches.³

Peter never dreamt that he would find the King of Sweden in Livonia. He believed his hands were more than full enough, elsewhere, with the King of Denmark; he was quite unaware that the Peace of Travendal, which had been signed on the very day of the departure of the Russian troops, had been already forced upon his ally. He started off gaily at the head of his Bombardier Company, full of expectation of an

¹ Memoranda, Sept. 2, 1700 (Dutch Archives).

² Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 9.

³ Hansen, *Geschichte der Stadt Narwa* (Dorpat, 1858), p. 144.

easy victory. When he arrived before the town on the 23rd of September, he was astounded to find any preparations for serious defence. A regular siege had to be undertaken, and when, after a month of preparations, the Russian batteries at last opened fire, they made no impression whatever. The artillery was bad, and yet more badly served. A second month passed, during which Peter waited and hoped for some piece of luck, either for an offer to recapitulate, or for the arrival of Repnin's force. What did happen was, that on the night of the 17th of November, news came that within twenty-four hours the King of Sweden would be at Narva.

That very night, Peter fled from his camp, leaving the command to the Prince de Croy.

None of the arguments brought forward by the Sovereign and his apologists, in justification of this step, appear to me to hold water. The necessity pleaded for an interview with the Duke of Poland,—the Tsar's desire to hasten on Repnin's march,—are mere pitiful excuses. Langen and Hallart, the Generals sent by Augustus to observe the military operations in Livonia, gravely reported that the Tsar had been obliged to go to Moscow to receive a Turkish Envoy,—who was not expected for four months! The Emperor's Envoy, Pleyer, is nearer the mark, when he says the Sovereign obeyed the entreaties of his advisers, who considered the danger too great for him to be permitted to remain.¹ And Hallart himself, speaking of these same counsellors, whether ministers or generals, does not hesitate to declare, in his rough, soldierly language, that 'they have about as much courage as a frog has hair on his belly.'² The Russian army, disconcerted by the unexpected resistance of the Swedes, ill-prepared for resistance, ill-commanded, ill-lodged, and ill-fed, was already demoralised to the last extent. The arrival of Charles caused a panic, and from that panic, Peter, the most impressionable of men, was the first to suffer. The orders he left with the Prince de Croy give all-sufficient proof of the disordered condition of his mind. They enjoined him, *in the first place*, to await the arrival of the artillery ammunition, lacking at the moment, before he attempted to assault the town; and, *in the second*, to endeavour to seize the place before the arrival of the King of Sweden, of the imminence of which he must

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 34.

² Herrman, *Geschichte Russlands*, vol. iv. p. 116.

have been well aware, since that it was which drove him into flight!¹

Prince Charles Eugène de Croy was far from being a poor commander. He had served fifteen years in the Emperor's armies, had won the grade of Lieutenant Field-Marshal under Charles of Lorraine; had taken part, in 1683, in the relief of Vienna under Sobieski, and thus lacked neither experience nor authority. But he had only just reached the Russian camp with a message from the King of Poland, he knew nothing of the army which was put into his hands, he had no acquaintance with its leaders, and could not even speak their language. The one fault that can be laid to his charge, is that he ever accepted the command, and that fault was expiated by his death at Revel two years later, a prisoner, and stripped of everything he possessed.

The startling rapidity with which Charles had rid himself of the weakest of his three adversaries, under the very walls of Copenhagen, would have been less astonishing to Peter if the young sovereign had better realised the conditions under which he and his allies had begun a struggle in which, at first sight, their superiority appeared so disproportionate. King Frederick had reckoned without the Powers which had guaranteed the recent Treaty of Altona, by which the safety of Holstein was ensured,—without the Hanoverian troops, and those of Lüneburg, which at once brought succour to Toeningen,—without the Anglo-Dutch fleet, which forced his to seek shelter under the walls of Copenhagen, and thus permitted the King of Sweden to cross the Sound unmolested, and land quietly in Zealand; and finally, he reckoned, and for this he may well be excused, without that which was soon to fill all Europe with terror and amazement,—the lucky star, and the military genius, of Charles XII.

This monarch,—born in 1682, ten years after Peter, who had slain bears when he was sixteen, and, at eighteen, was a finished soldier, greedy for glory, and battle, and blood,—was the last representative of that race of men, who, between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, held all Central Europe in their iron grip;—fierce warriors, who steeped Germany and Italy in fire and blood, fought their way from town to town, and hamlet to hamlet, giving no truce, and showing no mercy, who lived for war, and by war,

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 35.

grew old, and died in harness, in a very atmosphere of carnage, with bodies riddled with wounds, with hands stained with abominable crimes, but with spirits calm and unflinching to the last. Standing on the threshold of the new period, he was the superb and colossal incarnation of that former one, which, happily for mankind, was to disappear in his person. Count Guiscard, who, as envoy from the King of France, accompanied him on his first campaign, describes him thus :—‘The King of Sweden is of tall stature,—taller than myself by almost a head ; he is very handsome, he has fine eyes and a good complexion, his face is long, his speech a little thick. He wears a small wig tied behind in a bag, a plain stock, without cravat, a very tight jerkin of plain cloth, with sleeves as narrow as our waistcoat sleeves, a narrow belt above this jerkin, with a sword of extraordinary length and thickness, and almost perfectly flat-soled shoes—a very strange style of dress for a prince of his age.’¹ This description is too hasty, and only skin-deep. That of the English Envoy, Stepney, written some years later, is more expressive :—‘He is a tall and well-built monarch, but somewhat slovenly. His manners are the roughest imaginable, in so young a man. In order that the exterior of his quarters may not belie their interior, he has chosen the dirtiest place, and one of the gloomiest houses, in all Saxony. The cleanest and neatest part of it is the courtyard in front of the house, where every one must get off his horse, and immediately sink up to his knees in mud. In this court are all his own horses, merely fastened with halters, with sacks over them instead of horse-cloths, and without either racks or mangers. They have staring coats, round bellies, heavy hind quarters, and badly kept tails, with the hair all of different lengths. The groom who takes care of them is no better dressed nor fed than his horses ; one of these is always kept ready saddled for the monarch, who will constantly jump on its back, and rush off at full gallop before any one can follow him. He will sometimes ride ten or twelve German miles, which equal forty-eight or fifty English, in a day, and this even in the winter, when he comes in as muddy as any postillion. He wears a blue coat with yellow copper buttons, the corners of his jerkin are turned back in front and behind to show his waistcoat and his leather breeches, which

¹ Despatch, Aug. 19, 1699 (French Foreign Office, Sweden).

are frequently very greasy. His cravat is made of a piece of black crape, but the collar of his overcoat buttons up so high that no one can see whether he wears a cravat or not. His shirt and wristbands are generally very dirty, and he never wears cuffs or gloves, except on horseback. His hands are the same colour as his wristbands, so that you can hardly tell one from the other. His hair is light brown, very short and greasy, and he never combs it, except with his fingers. He sits down, without the smallest ceremony, on any chair he finds in the dining-room . . . he eats very quickly, never spends more than a quarter of an hour at table, and never says one word during the meal . . . he never drinks anything but small beer . . . he has no sheets nor canopy to his bed, the mattress beneath him serves also to cover him, he rolls it round him . . . beside his bed, there is a very handsome gilded Bible, the only thing about him that is the least showy.¹

This time, the figure stands out clearly enough. Stern, fierce, and wild.

The landing in Zealand was a piece of boyish temerity. Guiscard, imprudent as he thought it, did not dissuade the monarch, and even threw himself into the water with him, so as to reach the shore more quickly. 'Your Majesty would not have me leave your Court on this, its greatest day !'

The descent on Livonia, regardless of the fact that bad weather had prevented the landing of some of the Swedish regiments, was held by the French Diplomat, intrepid though he was, as an act of madness. 'There is great reason to fear the King will not survive it,' he wrote.² In order to reach Narva with his 8000 men, Charles, after having crossed a tract of desert country, was obliged, at a place called Pyhäoggi, to cross a narrow valley, divided by a stream, which, if it had been fortified, must have stopped him short. The idea occurred to Gordon, but Peter would not listen to him, and it was not till the very last moment that he sent Shérémétief, who found the Swedes just debouching into the valley, received several volleys of grape shot, and retired in disorder. The mad venture had succeeded. But Charles's further advance involved the playing of a risky game. His men were worn out, his horses had

¹ Lamberty's *Memoirs* (The Hague, 1724), vol. iv. p. 438.

² Nov. 2, 1700, from Revel (French Foreign Office, Sweden).

not been fed for two whole days.¹ Still he went on; he reached Narva, formed his Swedes into several attacking columns, led one himself, and, favoured by a sudden hurricane, which drove showers of blinding snow into his adversaries' faces, threw himself into their camp, and mastered the place in half an hour. The only resistance he met was offered by the two regiments of the Guard. All the rest fled or surrendered. A few Russians were drowned in the Narva. 'If the river had been frozen,' said Charles discontentedly, 'I do not know that we should have contrived to kill a single man.'

It was a total breakdown; the army had disappeared, and the artillery. The very sovereign was gone, and with him, the country's honour. That had sunk out of sight amidst the scornful laughter with which Europe hailed this undignified defeat. The Tsar was in full flight. All Peter's plans of conquest, his dreams of European expansion, and of navigating the Northern Seas, his hopes of glory, his faith in his civilising mission, had utterly faded. And he himself had collapsed upon their heaped-up ruins. Onward he fled, feeling the Swedish soldiers on his heels. He wept, he sued for peace, vowing he would treat at once and submit to any sacrifice, he sent imploring appeals to the States-General of Holland, to England and to the Emperor, praying for mediation.¹

But swiftly he recovered possession of his faculties. Then, raising his head,—through the golden haze with which his insufficient education, the infatuation inherent to his semi-oriental origin, and his inexperience, had filled his eyes, through the rent of that mighty catastrophe and that cruel lesson,—he saw and touched the truth at last! He realised what he must set himself to do, if he was to become that which he fain would be. There must be no more playing at soldiers and sailors,—no more of that farce of power and glory, in which, till now, he had been the chief actor,—no more aimless adventure, undertaken in utter scorn of time and place. He must toil, now, in downright earnest,—he must go forward, step by step,—measure each day's effort, calculate each morrow's task, let each fruit ripen ere he

¹ Sarauw, *Die Feldzüge Karls XII.* (Leipzig, 1881), p. 551; Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 181.

² Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 77

essayed to pluck it, learn patience, and dogged perseverance. He did it all. He found means within him, and about him, to carry out his task. ...The strong, long-enduring, long-suffering race of which he came, endowed him with the necessary qualities, and gave him its own inexhaustible and never-changing devotion, and self-sacrifice.

Ten armies may be destroyed, he will bring up ten others to replace them, no matter what the price. His people will follow him, and die beside him, to the last man, to the last morsel of bread snatched from its starving jaws. A month hence, the fugitive from Narva will belong to a vanished, forgotten, almost improbable past,—the future victor of Poltava will have taken his place.

II

Of the Russian army, as it had originally taken the field, about three and twenty thousand men remained,—a certain number of troops,—the cavalry under Shérémétief's command, and Repnin's division. The Tsar ordered fresh levies. He melted the church bells into cannon.¹ In vain the clergy raised the cry of sacrilege; he never faltered for a moment. He went hither and thither, giving orders, and active help,—rating some, encouraging others, inspiring every one with some of his own energy,—that energy which his misfortunes had spurred and strengthened. Yet, Byzantine as he was by nature, he could not resist the temptation to endeavour to mislead public opinion. Matviéief was given orders to draw up his own special description of the Battle of Narva and its consequences, for the benefit of the readers of the *Gazette de Hollande*, and of the Memoranda which he himself addressed to the States General. The Swedes, according to this account, had been surrounded by a superior force, within the Russian camp, and had there been forced to capitulate; after which event, certain Russian officers, who had desired to pay their respects to the King of Sweden, had been treacherously seized, by his orders.² Europe only laughed, but in later years this pretended capitulation, and the supposed Swedish violation of it, was to serve Peter as a pretext for violating others, to which he himself had willingly

¹ Solovief, vol. xiv. p. 327.

² Lamberty, vol. i. p. 263.

consented.¹ At Vienna, too, Count Kaunitz listened with a smile, while Prince Galitzin explained that the Tsar 'needed no victories to prove his military glory.' Yet, when the Vice-Chancellor inquired what conditions the Tsar hoped to obtain from his victorious adversary, the Russian Diplomat calmly claimed the greater part of Livonia, with Narva, Ivangrod, Kolyvan, Koporié, and Derpt,²—and future events were to prove that he had not asked too much.

Before long, this boldness began to reap its own reward. To begin with, Charles XII. made no immediate attempt to pursue his advantage on Russian soil; Peter had the joy of seeing him plunge into the depths of the Polish plains. The King of Sweden's decision, which, we are told, did not tally with his Generals' opinion, has been severely criticised. Guiscard thought it perfectly justifiable, so long as the king had not rid himself of Augustus, by means of the peace which this prince appeared more than willing to negotiate, through the mediation of Guiscard himself. But Charles turned a deaf ear to the French Diplomat's prayers and remonstrances. He feared, declares Guiscard, 'he might run short of enemies,'³ and as he could not advance on Russia, and leave the Saxons and Poles in his rear, he desired,—and here doubtless he was right,—first of all to ensure his line of communication, and of possible retreat. Thus, by his own deed, he strengthened and cemented an alliance which had already been shaken by common defeat. Augustus, repulsed by the Swedish king, threw himself into Peter's arms, and in February 1701, the common destinies of the Tsar and the King of Poland were once more bound together. A fresh treaty was signed at the Castle of Birzé, close to Düna-burg.

The Castle, now a mere ruin, then the property of the young wife of the Count Palatine of Neuburg, a Princess Radziwill, was a very magnificent residence. The allies' first care was to renew the delights of their meeting at Rawa. Peter, though beaten in the forenoon as an artillery marksman (see page 81, *ante*), took his revenge at the evening banquet. Augustus drank so much wine that it was impossible, next morning, to rouse him and get him on his feet, in time for Mass. Peter attended it alone, listened

¹ Lamberty, vol. vi. p. 288.

² Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 84.

³ Despatch dated June 1, 1701 (French Foreign Office, Sweden).

devoutly to the service (which was Catholic, of course, being in Poland), and manifested his usual curiosity concerning liturgical details. Then, Augustus having slept himself sober, the orgy began again, and lasted three whole days. Yet, even while carrying on the competition of skill and strength inaugurated by their target practice, the sovereigns contrived to give a thought to politics. Augustus, observing the silver plate in front of him was not a clean one, rolled it in his fingers like a piece of paper, and threw it behind him. Peter forthwith followed suit, and the whole service of plate might have been treated in like manner. But the Tsar was the first to hold his hand, with the remark, that the king of Sweden's sword must be treated after the same fashion.¹ On the fourth day, at last, he conferred with the Polish Vice-Chancellor Szczuka on the subject of the co-operation of the Republic in the forthcoming campaign. The conditions were not satisfactorily settled, and the Republic took no final share in this arrangement, but the personal concord of the two monarchs was settled on the 28th of February.

The year 1701 was a hard one for Peter. The junction between the army, which he had contrived, after some fashion, to put on a war footing, and the Saxon troops of Augustus, only resulted in the complete defeat of the allied forces under the walls of Riga, on the 3rd of July. In the month of June, the Moscow Kremlin caught fire; the State offices (*Priказ*) with their archives, the provision stores, and palaces, were all devoured by the flames. The bells fell from the tower of Ivan the Great, and the heaviest, which weighed over a hundred tons, was broken in the fall.² But, in midwinter, Shérémétief contrived to surprise Schlippenbach with a superior force, and defeated him at Erstfer (29th December). Peter's delight, and his wild manifestations of triumph, may easily be imagined. He did not content himself with exhibiting the few Swedish prisoners who had fallen into his hands at Moscow, in a sort of imitation Roman triumph; his practical mind incited him to make use of them in another way, and Cornelius Von Bruyn, who had lived long enough in the country to be thoroughly acquainted with its customs, calmly reports that the price of war captives, which had originally

¹ Nartof's *Recollections*, p. 26.

² Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 99.

been three or four florins a head, rose as high as twenty and thirty florins. Even foreigners now ventured to purchase them, and entered into competition in the open market.¹

On the 18th of July, 1702, Shérémétief won a fresh victory over Schlippenbach,—30,000 Russians defeated 8000 Swedes. According to Peter's official account of the battle, 5000 of his enemies were left dead on the field, while Shérémétief only lost 400 men.² This report made Europe smile, but the Livonians found it no laughing matter. Volmar and Marienburg fell into the hands of the victor, who ravaged the country in the most frightful fashion. The Russians had not, as yet, learnt any other form of warfare, and, as we may suppose, the idea that he might ever possess these territories had not yet occurred to Peter. His mind, indeed, was absorbed elsewhere. His old fancies and whims were strong upon him, and he left Apraxin to rage on the banks of the Neva, in Ingria, on the very spot where his future capital was to stand, while he himself gave all his time and strength to the building of a few wretched ships at Archangel. It was not till September, when the ice had driven him out of the northern port, that he returned to the west and took up his former course. He reached the Lake of Ladoga, sent for Shérémétief, and the end he was to pursue for many a long year seems at last to have taken firm root in his hitherto unstable mind. He laid siege to Noteburg, where he found a garrison of only 450 men, and on the 11th of December 1702 he rechristened the little fortress he had captured, by a new and symbolic name, Schlüsselburg (Key of the Sea).

Next came the capture of Nienschantz, at the very mouth of the Neva, in April 1703, a personal success for the Captain of Bombardiers, Peter Mihailof, who there brought his batteries into play. A month later, the artilleryman had become a sailor, and had won Russia's first naval victory. Two regiments of the guard manned thirty boats, surrounded two small Swedish vessels, which, in their ignorance of the capture of Nienschantz, had ventured close to the town, took possession of them, and murdered their crews. The victor's letters to his friends are full of the wildest and most childish delight, and there was, we must admit, some reason

¹ *Travels* (Amsterdam, 1718), vol. i. p. 52.

² Solovief, vol. xiv. p. 346.

for this joy.¹ He had reconquered the historic estuary, through which, in the ninth century, the first Varegs had passed southward, towards Grecian skies. On the 16th of the following May, wooden houses began to rise on one of the neighbouring islets. These houses were to multiply, to grow into palaces, and finally to be known as St. Petersburg.

Peter's conquests, and newly-founded cities, disturbed Charles XII. but little. 'Let him build towns; there will be all the more for us to take!' Peter, and his army, had, so far, where Charles was concerned, only had to do with small detachments of troops, scattered apart, and thus foredoomed to destruction. The Russians took advantage of this fact to pursue their advantage, strengthening and entrenching themselves, both in Ingria and Livonia. In July 1704, Peter was present at the taking of Derpt. In August he had his revenge for his disaster at Narva, and carried the town, after a murderous assault. Already, in November 1703, a longed-for guest had appeared in the mouth of the Neva, a foreign trading vessel, laden with brandy and salt. Menshikof, the governor of *Piterburg*, entertained the captain at a banquet, and presented him with 500 florins for himself, and thirty crowns for each of his sailors.²

Meanwhile, Charles XII. tarried in Poland, where Augustus' affairs were going from bad to worse. A Diet convened at Warsaw, in February 1704, proclaimed his downfall. After the disappearance of James Sobieski, whose candidature was put a stop to by an ambuscade, into which the dethroned king lured the son of the deliverer of Vienna, Charles, who was all-powerful, put forward that of Stanislaus Leszczyński. Though he gave little thought, just then, to Russia, and to the Russian Sovereign, the Tsar was beginning to be alarmed as to the consequences which the Swedish king's position in Poland, and in Saxony, might entail on himself. Charles was sure to end by retracing his steps, and an encounter between Shérémétief and Loewenhaupt, at Hemauerthorf in Courland (15th July, 1705), clearly proved that the Russian army, unless in the case of disproportionate numerical superiority over the enemy, was not yet capable of resisting well-commanded Swedish troops. On this occasion,

¹ Solovief, vol. xiv. p. 349.

² *Moscow Gazette*, Dec. 15, 1703.

Shérémétief lost all his infantry, and was himself severely wounded.¹

What then was Peter to do? He must work on, increase his resources, and add to his experience. If Shérémétief and his likes proved unequal to their task, he must find foreign generals and instructors, technical and other, he must keep patience, he must avoid all perilous encounters, he must negotiate, and try to obtain peace, even at the price of parting with some of the territory he had conquered. The years between 1705 and 1707 were busy ones for him. Within the borders of his country he was absorbed by his mighty efforts at military and economic organisation. Without them, and even in the farthest corners of Europe, he was carrying on an eager and active diplomatic campaign. I shall refer, later, to the first portion of this strenuous task. A few words as to the second must follow here.

III

The Russian diplomatists of that period found their task a most ungrateful one. The European Cabinets of the day were still in the frame of mind with which the shameful defeat at Narva, in 1700, had inspired them. Prince Peter Galitzin, overwhelmed with mortifications, cried out to be released from his post at Vienna. Matviéief, who was only given 2000 roubles a year, and expected to make a good figure as the Tsar's Ambassador to the Hague, and who, consequently, complained bitterly of his poverty, received orders to negotiate a loan in exchange for a body of troops to be employed against France. He was immediately asked whether the troops he was empowered to offer 'were those that had forced the King of Sweden to capitulate'? Besides, the Dutch,—a practical and far-seeing people,—viewed the establishment of Russia on the Baltic coast with marked disfavour. In 1705, Matviéief ventured on a journey to Paris,—at which place, since the year 1703, the Tsar had only kept a Resident, who carried no particular weight, named Postnikof,—and frankly admitted that he could not induce any one there to

¹ Adlerfeld, *Histoire Militaire de Charles XII.* (Paris, 1741), vol. ii. p. 522; Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 376.

take him seriously.¹ Since 1701, Dimitri Galitzin had been striving to gain the confirmation of the treaty negotiated by Oukraintsof at Constantinople, and further, demanding the right to free navigation of the Black Sea. But the Turks would not even permit the Russian Envoys to arrive at Constantinople by 'their water.' Yet, and for the first time, they agreed to receive a permanent Russian Minister at Adrianople. But Peter Tolstoï, who was appointed to this post, vainly endeavoured to induce them to make a diversion in the direction of Germany. All that could be said was, that, for the moment, no danger threatened Peter from that side.

Towards the end of 1705, he began to think of acquiring that third ally on whom Patkul had relied for his original plan of combination. And he despatched the Livonian to Berlin. This strange and enigmatic personage has been made the subject of a poet's verse. Gutzkow has turned the Land-junker into the heroic champion of his race, and even history does not appear to me, so far, to have done him full justice.² When Patkul first comes upon the scene, he does certainly appear as the defender of the rights of his country, or, at all events, of his caste, against the encroachments of Charles XI. But, even then, he gives us the impression of a man who plays a part, rather than of one who fulfils a mandate. We see no mandatories; he does, indeed, treat with Augustus, in the name of the Livonian nobility, but his powers appear far from regular, and he is left forsaken in his exile. Even at the very summit of his short political career, he keeps all the outward appearances of an adventurer.

And fate was against all his enterprises. An appeal to Poland was part of the national tradition of his country, but, in the present condition of that republic, divided and torn by contrary factions, the only means of reaching the State was

¹ Solovief, vol. xv. pp. 44-69.

² Yet see Förster, *Die Hofe u. die Cabinette Europa's*, vol. iii.; and Iarochowski, *Patkuls Ausgang* (*Neues Archiv für Sachsische G.*), which seem to me to approach most nearly to historical accuracy; comp. Bernouilli, *Joh. R. von Patkul's Berichte*; Otto v. Wernich, *Der Livländer. J. R. von Patkul*; C. Schirren, *Antwort*, 1869; Fr. Bienemann, *Aus baltischer Vorzeit*, vol. vi. 1870; Otto Sjogren, *I. R. Patkul*; C. Schirren, *Ueber F. F. Carlson's Carl XII.* (*Götting. Gel. Anz.*, 1883); E. Bodemann, *Leibnitsen's Plan*, etc., 1883; C. Schirren, *Patkul und Leibnitz*; *Mitth. aus d. Livl. G.*, vol. xiii., 1884; G. Mettig, *J. R. von Patkul* (*Nordische Rundschau*, vol. iii., 1885); H. v. Bruiningk, *Patkuliana* (*Mittheil. a. d. Livl. G.*, vol. xiv., 1886).

through its lately chosen chief, and that chief, under the most seductive of appearances, hid what was probably the vilest and most corrupt nature in the whole of Europe. Patkul's moral sense, never of the highest, could not stand against this intercourse, and the result was soon evident in the disfigured and degraded condition of his mission. The patriot dwindled into a mere vulgar intriguer, and the defence of Livonia was lowered, in his hands, to an odious traffic in the most vital interests of the country. The period, alas! was only too favourable to such transmutations. Patkul's story is on a par with those of Goertz and Struensee.

The Livonian adventurer did not even possess the qualities necessary for his undertaking. He could not control his nerves. He was restless and impatient, sarcastic and violent, and, in spite of great intelligence and knowledge, he was both frivolous and superficial. He could not govern his tongue, still less his pen, and thus disoblged the Polish nobility, whom he treated with disdain, and fell out with the Saxon Ministers and Generals, on whom, by means of pamphlets, which he scattered broadcast, he threw the responsibility of faults which, if not absolutely personal to himself, were, at all events, common to him and others. Let me add, for the honour of his memory, that he was incapable of entirely identifying himself with the part he tried to play. Thus, in 1704, he travelled to Berlin, bearing a proposal for the division of the Polish provinces between Prussia and Russia. Yet that very same year, one of his letters, addressed to the Chancellor Golovin, makes a strong appeal to his own national traditions, as against Russia, and for Poland.¹ Consequently, he ended by having no firm standing at all. He was the confidant of Augustus, whose character he professed to despise, and the close adviser of Peter, whose despotism, so he declared, 'infinitely displeased him.' He floundered in an inextricable confusion of machinations, and political attempts, all of them more or less perilous. In 1703, he conspired to ruin the Saxon Chancellor, Count Beichlingen, and all he attained by that Minister's fall was to make more enemies for himself. In 1704, he commanded the auxiliary troops of the Tsar quartered in Saxony, and was well beaten, with them, under the walls of Thorn. He agreed to go to Berlin to negotiate an alliance, and after he had departed

¹ Zaluski, vol. iv. p. 285.

empty-handed, he wrote to the Prussian Ministers, 'that he was weary of the affairs of the King of Poland, and was ready to make his peace with the King of Sweden.'¹ Wearied at last by all these comings and goings, perceiving they had brought him nothing, and only opened an abyss beneath his feet, sick at heart, and threatened on every side, he lingered in Dresden, because he desired to marry a beautiful widow, Sophia Von Rumohr, Countess Von Einsiedel, the richest match in Saxony. It was the second occasion on which a woman was to have a fatal influence upon his destiny, and this time the influence hurried him to his end.

The announcement of his marriage fanned the hatred and jealousy of his enemies. On the 15th of December 1705, in virtue of the powers conferred on him by Peter, and not exceeding, though he may, perhaps, have somewhat strained them, Patkul signed a Convention with Count Stratmann, whereby all the Russian auxilliary troops under his orders were taken into the Emperor's pay. This treaty was by no means against the interests of the King of Poland. The Emperor undertook never to recognise Stanislaus, so long as Augustus lived, and even to support the Saxon party in Poland,—and the troops in question were dying of hunger in Saxony. But the possible pretext furnished by Patkul's interpretation of his powers, was seized forthwith, and within four days of the signature of the treaty, the 'Tsar's commissioner' was arrested.

Peter intervened, but very half-heartedly, in his defence. Menshikof, his chief adviser, had been won over by the Saxon Ministers.² Then came long months of discussion; the Tsar's protests were measured and discreet; those of Patkul far more violent, and supported by pamphlets, which, imprisoned though he was, he found means to publish and disseminate. At last Augustus, defeated over and over again, tracked and hunted, reduced to despair, as regards military matters, by Charles XII., beaten on the diplomatic field by a Swedish prisoner named Arved Horn, was induced, on the 24th of September 1706, to sign the ignominious peace of Altranstadt, the 11th Article of which stipulated that Patkul should be given up. The King of Poland has

¹ Dresden Archives, *Documents connected with the arrest of General Patkul*, No. 3516; Copenhagen Archives, *Jessen's Reports*, 1703-5.

² Herrmann, *Geschichte Russlands*, vol. iv. p. 201.

been credited with the intention of allowing the prisoner to escape, after the signature of the treaty. There are no grounds for supposing him capable of such generosity, nor the slightest mention of anything of the kind in the Dresden archives. Nothing but a note from the Sovereign, ordering the betrothal ring found on the prisoner's person, to be given to the Countess Von Einsiedel, which evidently proves that, in the king's mind, he was a doomed man. In vain did the Grand Treasurer of Poland, Przebendowski, venture to remind him that, at the Peace of Karlowitz, the Turks themselves refused to deliver up Rakoczy!¹

Augustus' behaviour, on this occasion, was of a piece with his whole life. Peter's casts a blot upon his glory. Patkul was made over to the Swedes during the night of the 5th April 1707; was dragged, for some time, wherever Charles XII. was pleased to go, was finally tried and condemned by a court-martial, and, on the 10th of October, was broken on the wheel at Kazimierz in Poland. He was struck fifteen times with an unshod wheel by a peasant who performed the executioner's office, and all the time he cried, 'Jesus, Jesus!' After four more strokes his groans were silenced, but he still had strength to crawl to the block prepared for another execution, and to murmur, 'Kopf ab!' (Cut off my head!) Colonel Waldow, who was in charge of the execution, granted this final request, but four blows from the axe were requisite to put the poor wretch out of his pain.²

Diplomacy, as we have seen, served Peter but ill, and Arved Horn's triumph over Patkul, clenched as it was by the defection of Augustus, imperilled the safety of the Russian armies. In the beginning of 1706, when they were shut up in Grodno, where Menshikof and Ogilvy were squabbling for the chief command, they ran the narrowest risk of being captured by Charles. The sudden breaking up of the frozen Niemen, which prevented the King of Sweden from crossing the river, permitted the Russians to beat a precipitate retreat, leaving their artillery and baggage behind them. Peter, who on this occasion, once again, avoided sharing the fortune of his troops, caused cannon to be fired at Kronslot in honour of the victory!³ In the beginning

¹ Dresden Archives, Book 3617.

² *Patkul's Berichte*, vol. iii. p. 300; Förster, *Die Hölle*, vol. iii. p. 404; Lundblad, vol. i. p. 408; *Theatrum Europæum* (1707), p. 281.

³ Ostrialof, vol. iv. p. 475.

of October, a more genuine triumph had given him some prestige, and would appear to have crowned his alliance with the King of Poland with its first success. With Menshikof, who, like himself, was ignorant of what had happened at Altranstadt five days previously, and carrying his faithless ally, who still carefully concealed his treachery, with him, he had defeated the Swedish troops under Mardefeldt, before the walls of Kalisz. But the news of Augustus' defection shortly transpired, and Peter was left alone to face the formidable adversary, whom Menshikof and his soldiers were quite unable to resist.

Peter's relations with the King of Poland betray an evident lack of foresight in the first instance, and, eventually, an equal absence of tact. For several years the charm which bound these two men, really so unsuited to each other, had ceased to work. Peter had perceived all the meannesses which the Polish monarch concealed under his brilliant exterior, and Augustus had become aware that when he had accepted an annual subsidy, raised, in 1703, to the sum of 300,000 roubles, as the price of his alliance, he had been duped. Two days after the signature of the Treaty which ensured him this remuneration, Charles took possession of Elbing, and raised, from that one city, a contribution of 200,000 crowns. And the Tsar's subsidy, always very irregularly paid, ended by failing altogether; for Peter ran short of money. Hence it came about that, from the year 1702, Augustus, with his usual unreliableness and dishonesty, began to enter into various independent negotiations. In the month of January, his former mistress, Aurora Von Koenigsmark, the mother of the great Maurice de Saxe, appeared in Charles XII.'s camp on the frontiers of Courland; she gained nothing by her journey, for the hero obstinately refused to receive her, and she was driven to console herself by rhyming the following verses:—

‘D'où vient, jeune Roi, qu'avec tant de mérite
Vous ayez peu de vrai bonheur,’

following on which sentiment, and still in verse, she proceeded to lavish her consolations on Augustus himself, assuring him that the friendship of so virtuous a monarch as the King of Sweden was worth far more than the throne of Poland.¹

¹ Lamberty, vol. iv. p. 292.

Peter was well aware of this attempt on Augustus' part, and of several others which followed it, and did not hesitate to take similar measures of his own. After having offered the Polish crown to James Sobieski, he fell back on Rakoczy, with whom his plenipotentiaries signed a formal treaty.¹ Then, through the intervention of the Dutch, and, when they retired, through Great Britain, he endeavoured to make his separate peace with Sweden. Matviéief was sent from the Hague to London, in 1706, with orders to buy over Marlborough and Godolphin. Marlborough refused all pecuniary offers—he may have had doubts as to the Tsar's solvency—and, on his expressing his preference for landed property, he was invited to choose between Kief, Vladimir, or Siberia, with a guaranteed income of 50,000 crowns. This matter fell through, on the conditions of peace insisted on by Peter—the possession of the mouth of the Neva, and the adjacent sea-coast. Then came the turn of France, then that of Austria. Desalliers, an agent employed by France in Transylvania, appeared at Versailles, and offered the services of a whole Russian army, to be used according to the will of the most Christian king. Baron Huissen, a former tutor to the Tsarevitch Alexis, was sent to Vienna, with an offer of a body of Cossacks, to be employed against the Hungarian insurgents. But wheresoever he applied, the Tsar's demands were thought too exacting, and besides, the prospect of any intercourse between the Cossacks and the Servian neighbours of Hungary, was far from pleasing to the Emperor. Two other attempts, made simultaneously—one at Berlin, where Ismailof, Peter's envoy, tempted Count Wartemberg with a promise of 100,000 crowns—and the other, at Copenhagen, where the same messenger was commissioned to offer Narva and Derpt to the Danes, met with no better success.²

But Peter, in spite of all these efforts, and the compromising negotiations in which, like his ally, he indulged, flattered himself he was to keep both his ally and his alliance, and enjoy all the advantages therefrom accruing. The Treaty of Altranstadt took him by surprise, and found him quite unprepared. He soon made good his mistake, took a swift decision, and adopted the course which was

¹ *Kourakin Papers*, vol. v. pp. xviii, 14.

² Solovief, vol. xv. p. 198, etc.

infallibly to bring him final victory. He evacuated Poland, retired backward, and, pushing forward the preparations which Charles's long stay in Saxony had permitted him to carry on with great activity, he resolved that the battle should be fought on his ground, and at his chosen time. He took fresh patience, he resolved to wait, to wear out his adversary, to draw back steadily, and leave nothing but a void behind him. Thus he would force the enemy to advance across the desert plains he had deliberately devastated, and run the terrible risk, which had always driven back the ancient foes of his country, whether Turks, Tartars, or Poles,—a winter sojourn in the heart of Russia. This was to be the final round of the great fight. The Tsar, as he expressed it, was to set ten Russians against every Swede, and time, and space, and cold, and hunger, were to be his backers.

IV

Charles, the most taciturn General who ever lived, never revealed the secret inspiration which drove him to play his adversary's game, by marching afresh on Grodno. During the preceding year, he had seemed to give the law to Europe, from his camp in Saxony. France, which had been vanquished at Hochstädt and Ramillies, turned a pleading glance towards him, and the leader of the victorious allies, Marlborough himself, solicited his help. I see no likelihood that the great leader was actuated by a desire to take advantage of the revolt amongst the Bashkirs, which, at that moment, was giving Peter some trouble. In February 1708, the insurgents were only thirty versts from Kazan. But Kazan was a long way off, and Peter possessed many resources in that quarter. He soon contrived to embroil the rebels with their Kalmuk neighbours. On the Don, where, almost at the same moment, a second Razin made his appearance, the Tsar was equally successful. Prince George Dolgorouki, who had been sent into that country, in 1707, to check the emigration of the local population, which had taken on alarming proportions,—every one moving towards that Eden guarded by the cataracts of the Dnieper, called the Zaporojé,—came into collision with some Cossack troops, commanded by an individual named Boulavin, and perished with all his men. But immediately afterwards, the victors

fell out amongst themselves, were beaten piecemeal, and Boulavin blew out his brains.¹

Charles may have had an idea of making Grodno his base for a spring attack on the Tsar's new conquests in the North. This supposition would seem to have been the one accepted by Peter, if we may judge by the orders given, just at this time, to ensure the safety of Livonia and Ingria, by completing their devastation; and these very orders may have induced the King of Sweden to abandon his original design, in favour of another, the wisdom of which is still contested by experts, but which, it cannot be denied, was of noble proportions. Charles, too, had found an ally, to set against those natural ones with which Russia had furnished the Tsar, and he had found him within the borders of the Tsar's country. The name of this ally was Mazeppa.

The stormy career of the famous Hetman, so dramatic, both from the historic and domestic point of view,—from that adventure with the *pan* Falbowski, so naïvely related by Pasek, down to the Romance with Matréna Kotchoubey, which coloured the last and tragic incidents of his existence,—is so well known that I will not narrate it here, even in the concisest form. Little Russia was then passing through a painful crisis,—the consequence of Shmielnicki's efforts at emancipation, which had been warped and perverted by Russian intervention. The Polish Lords, who formerly oppressed the country, had been replaced by the Cossacks, who not only ground down the native population, but railed at, and quarreled with, their own chief. The Hetmans and the irregular troops were at open war, the first, striving to increase their authority, and make their power hereditary, the others defending their ancient democratic constitution. The Swedish war increased Mazeppa's difficulties. He found himself taken at a disadvantage between the claims of the Tsar, who would fain have his Cossacks on every battlefield in Poland, Russia, and Livonia, and the resistance of the Cossacks themselves, who desired to remain in their own country. Being himself of noble Polish birth, brought up by the Jesuits, having served King John Casimir of Poland, and sworn allegiance to the Sultan, he saw no reason for sacrificing his interests, much less his life, for Peter's benefit. The approach of Charles XII. made him

¹ Solovief, vol. xv. p. 259.

fear he might, like his predecessor Nalevaiko, be deserted by his own followers, and given up to the Poles. He declined offers made him by Leszczynski, in 1705, not without reminding the Tsar that the temptation, thus honestly resisted, was *the fourth* which had been offered him.¹ Then he began to reflect. His Cossacks' complaints were growing louder and louder. Peter had gone so far as to try to send two of their regiments into Prussia, to learn German drill. Mazeppa, having been invited by Prince Wisniowiecki, a Wolhynian Polish magnate, to stand godfather to his daughter, met the Prince's mother, Princess Dolska, in his house, and formed an intimacy with her. In spite of his age (according to Prokopovitch, he was then 54, while Engel makes him 60, and Nordberg 76), he was still an ardent lover. Madame Falbowska, who, like himself, had been vilely treated by her fiercely jealous husband, had been succeeded by many other mistresses. In the early days of Mazeppa's intercourse with Princess Dolska, she pretended to plead no cause but that of Leszczynski, for whom she greatly desired the Tsar's support. Then she showed her hand,—her real object was that Leszczynski and his victorious protector should be supported through thick and thin, even against Peter himself. Mazeppa's first impulse was one of anger against the '*baba*' (gossip). But she was a clever woman. A few remarks, carelessly dropped, made him prick his ears. She had been at Léopol, where she had met the Russian Generals Shérémétief and Rönne, and had heard them foretell the early deposition of the Hetman, and Menshikof's succession to his position. The idea did not appear altogether improbable to Mazeppa, who knew that Peter's collaborators panted to establish Russian officialism in the Ukraine. The favourite himself had even dropped a hint one day, at Kief, and in his cups, upon the subject, and was already taking upon himself to send the Cossack regiments hither and thither, without reference to Mazeppa. Princess Dolska was backed by Zалenski, a Jesuit, the mouthpiece of Leszczynski and of Charles, and not a word of this fresh temptation was breathed by the Cossack leader to the Russian Tsar.

My readers know the story of the Hetman's final love affair, which brought about Peter's acquaintance with the

¹ Solovief, vol. xv. p. 289.

facts of this negotiation. Mazeppa had seduced the daughter of Kotchoubey, a Cossack Chief, and the father, out of revenge, denounced him to the Tsar. Unhappily for himself, the proofs he furnished were not conclusive. The Tsar,—relying on his own constant kindness to the Hetman, and obstinately regarding him as representing his personal authority, in opposition to the traditional insubordination of the Cossacks,—allowed himself to be deceived by Mazeppa's protestations, and delivered his accuser up to him. Twenty times in the past twenty years, he had been denounced, and had contrived to clear himself. He caused Kotchoubey and his confidant, Iskra, to be beheaded, but still he was uneasy,—on the watch for a possible return of the peril lately past. The appearance of Charles on the Russian frontier forced him to a definite resolution; and, in the spring of 1708, his emissaries appeared at Radoshkovitsé, south-east of Grodno, where Charles had established his head-quarters.¹

The King of Sweden's idea, at that decisive moment, would seem to have been to take advantage of the Hetman's friendly inclination, to find his way into the heart of Russia, using the rich Southern Provinces as his base, to stir up, with Mazeppa's help, the Don Cossacks, the Astrakhan Tartars, and, it may have been, the Turks themselves, and thus attack the Muscovite Power in the rear. Then Peter would have been forced back upon his last entrenchments, at Moscow or elsewhere, while General Luebecker, who was in Finland with 14,000 men, fell on Ingria and on St. Petersburg, and Leszczyński's Polish partisans, with General Krassow's Swedes, held Poland.²

It was a mighty plan, indeed, but, at the very outset, it was sharply checked. Mazeppa insisted on certain conditions, and these conditions Charles thought too heavy. The Hetman agreed that Poland should take the Ukraine and White Russia, and that the Swedes should have the fortresses of Mglin, Starodoub, and Novgorod-Siévierski, but he himself insisted on being apportioned Polotsk, Vitebsk, and the whole of Courland, to be held in fief. Thus the negotiations were delayed. Meanwhile Charles, perceiving that he was not strong enough to make a forward movement, made up his mind to send for Loewenhaupt, who

¹ Moscow Archives, *Little-Russian Affairs*, 1708.

² Sarauw, p. 238.

was in Livonia, and who was to bring him 16,000 men and various stores. But the Swedish hero had not reckoned fairly with distance, and with time. Many precious days, the best of the season, fled by, before his orders could be obeyed. And, for the first time, he showed signs of uncertainty and irresolution, which were all too quickly communicated to those under his command. Loewenhaupt grew slower than usual. Luebecker slackened his activity, and Mazeppa began to play his double game again,—prudently preparing his Cossacks to revolt, in the name of the ancient customs, national privileges, and church laws, which Peter's reforms had infringed,—fortifying his own residence at Batourin, and accumulating immense stores there, but still continuing to pay court to the Tsar, wearing the German dress, flattering the Sovereign's despotic taste by suggesting plans which would have annihilated the last vestiges of local independence, and accepting gifts sent him by Menshikof.¹

And so the summer passed away. A winter campaign became inevitable, and the abyss which Peter's unerring eye had scanned, began to gape.

V

It was not till June that Charles XII. left Radoshkovitsé, and marched eastwards to Borisov, where he crossed the Berezina. Menshikof and Shérémétief made an attempt to stop him, on the 3rd of July, as he was crossing a small river called the Bibitch, near Holovtchin. A night manœuvre, and a wild bayonet charge, led by the king himself, carried him once more to victory. The town of Mohilef opened its gates to the Swedes, but there Charles was forced to stay, and lose more time yet, waiting for Loewenhaupt. He marched again, early in August, in a southerly direction, and his soldiers soon found themselves in the grip of one of Peter's allies. They were driven to support themselves by gathering ears of corn, which they ground between two stones. Sickiness began to thin their ranks. Their three doctors, so the fierce troopers said, were 'brandy, garlic, and death'! Loewenhaupt had reached Shklof, and was sepa-

¹ Engel, *Geschichte der Ukraine* (Halle, 1796), p. 303, etc.; Prokopovitch, *History of Peter the Great* (in Russian), p. 178, etc.

rated from the invading army by two streams, the Soja and the Dnieper, between which Peter had taken up his position. The Swedish general, after having successfully passed the Dnieper, was met at Liesna, on the 9th of October, by a force three times as large as his own, and Peter was able, on the following day, to report a complete victory to his friends: '8500 men dead on the field, without mentioning those the Kalmuks have hunted into the forest, and 700 prisoners!' According to this reckoning, Loewenhaupt, who could not have brought more than 11,000 troops into action, should have been left without a man; as a matter of fact, he reached Charles with 6700, after a flank march which all military experts consider a marvel. But, not being able to find a bridge across the Soja, he was forced to abandon his artillery and all his baggage, and he led his starving troops into a famine-stricken camp.

There was bad news, too, from Ingria, where Luebecker had also been defeated, losing all his baggage and 3000 first-class troops. Charles grew so disconcerted that he is reported to have confessed to Gyllenkrook, his Quartermaster-General that he was all at sea, and no longer had any definite plan.¹ On the 22nd of October, he reached Moko-shin on the Desna, on the borders of the Ukraine, where he had expected to meet Mazeppa. But the old leader broke his appointment. He still desired to temporise, and was loath to take any decisive resolution. He was driven to take one, at last, by the Cossacks about him, who were alarmed at the idea of the Russians following the Swedes into the Ukraine. It would be far better, so they thought, to join the latter against the former. One of these Cossacks, Voïnarovski, who had been sent by the Hetman to Menshikof, had returned with most terrifying news. He had overheard the German officers on the favourite's staff, speaking of Mazeppa and his followers, say, 'God pity those poor wretches; to-morrow they will all be in chains!' Mazeppa, when he heard this report, 'raged like a whirlwind,' hurried to Batourin to give the alarm, and then crossed the Desna and joined the Swedish army.

It was too late. The popular sentiment, on which both he and Charles had reckoned to promote an insurrectionary movement, confused by the tergiversations and the am-

¹ Lundblad, vol. ii. p. 49.

biguous actions of the Hetman, had quite gone astray, and lost all consistency. All Mazeppa could reckon upon was a body of 2000 faithful troops: not enough even to defend Batourin, which Menshikof snatched from him a few days later,—thus depriving the Swedish army of its last chance of revictualling. When the fortresses of Starodoub and Novgorod - Siévierski closed their gates against him, the whole of the Ukraine slipped from the grasp of the turn-coat chief, and his new allies. His effigy was first hung, and then dragged through the streets of Glouhof, in Peter's presence; another Hetman, Skoropadski, was appointed in his place, and then came winter—a cruel winter, during which the very birds died of cold.

By the beginning of 1709, Charles's effective strength had dwindled to nearly 20,000 men. The Russians did not dare to attack him as yet, but they gathered round him in an ever-narrowing circle. They carried his advanced posts, they cut his lines of communication. The King of Sweden, to get himself mere elbow room, was driven to begin his campaign in the month of January. He lost 1000 men and 48 officers in taking the paltry town of Wespjik (6th January). By this time the game, in Mazeppa's view, was already lost, and he made an attempt to turn his coat again, —offering to betray Charles into Peter's hands, if Peter would restore him his office. The bargain was struck, but a letter from the old traitor, addressed to Leszczynski, chanced to fall into the Tsar's hands, and made him draw back, in the conviction that Mazeppa was utterly unreliable.¹ In the month of March, the near approach of the Swedish army, then advancing on Poltava, induced the Zaporojé Cossacks to join it. But the movement was a very partial one, and Peter soon put it down,—by means of a series of military executions, mercilessly carried out by Menshikof, and of various manifestoes against the foreign heretics, 'who deny the doctrines of the true religion, and spit on the picture of the Blessed Virgin.' The capture of Poltava thus became the last hope of Charles and his army. If they could not seize the town, they must all die of hunger.

The fortifications of the place were weak, but the besieging army was sorely changed from that which had fought under the walls of Narva. It had spent too long a time in fat

¹ Solovief, vol. xv. p. 361.

quarters, in Saxony and Poland, to be fit to endure this terrible campaign. Like the Russian army at Narva, it was sapped by demoralisation, before it was called on to do any serious fighting. Even amongst the Swedish staff, and in the king's intimate circle, all confidence in his genius, and his lucky star, had disappeared. His best Generals, Rehnsköld, and Gyllenkrook, his Chancellor, Piper, and Mazeppa himself, were against any prolongation of the siege, which promised to be a long one. 'If God were to send down one of his angels,' he said, 'to induce me to follow your advice, I would not listen to him!'¹ An ineradicable illusion, the fruit of the too easy victories of his early career, prompted him to undervalue the forces opposed to him. He knew, and would acknowledge, nothing of that new Russia, the mighty upstanding Colossus, which Peter had at last succeeded in raising up in his path. According to some authorities, Mazeppa, in his desire to replace Batourin by Poltava, as his own personal appanage, encouraged him in this fatal resolution.² But it may well have been, that retreat had already become impossible.

It was long before Peter made up his mind to intervene; he was still distrustful of himself, desperately eager to increase his own resources, and with them his chances of victory. On his enemy's side, everything contributed to this result. By the end of June, all the Swedish ammunition was exhausted, the invaders could use none of their artillery, and hardly any of their fire-arms, and were reduced to fighting with cold steel. On the very eve of the decisive struggle, they were left without a leader. During a reconnaissance on the banks of the Vorskla, which ran between the hostile armies, Charles, always rash, and apt to expose himself unnecessarily, was struck by a bullet. 'It is only in the foot,' he said, smiling, and continued his examination of the ground. But, when he returned to camp, he fainted, and Peter, reckoning on the moral effect of the accident, at once resolved to cross the river. A report, as a matter of fact, ran through the Swedish camp, that the King, convinced of the hopelessness of the situation, had deliberately sought death.³

Yet ten more days passed by, in the expectation of an

¹ Fryxell, vol. ii. 158.

² Lundblad, vol. ii. p. 104.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

attack which the Russians did not dare to make. It was Charles who took action at last, informing his Generals, on the 26th of June (7th July) that he would give battle on the following morning. He himself was still in a very suffering condition, and made over the command to Rehnsköld, a valiant soldier, but a doubtful leader, for he did not possess the army's confidence, and, according to Lundblad, 'hid his lack of knowledge and strategical powers under gloomy looks and a fierce expression.' After the event, as was so commonly the case with vanquished generals, he was accused of treachery. The truth would seem to be, that Charles's obstinate reserve, and habit of never confiding his plans and military arrangements to any third person, had ended by gradually depriving his lieutenants of all power of independent action. In his presence they were bereft of speech, and almost of ideas. All Rehnsköld did was to rage and swear at every one. Peter, meanwhile, neglected nothing likely to ensure success. He even went so far as to dress the Novgorod regiment—one of his best—in the coarse cloth (*siermiaga*) generally reserved for newly-joined recruits, in the hope of thus deceiving the enemy. This stratagem, however, completely failed. In the very beginning of the battle, Rehnsköld fell on the regiment, and cut it to pieces.¹ The Russian centre was confided to Shérémétief, the right wing to General Rönne, the left to Menshikof. Bruce commanded the artillery, and the Tsar, as usual, retired modestly to the head of a single regiment. But this was a mere disguise; in real fact, he was everywhere, going hither and thither, in the forefront of the battle, and lavishing effort in every direction. A bullet passed through his hat, another is said to have struck him full on the breast. It was miraculously stopped by a golden cross, set with precious stones, given by the monks on Mount Athos to the Tsar Féodor, and which his successor habitually wore. This cross, which certainly bears the mark of some projectile, is still preserved in the Ouspienski Monastery, at Moscow.

The heroism, and sovereign contempt of death, betrayed by Charles, were worthy of himself. Unable to sit a horse, he caused himself to be carried on a litter, which, when it was shattered by bullets, was replaced by another made of crossed lances. But he was nothing but a living standard,

¹ Golikof, vol. xi. p. 202.

useless, though sublime. The once mighty military leader had utterly disappeared. The battle was but a wild conflict, in which the glorious remnants of one of the most splendid armies that had ever been brought together—unable to use its arms, leaderless, hopeless of victory, and soon overwhelmed and crushed by superior numbers—struggled for a space, with the sole object of remaining faithful to its King. At the end of two hours, Charles himself left the field of battle. He had been lifted on to the back of an old horse which his father had formerly ridden, and which was called *Brandklepper* (run to the fire), because he was always saddled when a fire broke out in the city. This charger followed the vanquished hero into Turkey, was taken by the Turks at Bender, sent back to the king, taken again at Stralsund in 1715, returned to its owner once more, and died in 1718—the same year as his master—at the age of forty-two.¹ Poniatowski, the father of the future King of Poland, who was following the campaign as a volunteer (Charles had refused to take any Polish troops with him on account of their want of discipline), rallied one of Colonel Horn's squadrons to escort the King, and received seventeen bullets through his leather kaftan while covering the royal retreat.² Field-Marshal Rehnsköld, Piper, the Chancellor, with all his subordinates, over 150 officers, and 2000 soldiers, fell into the victor's hands.

The Russians' joy was so extreme that they forgot to pursue the retreating enemy. Their first impulse was to sit down and banquet. Peter invited the more important prisoners to his own table, and toasted the health of his 'masters in the art of war.' The Swedes, who still numbered 13,000 men, had time to pause for a moment in their own camp, where Charles summoned Loewenhaupt, and, for the first time in his life, was heard to ask for advice, 'What was to be done?' The General counselled him to burn all waggons, mount his infantry soldiers on the draught horses, and beat a retreat towards the Dnieper. On the 30th of June, the Russians came up with the Swedish army, at Pérévolotchna on the banks of the river, and, the soldiers refusing to fight again, Loewenhaupt capitulated; but the king had

¹ Lundblad, vol. ii. p. 137.

² Kantecki, *Biography of Stanislas Poniatowski* (Posen, 1880) (in Polish), vol. i. p. 26.

time to cross to the other side. Two boats lashed together carried his carriage, a few officers, and the war-chests which he had filled in Saxony. Mazeppa contrived to find a boat for himself, and loaded it with two barrels of gold.¹

At Kief, whither Peter proceeded from Poltava, a solemn thanksgiving was offered up in the church of St Sophia, and a Little-Russian monk, Féofan Prokopovitch, celebrated the recent victory, in a fine flight of eloquence: 'When our neighbours hear of what has happened, they will say, it was not into a foreign country that the Swedish army and the Swedish power ventured, but rather into some mighty sea! They have fallen in, and disappeared, even as lead is swallowed up in water!'

The Sweden of Gustavus Adolphus had indeed disappeared. Charles XII. was, ere long, to be a mere knight-errant at Bender. The Cossack independence, too, was a thing of the past. Its last and all too untrustworthy representative, was to die in Turkey, before many months were out—of despair, according to Russian testimony—of poison voluntarily swallowed, according to Swedish historians. The poison story has a touch of likelihood about it, for Peter certainly proposed to exchange Mazeppa's person for that of the Chancellor Piper.² The cause of the Leszczynski, too, was dead. It was to be put forward again by France, but for the benefit of France alone. And with the Leszczynski cause, Poland itself had passed away, and lay a lifeless corpse, on which the vultures were soon to settle. Out of all these ruins rose the Russian power—its Northern hegemony, and its new European position, which henceforward were daily to increase, and reach immense, immoderate proportions. Europe played a special part in the festivities which graced the return of the victors to Moscow, a few months later. European ideas, traditions, and forms, appeared in the triumphal procession, and served as trappings for the trophies of victory. Peter, playing the part of Hercules, and conquering a Swedish Juno, in a *cortège* in which Mars figured, attended by Furies and by Fauns, was a fit symbol of the alliance of Russia with the Greco-Latin civilisation of the West. Old Muscovy—Eastern and Asiatic—was numbered with the dead.

¹ Solovief, vol. xv. p. 378.

² *Ibid.*, vol. xvi. p. 42.

CHAPTER II

FROM THE BALTIC TO THE CASPIAN

- i. The victory of Poltava does not bring peace to Russia—A policy of general expansion—The origin of Pan Slavism—European alliances—The Tsar's Diplomacy—His awkwardness and blunders—Peter, in his eagerness to reach the West, forgets the South—Diplomatic struggle at Constantinople—Charles XII. wins—Weighty arguments—Declaration of War.
- ii. Peter's Plan of Campaign—Its weakness—He forgets the lesson of the past—The march on Iassy—He makes the same mistake as Charles—Another Ukraine and another Mazeppa—The Tartars cut the Russian communications—The Tsar and the Russian army hemmed in on the banks of the Pruth—A desperate situation—Peter flinches again—His letter to the Senate—'The throne to the worthiest'—Doubtful authenticity of the document—Catherine's action—The future Tsarina's diamonds—Salvation—The Vizier consents to treat—The influence of *Backsheesh*—Unhoped-for conditions—Azof is given up—Peter soon recovers from his fright, and consoles himself for his losses—'Matchless acquisitions'—The triumph of obstinacy—The skirmish at Bender—Charles XII. a prisoner.
- iii. The allies prevent Peter from obtaining peace with Sweden—Quarrels and rivalries—The Siege of Stralsund—Attempted understandings with England and Prussia—Peter always succeeds better when he acts independently—The Conquest of Finland—The Tsar's German victories only profit Prussia—The capture of Stettin, and the Treaty of Sequestration—Charles XII. reappears at Stralsund—Goertz appears on the scene—The capture of Wismar—Peter has served the King of Prussia again—Plan for a Russo-Danish Expedition.—Naval demonstration at Copenhagen—Peter in command of the allied squadrons of Denmark, Holland, England and Russia—The expedition fails—Peter is blamed—His intervention in German affairs rouses universal anger—English irritation—Plan to seize the Tsar's person and sink his squadron—Peter's disgust with his allies.
- iv. '*Goertz's idea*'—Plan for a separate understanding between Russia and Sweden—French origin of this view—It attracts Peter—His journey to France—Secret interview with Goertz—Treaty of Amsterdam, between Russia, France and Prussia—Acceptance of French mediation—The Congress of Aland—The death of Charles XII. puts an end to the negotiations—The execution of Goertz.
- v. Renewal of negotiations at Aland—The Swedes resist—Coercion—Russian descent on Sweden—England intervenes in Sweden's favour—A useless naval demonstration—Diplomatic intervention by France—Campredon—The peace of Nystadt—The joy of triumph—The Imperial title—Admiral, and Emperor of all the Russias—The benefits of peace—War again.

- VI. The Eastern frontier—The road to India—Failure of early efforts in this direction—Fresh military and diplomatic action with regard to Persia—Volynski—The great expedition of 1722—Led by Peter in person—The taking of Derbent—A forced retreat—Turkey and England intervene—A temporary agreement—The Armenians claim the Tsar's protection—The Eastern Christians—A fresh attempt to reach the far East—The Madagascar Expedition—The natural direction and limits of Russia's colonising powers.

I

THE victory of Poltava shed a glory on Peter, on his army, and on his subjects, which extended far beyond the great Tsar's reign, and even beyond the eighteenth century itself. Yet it did not give the victor the reward which he may be reasonably supposed to have most desired—peace. Twelve more years—full of extreme effort and fresh sacrifice—were to elapse before this happy result was attained. With this fact Peter himself, his intellectual deficiencies, and the weaknesses of his character, had much to do. At the moment of his Poltava victory, his natural and logical line of conduct lay clear before him, and his personal will should have been humbly submitted to it. In default of any possible agreement with the conquered foe, he should have pursued him, strengthened the advantages already gained, completed the conquest of Livonia, taken up a firm footing in Finland, and, having thus secured all he could hope for from the struggle, he should never have given a thought to anything else, neither to the Saxon ally, who had deceived him, nor the Danish ally, who had been the first to relinquish the conflict. But logic, and the natural procession of things, and the influence of surrounding circumstances, were all overwhelmed, in Peter's case, by one of those instinctive and unreflecting impulses which he was so incompetent to quell. And he cast himself, without any plausible motive, and certainly without any clear and well-thought-out plan, into a career of adventure, and a wild outburst of universal expansion, in which Russia, at that moment, was incapable of following him, and in which his only visible guide was a blind and thoughtless need of activity, and of using, and abusing, his own strength. The Eastern coast of the Baltic no longer sufficed him; he must lay hands on Mecklenburg. He claimed the right to lord it over Poland, and establish order in that country, by uphold-

ing its anarchical constitution. He gave a foretaste of the Slavophil and Panslavist policy of future years, attracting Servians and Montenegrins beneath the shadow of his Protectorate, and sending them books and professors, who would have been far better employed at Moscow, which lacked both schools, and money to keep them up. He ended by risking all the fruits of his efforts and his former successes, on the banks of the Pruth, and even incurred the danger of casting his own fortunes, and those of his people, into a yet deeper abyss than that which had swallowed up Charles XII. Hardly had he escaped, as by a miracle, from this catastrophe, before he began afresh. Without any necessity,—swayed by the mere desire of attracting attention, making a figure in Europe, having a finger in everything, and being associated with every one,—he plunged into a network of doubtful intrigues, and ambiguous arrangements, negotiating, bargaining, meddling in all directions, running the risk, once more, of being swallowed up in that slough which for ten long years he trampled hopelessly, going up and down, between Berlin, Copenhagen and Amsterdam,—struggling with the rival ambitions and greed; which his blunders had roused.

He lacked everything necessary to enable him to move, and maintain his dignity, on the huge chess-board whereon he thus ventured to expose his own military power, and his newly Europeanised diplomacy. He had no sufficient knowledge, either of the various interests with which he had to do, or of the general routine of business, and he possessed neither tact nor moderation. Everywhere, at almost every step, he stumbled against some obstacle. He was caught in traps, and blundered into dark holes, which he neither perceived nor knew how to avoid. He was astounded that an alliance between himself and the Elector of Hanover should be unwelcome to that sovereign in his quality as King of England, and wondered that Austria was offended, when he had thought to serve German interests, by helping the King of Prussia to square his territory at the expense of the King of Sweden. He celebrated his daughter's wedding at Dantzic, in order to please his Polish friends, levied a contribution of 150,000 crowns on the town for the occasion, and betrayed great astonishment when the city appeared to care more for the money he had taken, than for the honour

he had conferred. He interfered in the quarrels between the Polish Catholics and Uniates, and the Orthodox Catholics, and all he gained was to drive the Orthodox monks themselves into flat rebellion against his Commissioner, Roudakovski, whom they beat, and threw into prison, crying, 'Away with the Muscovites!'¹ At the very moment when he was pestering Holland with requests for a loan, Rear-Admiral Cruys, commanding one of his squadrons, burnt five Dutch merchantmen in the Port of Helsingfors, murdered some of the crews, and carried off the rest. An explanation was demanded, and he declared that all the blame must be laid on the Swedes, who held Helsingfors, and whose artillery was so heavy that the Admiral had not dared to attack them. Wherefore, not choosing to retire without having performed some warlike feat, he had fallen on the Dutch ships!²

The Tsar's Ministers and Envoys to foreign courts were much like him,—either obsequious or arrogant, but always in extremes. The journal of the Danish Resident, in 1710, contains this passage: 'Victory has so completely turned the heads of the people here, that they are quite beside themselves. They think of nothing but having honour paid to them, and not returning it.'³ They, too—most of them professional adventurers, drawn, like Menshikof and Iagoujinski, from the stable or the servants' hall, or snatched, like Kourakin, from the delights of patriarchal existence, from the habits of the *domostroï* and of the *terem*,—waded hither and thither in the slough. Their blunders, their awkwardness, and their boorishness were never-ending. In one place they were imprisoned for debt, in another they were turned out of doors like ill-behaved servants; everywhere, they contrived to complicate the business of which they held the threads. The whole political history of the reign, from the triumph of Poltava down to the peace of Nystadt, is one long chaos and confusion. The lucky star of Russia, the heroic patience of the nation, and,—it is only just to admit it,—the vigour and perseverance of the Tsar, carried them through at last, but the process cost very dear, and brought but little profit.

¹ Solovief, vol. xviii. p. 86.

² Kourakin's Memoranda to the States-General, Aug. 7, 1713, and Jan. 31, 1714; De Bie's Despatch to Fagel, Oct. 14, 1713; Dutch Archives.

³ State Papers, Copenhagen.

From Kief, whither Peter had gone from Poltava, he proceeded to Poland, where the nobles of the country, headed by the Hetman Sieniawski, welcomed him triumphantly, as the victorious champion of Polish liberty! In October he met Augustus,—who had long since repented him of his secession,—at Thorn. The faithless king had not waited for Charles's final defeat, to seek a reconciliation with his adversary. After a very undignified freak, during which he and his son Maurice appeared under the walls of Lille as mercenaries, attached to a body of 9000 men, hired by the allies against France, he had thought better of it; sent General Goltz to St Petersburg; induced King Frederick IV. of Denmark to visit him at Dresden; travelled himself to Berlin; and so, by the beginning of July 1709, found himself once more possessed of three allies. His defensive and offensive treaty with Russia, against Sweden, secured him the Polish throne, and a decree from the Pope released him from the obligations contracted at Altranstadt, including that of obedience to Leszczyński.¹ Leszczyński himself had been forced to follow the fortunes of the Swedish army, and eventually retired into Pomerania with Krassow's troops.

Thus the quadruple coalition, which had been Patkul's dream, took shape at last. It had gathered together to divide the spoil, and Peter was its natural head. While he was at Thorn, Denmark sent him an envoy extraordinary, Count Rantzau, with proposals of direct alliance. This same alliance had formerly been eagerly solicited by the Tsar's Minister at Copenhagen, Dolgorouki, who had offered considerable subsidies to obtain it—300,000 crowns at the outset, 100,000 every following year, besides materials for the fleet, sailors, and other advantages. But that moment was quite gone by. The friendship of Russia had risen in the European market. 'I have given nothing, not a man, nor a copper coin,' writes Dolgorouki, in October, when he forwards the announcement that the treaty is signed.²

As regards military operations also, Peter was, at first, eminently successful. Riga, which he besieged in person, in the month of November,—throwing the first three bombs with his own hands,—did, indeed, hold out. But the follow-

¹ Herrmann, *Geschichte Russlands*, vol. iv. p. 247; Boettiger, *Geschichte Saxens* (Hamburg, 1830), vol. ii. p. 250.

² Solovief, vol. xv. p. 391.

ing year, in the month of June, Wiborg was simultaneously attacked by sea and land,—the Tsar this time performing the duties of rear-admiral,—and was forced to capitulate. In July, Riga surrendered, at last, to Shérémétief. One after the other, Kexholm, Pernau, Arensburg, and Revel, opened their gates, or were carried by assault. Carelia, Livonia, and Esthonia were conquered, and Courland voluntarily surrendered to the victors,—the reigning duke, Frederick William, suing for the hand of one of the Tsar's nieces, Anna Ivanovna.

But suddenly, alarming news came from the south. Charles's diplomacy in Turkey, armed with the most weighty of arguments, had defeated Tolstoï's. After Mazeppa's death, the Swedish king had grown rich. Voïnarowski had lent him 80,000 ducats, drawn from the well-filled barrels which the Hetman had carried with him in his flight. 100,000 crowns had been sent to him from Holstein; he had raised 200,000 more by a loan granted by the Brothers Cook, of the British Levant Company, and 400,000 came from the Grand Vizier Numan Kuprioli. He had thus been able to strengthen the hands of his two agents, Poniatowski and Neugebauer. This last, a turncoat, a former tutor of the Tsarevitch Alexis, had been driven, by ill-treatment, into desertion. The Tsar's Minister, who claimed the surrender, or demanded, at all events, the arrest, of the King of Sweden, could only lay his hand on 20,000 ducats and a few sable furs, wherewith to tempt the Turkish Mufti! Tolstoï ventured, at last, to deliver an ultimatum, and on the 20th November 1710, at a solemn meeting of the Divan, war was formally declared, and the Russian Minister was imprisoned in the Seven Towers.

To Peter,—absorbed with his great political combinations in Central Europe,—this blow was utterly unexpected, and he was ill-prepared to meet it. The allies he had secured could be of no service to him. The Danes had been already disabled by a complete defeat, which had cost them 6000 men (February, 1710), and England had taken advantage of this fact, to renew her previous attempts to bring about an agreement between Denmark and Sweden. Peter had no Minister in London at that moment, for Matviéief had been driven away by his creditors, after a most discreditable disturbance, in July 1708. Prince Kourakin had indeed succeeded, in the spring of 1710, in making arrangements

for a defensive alliance with the Elector George Louis of Hanover, but this treaty, by which the Tsar bound himself not to attack the Swedes in Germany, unless they attacked his allies, was looked on as treason of a kind.¹ The Polish subjects of Augustus were no better pleased with their king's new understanding with the Tsar, and, early in 1711, Wollowicz appeared at Moscow, to complain of the exactions and the violence inflicted by the Russian armies on the Poles. He demanded, in their name, the immediate evacuation of the country, by the Tsar's troops; the payment of an indemnity for the excesses committed; and the restitution of Livonia, and of all the Polish territories on the right bank of the Dnieper, both in the Ukraine and in Lithuania.²

All this constituted a perilous state of things, and on this most threatening horizon, to the north and west of Europe, the Tsar was forced to turn his back, when he faced southwards. Slow as he was to foresee events, Peter realised them very clearly when they were close upon him, and once again, under these dark clouds, his soul was darkened, and his mind distressed. Before leaving St Petersburg, in April 1711, he took measures to ensure the future of Catherine and the children she had borne him, and when Apraxin, who was on the Don, wrote for instructions, he replied (24th April 1711) that 'ill and *despairing* as he was, he had no orders to give him.'³ In this frame of mind he entered on his Moldavian campaign, where he was to learn, in his turn, what is entailed by offensive warfare, carried on in an unknown country, with insufficient resources, and against an enemy whose strength has been undervalued.

II

The Tsar's plan of campaign, on this occasion, seems to have been entirely of his own conception. Its chief flaw is evidently clear even to a non-professional observer. The great man's predecessors did wisely, when, after having undertaken to make common cause with the Poles and the Imperial forces against the Turks, they invariably concentrated their attention on the Tartars. The Khanate

¹ Solovief, vol. xvi. p. 62.

² Moscow State Papers, *Poland*, 1711.

³ Solovief, vol. xvi. p. 71.

of the Crimea,—the last remnant, and a formidable one, of the mighty Mongol power,—then constituted the advanced guard of the Ottoman army. It was so placed as to bar all access to Constantinople, eastward. Firmly established, and half hidden, as it were, in its natural fortress of Pérékop, it was certain to take any invader, who attempted to move through the Danubian provinces, by the western road, in the rear, cutting all communications, and removing all possibility of retreat. The realisation of this fact accounts for the great Catherine's desperate efforts to destroy the Khanate, and that Peter himself understood it is proved by the circumstance that his original attack on Turkey was made by way of Azof, whence he could always retreat up the river. But a fresh attack on Azof was impossible without a fleet, and the fleet which had been built for this object at Voronéje was useless, for the water was so shallow that it could not be moved. Peter therefore marched by Iassy, reckoning on the Hospodars of Moldavia and Wallachia, Kantémir and Brancovan, and on the resources of their provinces, just as Charles had counted on those of Mazeppa and the Ukraine. He had an army of 45,000 men, and a huge camp-following, with numberless useless mouths. Catherine accompanied him, with a numerous suite of ladies, and most of his officers, especially the foreigners, had brought their wives and children with them. There were to be daily gatherings of these ladies about the future Tsarina, in which the cares of war were to be swiftly forgotten.¹

But they were not forgotten for long. Kantémir received his guests with open arms, but he had no food to give them. Brancovan began by hesitating, and ended by siding with the Turks. The stores of provisions which Peter had ordered to be collected, had been overlooked in the haste of departure, and there was no chance, now, of repairing the error, for the Tartars had appeared on the Russian rear, and all communication with the north was completely cut. The Tsar learnt that the Turks had formed a dépôt of supplies at Braila on the Séret, and, more concerned already about feeding his troops, than giving battle, he detached General Rönne and a corps of cavalry, with orders to seize it, and meet him on the banks of the Pruth, the course of which river he him-

¹ Bracey de Lyon's *Memoirs* (Amsterdam, 1716), vol. i. p. 33.

self was to follow in the same direction. But another encounter awaited him: an unavoidable meeting this, foreseen by every one but himself,—for his staff is said to have realised, and warned him, of its likelihood. On the evening of the 7th (18th) of July 1711, his army, reduced by Rönne's departure to about 38,000 men, was surrounded by the Turks and Tartars, whose troops, five or six times as numerous as Peter's, held the two banks of the river, while a strong force of artillery guarded the neighbouring heights. No retreat was possible. The only apparent issue was captivity, or death.

According to one writer, Peter's first thought, on this occasion again, was to save his own person, and he summoned a Cossack, Ivan Nekulcze, who, so he thought, might be able to pass him, with Catherine, through the enemy's lines.¹ Others,—and these, though contradicted in more than one particular, are numerous, and in complete agreement,—describe him as having given way to despair, and utter moral prostration. He shut himself up in his tent, refused to give any order, or listen to any advice, and left Catherine to make a final effort for the common weal.² The famous letter which the sovereign is said to have addressed, at this tragic moment, to the Senate, is doubtless known to many of my readers: 'I give you notice, that without any fault on our part, and simply in consequence of the false information supplied to us, I have been hemmed in, with my whole army, by a Turkish army seven times as strong as our own,—so that all means of bringing up supplies are cut off, and that unless God bestows some special help upon us, I can foresee nothing but a complete defeat, or that I shall fall into the hands of the Turks. If this last should happen, you are not to consider me as your Tsar and Master, nor to execute any commands I may give you, even written with my own hand, so long as I am not amongst you in person. But if I should perish, and you should receive certain news of my death, you will choose one of your own number, more worthy than myself, to succeed me.' Although this document was, at a later

¹ Kotchoubinski, *Selections from the Moldo-Wallachian Archives*, p. 64.

² Coxe's *Travels*, vol. i. p. 499; Bruce's *Memoirs*, p. 44; Rousset's (Nestesouranoy) *Memoirs*, vol. iii. p. 161; Zinkeisen, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reichs*, vol. v. p. 424; La Motraye, *Voyages*, vol. ii. p. 19; Marais, *Journal*, vol. iii. p. 157. Marais refers to the *Chronique Contemporaine*. See also Baron Korff's letter in the *Bulletin du Bibliophile*, Jan. 15, 1861.

period, placed amongst the official records, its authenticity is more than doubtful.¹ The original is not in existence. How can it have disappeared? The first known edition of the text is to be found in Staehlin's anecdotes, and he quotes it as having been verbally given him by Shérémétief. It is well known that the 'Collected Laws' (*Polnoie Sobranie Zakonov*, iv., 712), which include this letter, were drawn up from information obtained from the same source. The style is Peter's style, and so too is the radical fashion in which he solves the numerous questions his captivity, or death, might be expected to raise. But how are we to account for his forgetfulness of his natural heir, at a period when his quarrel with Alexis was so far from being complete, that he was looking about for a wife for him, so as to secure the succession to the throne? How are we to account for the choice of a person 'more worthy than himself' from the Senatorial ranks, to which the Tsar's favourite collaborators, Apraxin, Golovkin, and Menshikof, did not belong? Not to speak of other points of improbability, as, for instance, that in several other letters, written in the course of the next few days, and the authenticity of which is undeniable, Peter makes no reference to this all-important communication, while, in one of them, he frankly refers to the faults which have placed him and his army in such desperate straits.²

As to Catherine's supposed share in these events, we are forced to choose between Peter's own testimony, which is not altogether reliable, and that of certain secondary actors in the drama. Most of these do not seem to be aware of her having played any active part. Poniatowski merely says that Peter ventured to send a flag of truce to the Turkish camp.³ Brasey de Lyon, who was serving as a brigadier in the Russian army, and whose wife, who was much appreciated and admired in the Tsar's circle, was, according to Weber, at that time very intimate with the future Tsarina, gives the following details,—'His Majesty, General Janus, Lieutenant General Baron Von Osten, and the Field-Marshal (Shérémé-

¹ See Bielof's paper in *Russia, Old and New* (1876) vol. iii. p. 404; Solovief, vol. xvi. p. 89, etc., argues on both sides, but does not come to any decision.

² Oustrialof's paper in the *Annuaire de l'Académie des Sciences*, 1859; Witberg's paper in *Russia, Old and New* (1875), vol. iii. p. 256, etc.

³ Report addressed to Leszczyński. French Foreign Office, *Mémoires et Documents* (Russia), vol. ii. p. 121.

tief), had a long secret conference. They gathered round General Von Hallart, who was obliged to remain in his coach on account of his wounds, and there—between the General's carriage and that of the Baroness Von Osten, in which the wife of Major-General Bouche was seated—it was arranged that the Field-Marshal should write a letter to the Grand Vizier, and ask for a truce.¹ Hallart's journal, which is confirmed by that of the Danish minister, Juel, who had the story from the General's own lips, is explicit in the same sense.² According to Juel, there was no truth even in the story that Catherine had stripped herself of her jewels, in order to increase the bribe offered to the Grand Vizier. All she did was to distribute them amongst the officers of the Guard, with the idea of placing them in safety, and they were ultimately returned to her.

Somehow or other, the catastrophe was averted. The Vizier, after sending back the first flag of truce without an answer, finally agreed to treat, and Shafirof was sent by the Tsar, to propose conditions quite in keeping with the respective positions of the two armies, viz.:—The surrender of all the strong places taken from Turkey in preceding wars, the restitution of Livonia, and even of the other coast territories, except Ingria and St Petersburg, to Sweden: (Peter was willing, if that was necessary, to give Pskof, and even other towns in the very heart of Russia, for the sake of keeping St Petersburg), the re-establishment of Leszczynski; a war indemnity, and gifts to the Sultan. He returned bringing peace, and at an almost infinitesimal price. Azof was to be evacuated: some small fortresses in the neighbourhood were to be razed: Peter was to engage not to meddle more in Polish affairs, and the King of Sweden was to be granted a free return to his own country. According to Hammer, who has consulted the Turkish records, the *backsheesh* received on this occasion, by the Vizier, and divided by him with the Kiaia, did not exceed the sum of 200,000 roubles.³ The German historian accepts the story of Catherine's intervention, and of the effect produced by her diamonds; for a ring which had belonged to the future Tsarina was found, in later years, amongst the belongings of the Kiaia: But

¹ *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 79, etc.

² Juel's *Travels* (Copenhagen, 1893) p. 422.

³ *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reichs* (Pesth, 1828) vol. vii. p. 157.

surely the Vizier and the Kiara might have taken everything, —the persons of Peter and his wife, and his whole army!

The explanation of this event must be sought in the general history of Turkish warfare. The Ottomans always betrayed great eagerness to return to their own country, and gladly accepted a trifling advantage, so as to escape the necessity of further effort. Their best troops, and the Janisseries in particular, were capricious and undisciplined. In the circumstances we are now considering, they probably thought that the victor of Poltava would sell his life and liberty very dearly, and Shafirof's attitude and language would confirm that conviction. Russia was an adept in the traditional arts of deception, which had originated in Byzantium, and which a long apprenticeship to misfortune had taught her to develop. The Turkish troops, caring little, at that moment, for any more complete triumph than the easy one lying within their grasp, and utterly indifferent to the fate either of Leszczyński or of Charles XII., showed small inclination for fighting. The Vizier, knowing what it would cost him to disoblige them, bowed to their will, and peace was signed.¹

On this, as on every other occasion, Peter recovered from his past terrors, and took fresh heart for the future, with the most extraordinary swiftness. Writing to Apraxin, that very day, he does indeed acknowledge that he had never been in such a distressing position, 'since he had begun to serve,' but he hastens to add that 'the losses we have endured on one hand will serve to strengthen the *matchless acquisitions* we have preserved elsewhere!' At the same time, he took good care not to relinquish any opportunity, dishonest or not, which offered, to counterbalance the severity of fortune. When he gives orders to raze the fortifications of Taganrog, he insists that the foundations should not be touched, 'as circumstances may change,' and he refuses to hear of surrendering Azof, or evacuating Poland before Charles XII. has left Turkey. In vain it was pointed out to him that the Porte was under no obligation as to this last point! Shafirof, and young Shérémétief, whom he had sent to Constantinople as hostages, went in peril of their lives; but the Tsar cared not a jot, and in October 1712, he allowed them to be imprisoned in the Seven Towers, with Tolstoï himself. He did not give in, and then only partly,

¹ Solovief, vol. xvi. p. 104.

until the Turks directly threatened a renewal of hostilities. He then surrendered Azof, and consented to a fresh rectification of the frontier, demanded by the Porte. But he continued to deceive it by false reports as to the number of troops he had kept in the neighbourhood of Warsaw, and finally, he gained the point he had most at heart.

When Charles, after that wild and legendary freak of his, [*que l'on soit*] refused to depart from Bender, he was seized and imprisoned in the Castle of Timourtach, a property of the Sultan's, in the neighbourhood of Demotica. His adventure had cost the heroic warrior four fingers, the tip of his ear, the end of his nose, and all possibility of stirring up warlike feeling in Turkey.

III

Peter now believed himself to be in a position which would enable him to bring the war with Sweden to a speedy close. The exhausted condition of his country, and the disorder reigning in his own finances, imperiously called for such a step. But he had reckoned without the allies he himself had chosen. The Siege of Stralsund, undertaken in common with them, in September 1712, brought forth nothing but European indignation. Russians, Danes and Saxons spent their whole time quarrelling amongst themselves, and devastating the neighbouring country. The War of the Spanish Succession was drawing to a close, and there was reason to fear that Great Britain, Holland and Austria might intervene in the North. Peter sent Prince Kourakin to the Hague, with orders to ask a guarantee for his Swedish conquests, in return for his assistance against France. The Ambassador was coldly received. The conduct of the allies in Pomerania had not been of a nature to tempt other countries to make common cause with them. The year closed with a complete defeat of the Saxo-Danish army, which had followed Stenbock's troops,—the only Swedish corps still able to keep the field,—into Mecklenburg.

The following year was no more prosperous. Peter, noticing the disposition of France and England to draw together, at the Congress of Utrecht, went into Hanover, to win over the Elector to his own interests, but got nothing but fair words. He fell back on Prussia, where the King,

Frederick I., had lately died. Prussia, up to this point, had worked on a system which may be summed up in the following manner: she never did anything, of any sort, without trying to gain something, however small; she left others to fight, and took advantage of the confusion to snatch some part of the booty. Thus, when Elbing was offered her, she gave nothing in exchange, beyond the vaguest promises. Her ultimate object was no less than an anticipation of the great Frederick's work—the immediate partition of Poland.¹ Peter's visit to the new king, Frederick William, soon convinced him that the change of ruler had by no means modified the national policy.

He returned to St. Petersburg in March 1713, and resolved to strike a great blow with his own hand. He would attack Finland, which he called 'the nursing mother' of Sweden.² The event proved that he always succeeded best when he did his own work. The chief town of the country, Abo, opened its gates, almost without resistance, in August. In October, Apraxin and Michael Galitzin defeated the Swedes at Tammerfors. But in Germany, on the other hand, the campaign of 1713 brought no good fortune to any one but Prussia; and Prussia's greed was the only force she expended in it. Stenbock, who had been shut up in Tönningen, was forced to capitulate to Menshikof and the allies, on the 4th of May, and the surrender of Stettin soon followed. But the victors fell to quarrelling over the spoils, Prussia, who had refused to send artillery to help the besiegers to take the town, generously agreed to reconcile them by placing a Prussian garrison in the fortress, and the Treaty of Sequestration, which brought this windfall to Frederick William, included Rügen, Stralsund, Wismar and the whole of Pomerania! The king, in return, was good enough to declare himself ready to 'shed his blood for the Tsar and his heirs!'³

Denmark, ill-pleased with this compensation, protested loudly, claimed to be protected against the ambition of Prussia, Russia, and Holstein, and proved her ill-temper by refusing to take part in an arrangement with Hanover, according to which Peter had hoped,—when Queen Anne

¹ Droysen, *Geschichte des Preussischen Politik*, Part IV. Sect. i. p. 340.

² Letter to Apraxin, Oct. 30, 1712. Cabinet Papers, Sect. i. 14.

³ Solovief, vol. xvii. p. 24.

was dead, and the Elector George had succeeded to the British throne,—to have secured the support of the latter Power.

During 1714, the Tsar made war alone, both by sea and land, and fortune continued to smile upon him. After the taking of Neuschlot, which completed the conquest of Finland, he personally defeated the Swedish fleet, between Helsingfors and Abo, on the 25th of July, took Rear-Admiral Erensköld prisoner, seized on the island of Aland, and returning to his 'Paradise' in full triumphal progress, was rewarded by the grade of Vice-Admiral, duly conferred on him by the Senate.

But in the month of November, Charles XII. unexpectedly appeared at Stralsund. Here he was joined by the Administrator of Lubeck, who ruled the Duchy of Holstein, during the minority of Duke Charles Frederick. This prince, who was Charles XII.'s sister's son, was accepted, at that time, as presumptive heir to the crown of Sweden. But the Danes had taken possession of his Holstein inheritance, and gave no sign of yielding it up. Charles XII. was the only person who seemed likely to force them to do so. His sudden appearance at Stralsund was a fresh complication in the long-drawn-out and seemingly interminable Northern crisis. In the company of the Administrator came his Minister, who soon became the Swedish hero's counsellor and favourite. The how and why of this is not easy to explain,—for the man himself was far from attractive. His exterior appearance was gloomy and threatening, and he was generally believed to be guilty, or capable at all events, of the most abominable crimes. When, just a little later, we shall find him mixed up in the great negotiations which were to bring peace to Europe, we shall hear the French Minister at the Hague, Chateauneuf, bewailing the fact that he is forced to treat with a man 'whose loyalty may be more than fairly suspected.' Stanhope declared he was 'a rascal,' and openly accused him of having sold himself to the Emperor. The Baron Von Goertz, disliked and suspected by every one about him, roused distrust and alarm wherever he went.

Early in 1715, the affairs of the allied Powers seemed, for a moment, to be taking a favourable turn. Denmark agreed to make over Bremen and Verden to Hanover, and King George, seeing that Prussia was inclined to accept the media-

tion of France between herself and Sweden, had been induced (as Elector of Hanover) to declare war against the Swedes. But soon fresh complications arose, and everything went wrong. Denmark claimed the co-operation of the English fleet, which the Elector neither could nor would promise, and, as the English vessels stayed in port, the Danish army remained in quarters. In May, Prussia joined the alliance, with the sole object of laying hands on Stralsund, from which place Charles XII. slipped away before the capitulation, on the 12th of September. Peter, who had been detained in Poland, and had not taken part in the siege, was sorely displeased. He endeavoured to retrieve matters by settling his niece, Catherine Ivanovna, in Germany. He married her to Charles Leopold, Duke of Mecklenburg, promising, as her dowry, the Mecklenburg towns of Wismar and Warnemünde, which he proposed to take from the Swedes. Wismar did indeed capitulate to the allies in April 1716. But they refused to allow Repnine, who commanded the Russian troops, to take possession of the town; yet once again, Peter had worked for the benefit of the Prussian King!

In the course of the following summer, his vanity was salved in a very flattering manner. In the month of August, and from the deck of a ship of his own building, the '*Ingermanland*,' he reviewed the Russian, Danish, Dutch and English squadrons lying in the roads of Copenhagen, under his own command. The appearance of England and Holland on this occasion was purely formal, but an agreement had been come to for common action in Scania by the Russian and Danish fleets, and the mere presence of the two other squadrons, as a matter of demonstration, was valuable in the sense of its giving a powerful moral support to the allies. The understanding fell through, unfortunately, just at the very moment when active co-operation became necessary. Suspicions rose on both sides, and there were mutual accusations of designs far removed from the projected enterprise. In vain did Peter lavish activity and energy,—hurrying to Stralsund, to hasten the arrival of the Danish transports, which were lacking, and venturing on the most dangerous reconnoitring expeditions, under the fire of the hostile batteries. A shot actually passed through his boat, the *Princess*. But the month of September came, and

no advance had been made. Then the Russian staff unanimously declared the expedition should be put off, till the following year. A general outcry immediately arose amongst the allies. Peter, they declared, had cast aside the mask,—he had agreed with the Swedes on the division of Pomerania and of Mecklenburg,—he had come from Germany on purpose,—he might even have designs on Copenhagen! The Danish capital was forthwith placed in a state of defence, and arms were distributed to all the burghers. Hanover,—which had looked with such a jealous eye on the establishment of a Russian Princess on German ground, as to offer the Tsar the friendship of England, and the active co-operation of the English fleet, in return for his renunciation of the Mecklenburg marriage,—was the bitterest of all. King George, we are told, went so far as to give Admiral Norris, who commanded his ships in Danish waters, orders to seize the person of the Russian sovereign, and sink his squadron.¹ Stanhope, to whom the message was confided, gave the angry king time to cool down, under pretext of the necessity of referring it to his Ministerial colleagues. But Peter was disgusted with all his allies. He ordered his troops to evacuate Denmark, and retire to Rostock. Shérémétief established himself in Mecklenburg, with the bulk of the Russian army, and the Tsar betook himself to Amsterdam, attracted thither by Goertz, and by the fresh horizons he unfolded before his gaze.

IV

Baron Von Goertz had been the Duke of Holstein's Minister before he had served Charles XII., and had endeavoured to save his first master's interests, at a moment when these seemed likely to be engulfed in the misfortunes of the Swedish king. He had entered into negotiations with Russia, Prussia, and the King of Poland, to gain some share of the spoils snatched from the vanquished warrior,—and with the Tsar, to obtain the Duke of Holstein's marriage with a Russian princess, and his subsequent accession to the throne of Sweden. Thus he had betrayed his future master beforehand, and gained nothing, beyond the worst diplomatic

¹ Mahon's *History of England*, vol. i. p. 338; Droysen, *Geschichte des Preussischen Politik*, p. 174; Solovief, vol. xvii. p. 64.

reputation in Europe. Yet he was perfectly sincere, when, after the allies had curtly dismissed him, and the Danes had occupied Holstein without a shade of opposition, he turned his eyes on the Swedish hero, then just returned from Turkey. He had conceived a fresh plan,—that of finding Holstein's salvation in the triumph of Charles XII., and with this object, he desired to lessen the number of Sweden's enemies, to isolate Denmark, to get George of Hanover into difficulties with the Pretender, and then to treat directly with the Tsar, or even, if that were possible, with Prussia, through French mediation.

When Peter reached Holland, where Goertz had been established since the month of May, 1716, he was already well inclined to give ear to his suggestions. Erskine, a Scotch doctor, and partisan of the Pretender's, whom Goertz had contrived to place about the Tsar, had already influenced him in that direction. The assistance of France seemed quite assured; the plan Goertz favoured was indeed no more than the formulation of the leading idea of the last Franco-Swedish treaty, signed on the 13th of April 1715. France had undertaken, by its provisions, to support Charles XII. in his efforts to recover his trans-Baltic dominions, and to push the claims of the Duke of Holstein-Gottorp. As may have been observed, Goertz's idea bore a French brand, and a good one,—that of Louis XIV. and Torcy.¹ The great King and his Minister had desired to avert the complete ruin of that system of alliances, which had, for centuries, established the position of France in Central Europe, as opposed to that of the Emperor. The gradual weakening of Poland and Turkey, and the blows struck by Russia at Sweden, had sapped the foundations of this edifice. The idea of reconstructing it with other materials, to be supplied by Russia itself, was not ripe, and a long period was to elapse before the spirit of routine, and a more legitimate attachment to old and venerable traditions, could be overcome. In the meanwhile Goertz's plan offered a fairly suitable expedient.

From the month of July to that of November, 1716, the Hague became the scene of busy negotiations. Goertz himself, the Swedish Minister in Paris, Baron Sparre, General Ranck, another Swede, in the Hessian service, and Poniatowski, Charles XII.'s devoted follower and friend, opened

¹ Syveton, as already quoted (1895), p. 418.

communications with Kourakin, with Dubois,—whom the Regent had sent from Paris,—and with Pensionary Heinsius.¹ Petter was less and less well inclined towards his German allies. Catherine, who was to have followed him to Amsterdam, had been obliged to stop at Wesel, where, on the 2nd of January 1717, she bore a child, the Tsarevitch Paul, who only lived a few days. This unfortunate event was attributed by her husband to the manner in which she had been treated, during her journey through Hanover. Her coachman had actually been beaten! But Dubois had come to Holland for a very different purpose from that of supporting Goertz. Louis XIV. was dead. The direction of French policy had slipped from Torcy's grasp, and the Regent had sent Dubois to meet Stanhope, and come to an understanding with Great Britain, on a subject which, for some years, was to take precedence of all other considerations and political combinations—the coveted succession to the throne of the 'Grand Monarque.'

This fatal coincidence brought about the ruin of Goertz's plan. When France failed him, Peter endeavoured to come to an understanding with England. But, in February 1717, Gyllenberg, the Swedish Minister in London, was arrested on suspicion of having a secret understanding with the Pretender, and the Russian Resident, Viesselovski, was implicated with him. He contrived to exculpate himself, and the Tsar despatched Kourakin to the rescue, with orders to propose a very favourable commercial treaty, as a preliminary to a political alliance. But another preliminary, the evacuation of Mecklenburg, was at once demanded, on the British side. Peter was forced to acknowledge that he need expect nothing from that quarter,—the King of England and the Elector of Hanover being evidently agreed to drive him away from Germany and the Baltic! Once more he fell back on France, and in March 1717, he resolved to try his fortune there in person. He had received favourable news from Berlin; Prussia seemed inclined to act as mediator, and even to share in any agreement arrived at. I shall speak, in a later chapter, and in some detail, of the Tsar's residence on the banks of the Seine, and of the partial

¹ Uhlenberg, *Researches among the Russian State Papers, for the History of the Relations between Russia and the Low Countries* (The Hague, 1891), p. 192; Scheltema, *Russia and the Low Countries*, vol. iii. p. 323, etc.

success which crowned his personal attempts at diplomacy, partial though they were. But when his Ministers, Golovkin, Shafirof, and Kourakin, returned to Amsterdam from Paris, whither they had accompanied their master, they signed a treaty,—with Chateaneuf for France, and Cnyphausen for Prussia,—the essential condition of which was the acceptance of French mediation to put an end to the Northern War. Thus Goertz's scheme won the day.

The unattractive diplomatist had won the Tsar's personal favour. Peter agreed to meet him privately at the Castle of Loo, and at once entered into his plans. He charged him with proposals for a separate peace with Charles, himself undertaking to remain quiescent for a period of three months, and Goertz proceeded, with Russian passports, to Revel, whence he was to rejoin his master in Sweden. The results of this new diplomatic complication soon became evident. Early in January 1718, attention was roused in the political world of St Petersburg by the sudden departure of General Bruce, Master of the Ordnance, and of Ostermann. Whither were they bound? The Dutch Resident, De Bie, observed that Bruce had taken 'new and rich clothes and silver plate' away with him. As he was known to be very stingy, these preparations looked suspicious, and the rough words and angry outbursts with which Ostermann replied to certain discreet questions put by Weber, the Hanoverian Resident,—asserting that he was merely going on a tour of inspection,—were considered far from reassuring.¹ In the month of May, the whole of Europe knew what it meant. Bruce and Ostermann, as representing Russia, with Goertz and Gyllenborg for Sweden, had met at Aland, to treat for peace. To cut short all quarrels as to precedence, the partition between two rooms was thrown down, and the conference table was set in the middle, half in one room and half in the other. The real object of the meeting was more difficult of attainment. Goertz demanded the *statu quo ante*, and the surrender of everything which had been taken from Sweden. Peter would only agree to evacuate Finland. The Tsar, it must be said, showed himself disposed, in other matters, to be more than liberal. He offered Sweden any equivalent her King chose to take, amongst the King of England's German possessions. He expected Charles XII. to keep whatever he

¹ De Bie to Heinsius, Jan. 21, 1718. Dutch State Papers.

might lay his hands on without help from him, but he was willing to assist him in his conquest, and would even, if necessary, support the Pretender in England with that object. As the Swedes appeared to see little attraction about these proposals, the Tsar desired his plenipotentiaries to try what corruption would do. Gyllenborg, he opined, was not likely to despise a gift of rich lands in Russia. But the Hanoverians, he was informed, had already bought over the Swedish Minister, Miller, and the ingenuous Sovereign was very much annoyed.¹ Yet more serious obstacles,—reports as to a popular insurrection in Russia, resulting from the trial of the Tsarevitch Alexis, which roused Charles XII.'s hopes and made him stubborn,—the difficulty of recovering Stettin, which the Swedish King refused to cede to Prussia,—arose, and prevented a final arrangement. At last the catastrophe of Frederickshald, where Charles was killed, on the 7th September 1718, cut the negotiations short. Goertz, accused by Ulrica-Eleonora, Princess Frederick of Hesse-Cassel, who succeeded her brother, of conniving with Russia against Swedish interests, was imprisoned, condemned, and sent to the scaffold. Thus the mighty Northern crisis entered on yet another phase.

V

The Aland negotiations were re-opened. Goertz was replaced by Baron Lilienstädt, and Peter sent Iagoujinski, with more tempting proposals, including the cession of Livonia. But even these did not suffice, and the Tsar betook himself to strong coercive measures. In July 1719, a huge Russian fleet, numbering 30 warships, 130 galleys, and 100 smaller craft, descended on the Swedish coast, and Major-general Lascy marched into the country, and burnt 130 villages, besides mills, stores, and factories, without number. A troop of Cossacks actually advanced within a league and a half of the Capital. But the shadow of the heroic king still hovered over his country. The Swedish Government and people came gallantly through the trial. When Ostermann made his appearance at Stockholm, with the object of parleying, the Prince of Hesse-Cassel, and Kronhelm, President of the Senate, told him they were

¹ Letter to Kourakin, dated Sept. 27, 1718. *Kourakin Papers*, vol. i. p. 4.

ready to give every facility for the disembarkation of the Russian troops in Sweden, so as to bring about such a decisive battle as would finally settle the matter. Meanwhile Ulrica-Eleanora, by ceding Bremen and Werden to Hanover, had won the support of Great Britain, and the Court of Vienna—already on bad terms with that of St. Petersburg, on account of the trial of Alexis, and jealous of Prussia,—showed a still stronger inclination to support Sweden. In June 1720, the London Cabinet brought about a reconciliation between Sweden and Denmark; the former paying an indemnity of 600,000 ducats, and surrendering the right of collecting tolls on the Sound, while the latter ceded all the places taken from Sweden, both in Pomerania and in Norway. Kourakin, at the Hague, was reduced to seeking the help of Spain, and the French Resident, La Vie, writes from St. Petersburg: ‘The Tsar’s uneasy movements and fits of rage betray the violence of the passions which disturb him . . . The natural functions are interrupted by constant sleeplessness, and the people about him, in their desire to conceal the real subject of his anxiety, which is all too visible, declare he is haunted by ghosts.’¹ The subject of anxiety referred to, was the result of twenty years of effort, which Peter now saw imperilled by the defection of allies he himself had imprudently associated with his victorious arms, whose sole object was, to snatch the prize of his own exertions from his grasp. The bodies and souls of his people, worn out and exhausted by this endless war, cried out to the Sovereign, in the horror of his sleepless nights. To this his alliances with the great European Powers, his attempts at playing a bold political game, and all the showy diplomacy he had borrowed from the tradition and practice of other nations, had brought him at last!

Happily for him, the Great Powers, though they would gladly have made him pay dear for his imprudence and presumption, lacked the means of forcing him to it. A British Squadron, commanded by Norris, threatened Revel in May 1720. The English Admiral successfully joined the Swedish fleet, but, after some attempts at intimidation, all that was done was to burn an *isba* and a *bania* (bath) built by some labourers on a neighbouring islet. While this was going on, a Russian Detachment led by Mengden had made

¹ June 6, 1719 (French Foreign Office).

a fresh descent on Sweden, and burnt 1026 peasants' houses. 'The loss inflicted on your Majesty by the allied fleets in the Isle of Nargin,' writes Menshikof, 'is a very serious one; but on the whole we must make up our minds to it, and leave the *isba* to the Swedish fleet, and the *bania* to the British!'

France now appeared upon the scene, but this far more successful intervention was purely pacific, and equally salutary to both countries, which ardently desired peace. It resulted in a fresh meeting of Russian and Swedish plenipotentiaries, at Nystadt, in April 1721. The way had been prepared by Campredon, who shortly before, and with the Tsar's consent, had travelled from St Petersburg to Stockholm. The only point on which Sweden now insisted was that the Duke of Holstein, with whom Peter had again made rash engagements, should be entirely put out of the question. This prince had, by the death of his uncle, really become the legitimate heir to the Swedish throne, and Peter desired to support and make use of his rights, for the benefit of the Russian policy. He had invited Charles Frederick to St. Petersburg in June 1720, had received him in the most flattering manner, and had promised, and almost offered, him, the hand of his daughter, the Tsarevna Anna; while Catherine, we are told, had publicly assured him 'that she should be happy to become the mother-in-law of a Prince, whose subject she might have been, if fortune had not played Sweden false.'¹

The Russian sovereign, we know, held himself little fettered by any promise, and he finally, without a tinge of scruple, threw the unlucky Duke overboard, with all his rights, and ambitions, and hopes. On the 3rd of September 1721, a courier from Wiborg brought the Tsar news that peace was signed. Russia was to pay an indemnity of 2,000,000 crowns, and definitely acquired possession of Livonia, Esthonia, Ingria, part of Carelia, the town of Wiborg, and a portion of Finland. Great Britain and Poland were both parties to the treaty, the former on Sweden's side, the latter on that of Peter,—but the Duke of Holstein's name did not appear at all.

The great evolution of the Muscovite power, the end of the Oriental and Continental period of Russian history, the

¹ Solovief, vol. xvii. p. 269.

commencement of its western and maritime phase, were thus accomplished. A new factor, and one of constantly increasing importance, had taken its place in European politics. The end of Peter's rough toil and terrible apprenticeship had come at last. He was free, now, to listen to the delighted acclamations of his subjects, who, worn-out, exhausted, and terrified as they had finally been, had, in spite of all, followed him to the bitter end, and now shared his overflowing joy and intense relief. Back he went, straightway, to St. Petersburg, sailing up the Neva, with flourishes of trumpets and salvoes from the three cannons of his yacht. The populace rushed to the landing-stage of the Troïtsa. The Tsar appeared in the distance, standing on the poop, waving a handkerchief, and shouting 'Mir! mir!' (peace); he bounded ashore, as active and eager as in his youthful days, and hurried to the Church of the Trinity, where a thanksgiving service was celebrated. Meanwhile a wooden stage was hastily built on the square before the sacred edifice. Barrels of beer and brandy were piled upon it; Peter, when he had rendered thanks to God, mounted the platform, spoke in heartfelt terms of the great event, and then, emptying a glass of brandy, gave the signal for the triumphal libations.¹ The officers of his navy came to congratulate him, and requested him to accept the rank of full admiral—a consecration this, of the new position conquered by the country on the Baltic, and the new part its ruler was, in consequence, to play. The Tsar consented willingly. Then the Senate proffered him three new titles, 'Father of his Country—Peter the Great—Emperor.' This time he hesitated. Both he himself, and his predecessors, had been tempted in this quarter. The pretension to claim that the word *Tsar* was equivalent to *Cæsar*, or *Kaiser*, had arisen, in Russia, in the seventeenth century, simultaneously with the tendency,—natural in a power which inclined to European forms,—to repudiate its Asiatic origin. The word, which was originally used to describe the Tartar Princes of Kazan, corresponds to the Persian *Sar*, the English *Sir*, and the French *Sire*. In a treaty between the Emperor Maximilian, and the Grand Duke Vassili Ivanovitch, the Imperial title had been somewhat carelessly bestowed on the Muscovite Prince, and on that equivocal recognition, the dignity had hitherto rested. But,

¹ Choubinski, *Historical Descriptions*, p. 31, etc.

in 1711, Kourakin had thought himself obliged to erase the word *Tsarian* added to the title of Majesty, in the letter sent by Queen Anne to his lord and master. Peter himself had appeared indifferent, and almost hostile, to the idea of claiming such dignity, and explained his personal repugnance by a phrase at once energetic and picturesque. 'It smells musty!' In 1721, he waived his objections, but imposed one change. He would call himself Emperor of *all the Russias*, not Emperor of *the East*, as the senators had proposed. He clearly recognised the difficulty with which Europe would be brought to acknowledge this change of title. As a matter of fact, France and Holland were at first the only countries which would recognise him. Sweden did not consent to do so till 1723; Turkey ten years later; Great Britain and Austria in 1742; France again, and Spain, in 1745; and Poland, the most interested of all, not until 1764, at the accession of Poniatowski, and on the eve of the first partition.

Thus the Russia of 'all the Russias,' including the provinces which the Polish hegemony had carried over, five centuries before, to European civilisation, made a final and definite entrance into history.

The Emperor himself lighted the fireworks at the festivities held in honour of the proclamation of this new title—the person who had been specially trusted with this duty being discovered to be dead drunk. The sovereign, too, drank freely, and amused himself, in fact, more than all his subjects put together. But on the morrow, he was afoot early, as usual, and back at his work. Peace was not to mean idleness for him; beside, and even beyond, its immediate benefit, he desired to endow his people with a moral one, of much larger, nay, of indefinite scope. Those twenty years of struggle were, so he held, to be above all things a *school*, 'with lessons of triple and most cruel length,' as he himself says, in one of the letters written to his friends, to announce the happy event. Knowledge in itself counted for nothing. They must profit, and at once, from what they had learnt. What was to be done? Make war again? Why not? He felt no weariness himself, and soon forgot the weariness of those about him. Yet another military enterprise tempted his fancy: one with yet wider horizons than those which 'the window open upon Europe,' on the

Baltic side, had spread before his eyes. The very historian who essays to follow the Tsar through this mighty undertaking, feels his breath fail him.

VI

Even during his struggle to increase his empire, and his influence towards the West, Peter did not lose sight of his eastern frontier. As early as 1691, the Burgomaster of Amsterdam, Nicholas Witsen, had drawn his attention, through the Dutch Resident at Moscow, to the important commercial relations which might be established between Russia and Persia. The journey of Isbrand, a Danish traveller, into China, in 1692, brought about some acquaintance with that country. One of Peter's most devoted assistants in the building of ships and the making of canals, John Perry, had studied the Caspian coast, where, after the middle of the seventeenth century, Astrakhan had grown into an important mart of commerce between Armenia and Persia. Repeated attempts to gain possession of the markets of Pekin, where a Russian Church was actually built, met with no success. Colonel Ismailof, sent there as Ambassador, in 1719, found himself forestalled by the Jesuits, who were already firmly established.¹ The only result of this disappointment was to strengthen Peter's determination to open himself some other road towards the far East. If China failed him, he would try India. The idea of meeting England there, and checking her, certainly never entered his head. His only object was to secure a share in that great mine of wealth, which had enriched almost every European Power. He first turned his eyes on Khiva and Bokhara, the earliest stages on the Oxus route, by which he hoped to reach Delhi, whence the English had not yet dislodged the Great Mogul. This road had already been explored by Russian merchants. After the unlucky campaign of 1711, the temptation to make up eastward, on the Caspian, for what had been lost on the south, towards the Black Sea, became more urgent. In 1713, the reports brought to Moscow by a Turcoman Hodja, roused the Tsar's covetous-

¹ Baer, *Peters Verdienste um die Ernteuerung des Geographischen Kenntnisse Beiträge zur Kenntniss des Russischen Reichs* (St. Petersburg, 1872), vol. xvi. pp. 12-32.

ness. There was gold, this man said, for the finding, on the banks of the Amu-Daria (Oxus), and this river, which had formerly fallen into the Caspian, and which the Khivans, in their fear of the Russians, had turned aside into the Sea of Aral, might easily be brought back to its original bed. The Swedish war prevented the despatch of any important expedition, but Peter's longing was too strong for him, and he began a system of small detachments, which has since been fatal to other conquerors in distant lands, and which served him little better. The first detachment, a very weak one, which took the field in 1714, under the command of Bergholz, a German officer, moved towards Siberia, found its way barred by the Kalmuks, and beat a retreat. In 1717, Prince Alexander Bekovitch Tcherkaski, with a stronger body, numbering 4000 infantry, and 2000 Cossacks, pushed as far as Khiva, sometimes negotiating, and sometimes fighting. But he was finally massacred with all his followers.¹

Other attempts simultaneously made, in the direction of Persia, met with more success. In 1715, Artémi Pétrovitch Volynski was sent to the Shah's Court, and returned with a treaty of commerce, and a project for an expedition on a grand scale. In 1720, he was appointed Governor of Astrakhan, and never ceased to preach, and prepare for, this Persian Campaign. This project it was, which, on the morrow of the Peace of Nystadt, once more roused Peter's warlike activity, and snatched him from the delights of his 'Paradise.' The condition of things in Persia at that moment seemed to call loudly for armed intervention. After the incursions of the Lesghians and the Kazykoumyks, which ruined the Russian factories,—costing one merchant alone, named Lévreïnof, 170,000 roubles during the course of the year 1721,—the Afghans found their way as far as Ispahan. If the Tsar did not hurry himself, there was every fear of his being outstripped by Turkey, whose intention to re-establish order in the Shah's dominions was openly declared. Peter, then, decided to take advantage of these propitious circumstances, and, in response to the Governor of Astrakhan's eager call, to take the field with a whole army, and personally command it.

He started from Moscow on the 13th of May 1722, with

¹ H. Sutherland Edwards, *Russian Projects against India* (London, 1885), pp. 1-30.

Tolstoj, Apraxin, and his inseparable companion, Catherine. On the 18th of July he sailed from Astrakhan, with 23,000 infantry. His cavalry, numbering some 9000 men, was to travel by land, followed by a cloud of irregular troops,—20,000 Cossacks, 20,000 Kalmuks, and 20,000 Tartars,—and to meet him on the road to Derbent. What was the Tsar's object in marshalling this body of 100,000 men? His plans have never been made clear. More than probably, he allowed himself to be carried away by a desire to counterbalance the excessive weakness of his former demonstrations. And once more, on this occasion, we notice the strange lack of seriousness which accompanied the more solid qualities of his mind and character. On the 23rd of August, after a trifling skirmish with the troops of the Sultan of Outemich, he made a triumphal entry into Derbent, and there received the congratulations of the Russian Senate, which urged him to 'press forward in the footsteps of Alexander.' But this new Alexander was soon obliged to stop short. His soldiers, like his army in Moldavia, ten years before, were in serious danger of starving to death. The transports which were to have carried them supplies had been wrecked while crossing the Caspian. Within a very few days, his cavalry was dismounted,—there was no forage, and the horses died in thousands. He left a small garrison in Derbent, laid the first stone of a Fort, to be called the Holy Cross, at the confluence of the Soulak and the Agrahan, and retired, in pitiful pomp, to Astrakhan.¹

But yet, once again, the guiding quality of his nature, his stubbornness, was to atone for his faults. He went back to the system of small detachments, sent Colonel Shipof, during the course of the following year, with a small body of troops, to occupy the Persian town of Riashtchi, while Major-General Matioushchine, at the head of another, took possession of Baku, which the Russian staff held to be the key of the position in those localities. At the same time, he had recourse to diplomacy. Colonel Abramof was ordered to use all his powers to explain to the Persians at Ispahan, that the Tsar's only desire was to come to their assistance against the insurgent tribes, and, on the 12th of September 1723, a Treaty was signed at St. Petersburg, by Isman Bey, for the Shah whereby the whole of the longed-for coastline of the Caspian

¹ Solovief, vol. xviii. pp. 40-50.

with Derbent, Baku and the Provinces of Gilian, Mazanderan, and Astrabat, were ceded to Russia, in exchange for a vague promise of help against the insurgents. In the month of May, in the following year, Peter was already betraying his anxiety to make the most of these new acquisitions, and drew up detailed instructions to Matiushkine, to despatch the local products,—such as petroleum, sugar, dried fruits, and lemons,—to St. Petersburg.

But this was somewhat premature. Prince Boris Meshcherski, who went to Ispahan in April 1724, to ratify the Treaty, was actually fired upon! The Turks, on their side, egged on by England, protested loudly, demanded immediate evacuation of the territory occupied by Russia, claimed part, at least, for themselves, and requested the French Envoy, the Marquis de Bonac, to arrange the partition. De Bonac, in the course of his efforts to arrange matters, fell out with the Russian Minister, Niéplouief, who accused him of betraying Russian interests, after having accepted 2000 ducats to defend them. The insolent Russian was forthwith turned out of the Frenchman's doors; but stubbornness was again to win the day.¹ In June 1724, a Treaty of Partition was signed at Constantinople, and though the limits thus determined were both precarious and illusory, Russia set her foot firmly in those countries, and in the long run, by hook or by crook, she was to make her influence felt there.

Alexander Roumiantsof, who was sent to Constantinople to exchange the ratification of this arrangement, met an Armenian deputation on its way to St. Petersburg, to solicit the Tsar's support against the Turks.

The movement then begun was to be an unceasing one, and the problem thus set, was to threaten the future of Europe, even at the close of the following century.

These first Armenian Deputies were, as may readily be imagined, received with open arms. Peter, with most remarkable political insight, at once made up his mind to use the protection of the Christian populations, whether Armenians, or Georgians, as the basis of his action in the countries he disposed to dispute with the Turks and Persians. But he was never able to carry out his programme. Already

¹ Solovief, vol. xviii. p. 58, etc. De Bonac does not refer to this incident in his reports.

his days were numbered, and those who came after him imperilled the work he had designed, by losing sight, for a time, of that road to India which he had sketched out. But the landmarks he had set up, remained. The Eastern Question was opened in the direction he had given it; his seal was on it.

He never ceased, during all the rest of his life, to give his attention to the Oriental Christians. At the same time,—impatient as he always was, and incapable of any quiet waiting,—he endeavoured, groping somewhat in the dark, to find some other road, by which he might reach the distant and mysterious East.

In the course of the year 1723, the Port of Rogerwick was all astir. Two frigates were being prepared, in greatest haste, and the profoundest secrecy, to start for some unknown destination. They set sail on the 12th (24th) of December, were overtaken by a tempest, and obliged to take refuge in the Port of Revel. A report spread, that they were bound for Madagascar, and were to take possession of that island,—destined, for two centuries yet, to tempt the colonising ambition of the European Powers. This idea, like many of Peter's, was drawn from a Swedish source. Charles XII., a short time before his death, had entered into relations with an adventurer named Morgan, the son, probably, of that famous British buccaneer, Henry John Morgan (1637-1690), who died in Jamaica, after a stormy career, in the course of which he took possession of the Isthmus of Panama, and ruled it, for some time, with despotic authority. Morgan boasted his power of ensuring the Swedes a footing in Madagascar, where, he averred, immense treasure was to be had, with very little trouble. Queen Ulrica-Eleonora reopened negotiations with him in 1719, and had even begun preparations to send an expedition. Then it was that Peter, warned by his agents in Stockholm, determined to outstrip his neighbours. But Madagascar, to his ardent imagination, was, like Baku, to be a mere stage. The Commandant of his expedition, Admiral Wilster, after having occupied the island, and established a Russian Protectorate over it, was to pursue his course eastward, to the fabled country ruled by the great Mogul.

It was only a dream. Peter, with his usual eagerness and overhaste, had not even given himself time to acquire the

most elementary information as to the country he proposed to conquer. He did not take the trouble to read the documents which had been abstracted, for his benefit, from the Stockholm Chancery, and he drew up a letter, quite at hazard, to the King (whom he supposed to reign over the distant Island) pointing out that at that moment a Russian Protectorate would be far more advantageous to him than a Swedish one! The Swedes were far better informed. He had pitched on the two first frigates he could lay his hands on, without any consideration as to whether they were fit to face such a long voyage, and fell into a fury when he heard how useless the two frail vessels had proved. He flew at Wilster and his officers, he stormed and threatened, he would not hear of the plan being given up. He suggested a sheathing of felt and boards, to be placed over the submerged timbers, and compensate for their inferior quality, and he commanded the Admiral to lie low at Rogerwick, under a feigned name, and to start as soon as possible. It was all in vain; the frigates were useless, no felt sheathing was to be had at Revel, and, early in 1724, the expedition was formally deferred to a later date.¹ It was never attempted again during the great Tsar's life. After his death, his country, once it had shaken off the fumes of his maritime intoxication, came to a better understanding of the resources, direction, and natural limits, of the Russian colonising power. The part thus played has been brilliant enough!

¹ Golikof, vol. ix. p. 300, etc.; vol. x. p. 370, etc.; *Russian Naval Review*, March 1894.

CHAPTER III

THE APOGEE—FRANCE

- I. Peter's first plan for a journey into France, and its failure—The Tsar's displeasure—Attempted agreement—France takes the initiative—Du Héron—Baluze—Matvičief's journey to Paris—Rupture of diplomatic relations—A non-political agreement—Frenchmen in Russia, and Russians in France—Two currents of emigration—The French colony in St. Petersburg—A strange parish—Father Cailleau—Fresh negotiations—Lefort—Comte de la Marck—Peter's unsatisfactory position in Germany induces him to seek fresh support—He resolves to go to Paris.
- II. Arrival at Dunkirk—The Tsar's incognito—A suite of 85 persons—An exacting Sovereign—The sorrows of Monsieur de Liboy—The Comte de Mailly-Nesle—The Cabriolet—A strange mode of transport—The Tsar's supper at Beauvais—His arrival in Paris—Apartment in the Louvre—A billet on the French Academy—The Hotel Lesdiguières—Three days imprisonment—The Tsar insists on receiving the King's visit before he goes out—Ceremonious reception—Etiquette forgotten—In the Tsar's arms—Peter recovers his liberty—A tourist—His curiosity—His buffness and stinginess—An evening at the opera—The Regent waits on the Tsar—Displeasure of the princes and princesses—The Duchesse de Rohan's mishap—The Tsar softens—A visit to St. Cyr—History and legend—A letter from Madame de Maintenon—Visits to scientific institutions—Serious occupations and amusements—The reverse of the medal—Orgies at the Trianon—The return from Fontainebleau—Departure—Final generosity—The Tsar pays his reckoning—On the way to Spa.
- III. Political results—Non-existent at first—Performances on the diplomatic slack-rope—No one but the Tsar has any serious desire to negotiate—The Congress of the Hague—A Platonic treaty—The diplomats representing both sides are not worthy—Baron von Schleinitz, and Cellamare—Fresh advances from the Tsar—Their secret reason—He desires to marry his daughter to a French prince—The Tsarevna Elizabeth—Louis xv. or the Duc de Chartres—These overtures coldly received in France—Dubois' silence—His reasons—Secret differences—France desires a political, and Russia a family alliance—No room for an understanding—The alliance of the future.

I

PETER'S journey into France, following as it did on his brilliant appearance at the head of the four squadrons united under his command, in the roads of Copenhagen, marks the most glorious point in his reign. In spite of his triumph at

Nystadt, subsequent events, his political disappointments and domestic troubles, his rupture with the allies he had bought too dearly, the trial of the Tsarevitch, and the Mons affair, strike us as reverses of fortune,—his star had begun to decline.

Since 1701, not a year had passed during which the Tsar had failed to cross the frontiers of his empire. He had travelled, incessantly, up and down Europe, now to visit his chosen allies in their various capitals, and then to seek the re-establishment of his steadily failing health at Carlsbad or at Pyrmont. In 1698, during his first great journey, he had turned longing eyes towards Paris. He had expected, and even tried to obtain, an invitation, but had failed.¹ He soon consoled himself. 'The Russians,' so he was heard to say, 'need the Dutchmen on the sea, and the Germans on land, but they have no need of Frenchmen anywhere.' Yet relations between the two countries, undeveloped as they were, suffered from the wound inflicted on the Russian Sovereign's vanity, and the interests of Frenchmen in the north were equally affected. But this fact was treated in France with an indifference which certainly equalled the Tsar's openly expressed scorn. The war of the Spanish Succession absorbed the French mind. To the most Christian king, as to the majority of his subjects, Russia was a very distant object, of very doubtful interest. And her ruler, in their eyes, was an exotic, whimsical, obscure, and,—taking him all in all,—a far from attractive figure. Until 1716, the name of the victor of Poltava was not even included in the list of European Sovereigns printed yearly in Paris!

Yet Peter had talked,—at Birzé, in 1701,—with the French Envoy to the King of Poland, and the intercourse thus begun, through Du Héron, was continued through the Russian Envoy to the Court of Augustus, through Patkul, and other intermediaries. Unfortunately a cardinal misunderstanding at once arose. The French King considered himself to be dealing with a second-rate power, who was greatly honoured by his notice, and was therefore likely to be far from exacting—a second Poland, in fact, more distant, less civilised, and yet more likely to be easily secured to his service, by a modest salary, and a few smooth words. The Russian Tsar expected to treat with France as her equal.

¹ Oustrialof, *History of Peter the Great*, vol. iii. pp. 135 and 489.

One of the most essential forces of modern Russia—I refer to that high opinion of her importance and power, which she never failed to assert, even before it was evidently justified—was splendidly exemplified on this occasion. When Du Héron spoke of an agreement between the two countries, his Russian interlocutor replied, that ‘a union and intimate alliance between the two heroes of the century (Louis XIV. and Peter) would assuredly rouse the highest admiration throughout the whole of Europe!’¹ This compliment, coming, as it did, on the very morrow of the defeat of Narva, must have been doubtfully welcome to France!

In 1703, Baluze, Du Héron’s successor in Poland, journeyed to Moscow, and returned somewhat crestfallen. He had expected to receive overtures from Peter, and all he had received was a dry request to make overtures himself. Up to the year 1705, the Russian agent in Paris was an unimportant individual, named Postnikof, whose chief occupation appears to have been to translate and publish the official reports of the more, or less, authentic victories, won by his master over the Swedes. If the truth must be told, former Muscovite Embassies had left far from pleasant memories behind them on the banks of the Seine. The Embassy, headed by the Princes Dolgorouki and Meshtcherski, in 1667, had very nearly caused a sanguinary scuffle. These gentlemen had claimed the right to introduce a whole cargo of saleable merchandise into the French dominions, without paying duty, and had even offered armed resistance to the Custom House officials.²

In 1705, Matviéief went from the Hague to Paris, and was obliged at once to struggle with public prejudice, with regard to the Russians and their Sovereign. ‘Is it true?’ he was asked, ‘that during the Tsar’s visit to Holland, he broke his glass when he saw it had been filled with French wine?’ ‘His Majesty delights in champagne!’ ‘And is it true that he ordered Menshikof one day to hang his own son?’ ‘Why, that is a story of Ivan the Terrible’s days!’³ But these apologetic remarks bore little fruit, and the poor diplomat, to enhance his discomfort, was charged with a far from

¹ Golovin, Minister for Foreign Affairs, to du Héron, Dec. 27, 1701 (French Foreign Office).

² French Foreign Office, *Mémoires et Documents*, Russia, vol. iii. p. 21, etc.

³ Solovief, vol. xv. p. 72.

agreeable mission, relating to two Russian ships, which had been seized by the Dunkirk Corsairs. He could get no satisfaction. His remonstrances, like his historical rectifications, were politely received,—but the ships were not returned.

A new attempt at an understanding took place after the victory at Poltava, and this time Peter took his revenge. The position was changed; the advances now came from the French side, and it was the Tsar's turn to look scornful. Baluze, who had sore difficulty in catching him up, during his constant journeys hither and thither, and who could not get speech with him till May 1711,—on the very eve of the campaign of the Pruth,—offered him the mediation of France between himself and Sweden. He was given an ironical reply. The Tsar, he was told, was quite willing to accept French mediation, but only in so far as to arrange matters between himself and the Turks! He was made to feel he was looked on as a bore, and systematically kept out of the Sovereign's presence. He was reduced to seeking the Tsar secretly, in the gardens at Iaworow; and, when, after Peter's unlucky campaign, he returned to the charge, the Tsar simply refused to listen to him.¹

Events had altered circumstances. The Powers allied with Peter against Sweden were those the war of the Spanish Succession had marshalled against France; and the desire to snatch 'the most powerful weapon she possesses in Germany'—the support of Sweden—from that country, was a natural bond between the Tsar and his allies.

Kourakin, personally, was anything but anti-French. His high-born instincts, and his quickly acquired habits as a man of the world, had given him too strong a taste for Paris, and especially for Versailles. He privately entered into an obscure and somewhat shady negotiation with Rakoczy, the head of the Hungarian insurgents, which was concealed from the Tsar, and carried on in a special cypher. The object of this negotiation was to put an end to the War of the Spanish succession, at the expense of Austria, Russia playing the part—conceived even in those early days,—of the 'honest broker,' for the benefit of France. Rakoczy himself appeared at Utrecht in April 1712, in the hope of carrying this matter through, but he was met by a courier

¹ Baluze to the King, Warsaw, Sept. 11, 1711 (French Foreign Office).

from Shafirof, who brought news of the conclusion of an advantageous peace with Constantinople, which peace 'he had succeeded in obtaining, in spite of the intrigues of the French Envoy, who had behaved worse to Russia than any Swedes, or Polish or Cossack traitors.' This cut the ground from under Kourakin's feet, and he made no further attempt to carry out his project.¹

Yet, insensibly, and by the mere force of circumstances, the gulf between the two countries narrowed, year by year. Russia, when she entered the European family, unconsciously made a great step towards this end. A current of natural and inevitable relations was slowly established, and developed, between the two peoples, even while their Governments remained apart. Russians went to France and settled there, Frenchmen, in still greater numbers, established themselves in Russia. Postnikof had already been desired to engage artists, architects, engineers and surgeons, in Paris, and at first he found it very difficult. 'The French,' he said, 'ask a thousand crowns a year, and think that to go to Moscow, is to go to the other end of the world.' Yet, little by little, the tide of emigration swelled. Guillemotte de Villebois, a Breton whose services Peter had personally engaged, during his visit to Holland, in 1698, and Balthazar de l'Osière, a Gascon, who had fought, in 1695, under the walls of Azof, in the ranks of the Muscovite army, formed the centre of a budding French colony in Russia. And I note the name of an engineer-officer, Joseph Gustave Lambert de Guérin, who took an active part in the sieges of Noteburg and Nienschantz, and who, in later years, advised the Tsar as to the choice of the site on which St. Petersburg was built.²

After the battle of Poltava the tide rose yet higher. Two French architects, Merault and De la Squire, were employed, in 1712, in building the new capital. In 1715, Peter took advantage of the death of Louis XIV. to secure, and at a cheap rate, the services of a whole flight of artists, who had been thrown out of work,—such as Rastrelli, Legendre, Leblanc, Davalet, and Louis Caravaque. In the following year, the direction of the ship-building establishments on the Neva was intrusted to the Baron de St. Hilaire. A certain

¹ *Kourakin Papers*, vol. v. pp. 1, etc., 171, etc., 178, 184, 197, 209.

² Barilich-Kamenski, *Historical Selections* (Moscow, 1814), pp. 66, 67.

Comte de Launay was made one of the gentlemen of the Tsar's bed-chamber, and his wife was chief Lady of Honour to the young daughters of the Sovereign. A French Chapel was founded on the Island of St. Basil at St. Petersburg, and the chaplain, Father Cailleau, a Franciscan, assumed the title of 'Almoner to the French nation.' It must be admitted that neither the chaplain, nor his parish, reflected great credit on themselves. He was an ill-conducted priest, who, before leaving France, had contrived to get himself appointed Chaplain to Marsillac's regiment, and had been discharged for misconduct. He was perpetually quarrelling with his St. Petersburg flock; he tried to force his way into the house of François Vasson, a smelter in the Tsar's service, and, when the way was barred, he called his wife a 'thief,' and 'an ill-conducted woman,' and treated her so roughly that she was forced to take to her bed. He thundered public excommunication against the painter Caravaque, and declared his marriage null, because the banns had been published elsewhere than in the Vassili-Ostrow Chapel. He ordered the bride to separate from her husband, and, when she refused, he persecuted her with a variety of coarse and defamatory songs, which formed the subject of an action brought against him, under the auspices of the French Consulate. In his defence, the Franciscan boasted openly, that he could speak with full knowledge of the private failings of the lady, 'having had an intimate acquaintance with them, prior to her illegal marriage.'¹

Independently of all this internal disorder, the condition of the colony was, in many respects, far from enviable. Lambert de Guérin, after serving three years and receiving no reward, pecuniary or otherwise, beyond the Cross of St. Andrew, was forced to sell everything he possessed, to save himself from starvation, and pay his way back to France. He wrote to the Duke of Orleans, in 1717, 'I think myself very happy to have escaped safe and sound from the States of that Prince (Peter I.), and to find myself back in the most flourishing kingdom in all the world; it is better to have bread and water here, than to own the whole of Muscovy.' And this was no isolated case, for, in a despatch sent to Dubois, in 1718, by the commercial agent, La Vie, I

¹ Records of the French Consulate at St. Petersburg, July 1720 (French Foreign Office).

find the following lines :—‘The condition of a great number of Frenchmen who settle in this country (Russia) seems to me so sad, that I feel it my duty to inform your Eminence of it. Twenty-five, who were formerly in the Tsar’s pay, have been discharged, in spite of the agreements made with them in Paris by the *Sieur Lefort*, the Prince’s agent. . . . A still larger number who were not formally engaged, and who had been promised funds, to be sent from Paris, to help them to establish themselves, are in a state of the greatest poverty, owing to the agent’s failure to execute this promise.’¹ One officer, named *De la Motte*, even went so far, when he returned to his own country, as to publish a warning to the public on this subject, which made a very great stir.²

Yet the impulse had been given, and, from year to year, the number of French immigrants into the new Northern capital increased, at such a rate as to arouse the alarm of the diplomatic agents of other Powers. The Dutch Resident, *De Bie*, made a perfect outcry.³ Meanwhile, in Paris, *Lefort*, a nephew of Peter’s early friend, endeavoured, with the help of the Chancellor, *Pontchartrain*, to form a Franco-Russian Trading Company, but, just as it seemed on the eve of success, this business fell through,—*Lefort* was arrested for debt. A sort of fate seemed to hang over the modest beginnings of the understanding which was destined to such a brilliant future. *Lefort*’s successor was a certain *Hugueton*, who called himself *Baron von Odik*, and whom the French Ministry recognised as a malefactor, ‘a London bankrupt whom the King would have hanged, and justly, if the King of England would have paid attention to the requests made for the possession of the wretch, who had taken refuge in London.’ Then came an unsuccessful attempt on the French side. The *Duc d’Orléans* sent the *Comte de la Marck* on a secret mission to the Tsar, at the springs of *Pyrmont*, in 1716, with directions to test the strength of the engagements which bound him to the King’s enemies.⁴ This fresh messenger of peace made great diplomatic preparations, drew up memoranda and preliminary plans, and, by the time he was ready, Peter had left *Pyrmont*.

¹ St. Petersburg, Jan. 3, 1718 (French Foreign Office).

² Cologne, 1704. This pamphlet gave rise to a prolonged discussion in print.

³ Despatches, dated Aug. 3 and 6, 1714 (Dutch State Papers).

⁴ ‘Instructions,’ dated June 18, 1716 (French Foreign Office).

The hope of any understanding seemed as far off as ever, but the logic of events ended by bringing the two countries into regular intercourse, and triumphed over the inconsistency and weaknesses of their various diplomats. While, in France, the Government began to recognise the insufficient value it had set on the new factor in European politics, Peter too, began to realise, more clearly, the inconveniences and dangers which the enterprises he had so thoughtlessly undertaken had raised about him, in the heart of Germany. Early in 1717, Prussia, whose interests he had specially served, threatened to abandon the over-venturous Sovereign. Alarmed at the attitude taken up by a coalition which she had joined, at the outset, under prudent reservations,—startled by the Tsar's conferences with Goertz, which had come to her ears, she thought it prudent to ensure her own safety, by means of a Secret Convention with France, signed on the 14th of September 1716. She accepted the mediation of the latter Power, and undertook to break off hostilities, in return for the surrender of Stettin. Peter had no resource left him but to follow this example, and his journey to France was forthwith decided. His arrival there was preceded, in February 1717, by that of twenty gentlemen, belonging to the best Russian families,—Jérebtsof, Volkonski, Rimski-Korssakof, Ioussoupof, Saltykof, Poushkin, Bézobrazof, Bariatinski, Biélossielski,—who had received permission to enter the King's Garde Marine. The hour had come for Russia and her Sovereign to make a fresh stride,—the greatest of all,—in that intercourse with the European world, which had become a law of their destiny.

Catherine did not take part in this journey, and that fact, in itself, indicates its nature and scope. Peter very seldom parted from this beloved companion. She had appeared beside him in every Court in Germany, and he had never given a thought to the effect her presence might produce. He did not think fit to try the experiment in Paris. Clearly, he felt that the new elements of culture and refinement he was there to meet, authoritatively demanded a greater display of decency, and propriety.

II

More than one difficulty cropped up during the journey. Peter reached Dunkirk on the 21st of April 1717, attended by fifty-seven persons. This numerous suite was, at first, a somewhat unpleasing surprise to his entertainers. The Tsar had given out that he was travelling in the strictest incognito, and the arrangements and outlay for his reception had been calculated on this basis. Fate willed that the earliest discussions between the august traveller's ministers and Monsieur de Liboy—the gentleman of the king's household who had been sent to receive him—should turn on a pitiful question of money. Would not his Imperial Majesty, it was inquired, agree to receive a fixed sum for his maintenance, during whatever time he elected to remain in France? The French Government was ready to give as much as 1500 *livres* a day. The expenses of hospitality were, at that period, always defrayed in this manner, in the case of foreign envoys to Russia, so the proposal in itself was not unbecoming. Yet Kourakin made a great outcry, which reduced de Liboy to silence, and likewise to despair—for his credit was strictly limited, and he perceived the waste in the Tsar's household to be something enormous. 'The chief cook, under pretext of the two or three dishes sent up to his master, every day, filches the value of a table that would suffice for eight people, both in food and wine.' De Liboy tried to economise, by cutting off the suppers, but this aroused a general outcry among the Russian gentlemen and their servants. And the suite steadily increased in number—soon there were eighty of them. Fortunately, the authorities at Versailles changed their minds, and the Regent sent fresh instructions, which gave his agent more elbow-room. Expense was not to be considered, so long as the Tsar was pleased. But it was not very easy to please the Tsar. De Liboy declared his nature 'betrayed some seeds of virtue,' but 'of the wildest.' He rose very early, dined towards ten o'clock, took only a very light supper, when he had dined heartily, and went to bed at nine o'clock at night. But, between dinner and supper time, he consumed an extraordinary quantity of brandy flavoured with aniseed, beer, wine, fruit, and every kind of food. 'He always has two or three dishes, prepared by his own cook,

standing ready to his hand. He will leave a magnificently-ordered table, and go and eat in his own room, has his beer brewed by one of his own men, considers the beer we give him detestably bad, and complains of everything.' He was a Gargantua, and a sulky one! The gentlemen of his suite were just as difficult to please, 'they like all good things, and thoroughly understand good cheer,' from which we may conclude that they had left a good deal of their savagery behind them.

But the table arrangements were a mere trifle, compared to the trouble of the transport service. The Tsar insisted on reaching Paris in four days, which seemed an impossible matter, with the relays at de Liboy's disposal. Kourakin glanced scornfully at the coaches offered him, and said, 'No gentleman had ever been seen driving about in a hearse'; he demanded *berlines*. As for the Tsar, he suddenly declared that nothing should induce him to travel either in a *berline* or a coach—he would have a two-wheeled cabriolet, like those he was accustomed to use at St. Petersburg. No cabriolet was to be had, either at Dunkirk or at Calais, and when, at last, the officials had utterly worn themselves out, to provide what he wanted, he changed his mind, so that de Liboy was driven to acknowledge, with bitterness, that 'this little Court is very changeable and irresolute, and, from the throne to the stables, greatly addicted to fits of bad temper.' The Tsar's will, and his plans, varied perpetually, from one hour to the other. There was no possibility of laying out a programme or arranging the smallest thing beforehand.

At Calais, where a stay of several days was made, the Sovereign grew a little more reasonable. He reviewed a regiment, inspected a fort, went so far as to be present at a hunting party given in his honour, and ended by becoming so gracious, that de Liboy appears to have felt some alarm for the virtue of *Madame La Presidente*, to whom the duty of doing the honours of the town to the travellers had been allotted. But the question of transport came to the front again, and grew so bitter, that de Liboy thought the journey would have been broken off. At one time, nobody knew how long the Tsar intended to stay at Calais, nor whether he would decide to go any farther. At that moment—it already was the 2nd of May—de Liboy was reinforced by a

notable coadjutor, the Marquis de Mailly-Nesle. A story was current in Paris, at the time, that this young nobleman had gone to meet the Muscovite Sovereign, without any formal commission from the authorities, under pretext of 'an ancient prerogative, which gave his family the right to meet all foreign kings who might enter France through Picardy.' And it was further declared, that, ruined as he was, he had contrived to borrow 1000 *pistoles* so as to carry on the tradition. A correspondent of the Duc de Lorraine's, who repeats these stories, adds certain details which give curious proof of the ideas then current in Paris concerning the expected guest. De Mailly, he declares, endeavoured to enter the Tsar's coach, whereupon Peter 'fell on him with his fists, and threw him out.' And on another occasion, the Muscovite Sovereign's sole reply to some casual observation was a hearty box on the ear.¹

The Marquis, as a matter of fact, had been duly and formally commissioned by the Regent, and all the public entertainment at the young man's expense, was pure and gratuitous spite. But the part he was called upon to play proved most ungrateful. He made a bad beginning, for he arrived during the Russian Easter, and the Tsar's suite, being all of them dead drunk, were quite unable to offer him a suitable reception. The only person able to keep his feet, and in something like his normal condition, was the Sovereign himself. 'Although,' as de Liboy tells us, 'he had gone out, at eight o'clock in the evening, incognito, to drink with his musicians, who were living in a tavern.' But the tavern and the company he found there had left him little inclination to accept the Marquis' complimentary remarks. Even on the following days, when he was sober, he found fault with him for being too elegant. Though he may not have actually fallen on him with his fists, he certainly launched epigrams at his head, and openly expressed his astonishment at seeing a man change his clothes every day. 'Cannot that young man find any tailor to dress him to his fancy?' The Tsar's temper had changed again, and for the worse. He had indeed given some sign, at last, of desiring to continue his journey, but he had pitched on a new style of locomotion. He would have a sort of litter, on which the body of an old phaeton,

¹ Sergent's *Letters*, Bibliothèque Nationale, Lorraine Collection, vol. 574 (56 s. s.).

found amongst some disused carriages, was to be fixed. And this was to be carried by horses. In vain it was pointed out that he would endanger his own neck by travelling in this strange fashion, to which the horses must necessarily be quite unaccustomed. 'Most men,' writes de Mailly, 'are led by reason, but these—if indeed the name of man can be given to persons who have nothing human about them—never listen to it.' The litter was arranged as best it could be managed,—the great point was to get away. De Mailly speaks more strongly even than de Liboy on the subject, adding, 'I do not know, as yet, whether the Tsar will lie at Boulogne or at Montreuil, but it is a great thing that he should start at all. I would with all my heart he were safe in Paris, and even that he had left it. When his Royal Highness has seen him, and he has spent several days in the city, I am persuaded, if I may dare say it, that he will not be sorry to be rid of him. None of the ministers, except Prince Kourakin, whom I have not seen to-day, can speak French . . . no commentary is possible on the strange antics of the others, who are truly a strange set.'¹

The start was made on the 4th of May. The Tsar left his litter before entering the different towns, drove through them in his coach, and then returned to his chosen mode of progression. This enabled him to get a good view of the country he passed through. Like another traveller, fifty years later, Arthur Young, he was struck by the wretched appearance of the country people he met. Matviéief's impression, twelve years earlier, had been very different; but the last years of a ruinous reign had done their work.²

The night was spent at Boulogne, and a start was made the next day, with the idea of sleeping at Amiens. But half way thither, the Tsar changed his mind, and insisted on going as far as Beauvais. It was pointed out to him that there were no horses ready. He replied with a volley of abuse. The *Intendant* of Beauvais, M. de Bernage, who was hastily warned, made desperate efforts, and collected the sixty horses necessary. He and the Bishop prepared a supper,

¹ This letter, dated May 3, 1717, did not appear in the 'Collected Documents,' relative to Peter's visit to France, included in the thirty-fourth volume of the great work published by the Imperial Russian Historical Society, which had access to the Records of the French Foreign Office: and this omission is not the only one.

² Solovief, vol. xvii. p. 88; compare vol. xv. p. 71.

and a concert, in the Episcopal Palace, with illuminations and fireworks. He adorned the Palace with the Tsar's arms, and his bedroom with portraits,—hardly, I should imagine, very like the originals,—of former Grand Dukes of Muscovy. Suddenly he learnt that the Tsar had entered the zealous *Intendant's* coach, hurried across the town, climbed back into his litter, and settled himself some quarter of a league off, in a sorry tavern, 'where all he spent was eighteen francs for his own food and that of thirty of his people,—drawing a napkin from his own pocket, and using it as a tablecloth.' Poor de Bernage was reduced to making his wife give a ball in the Bishop's Palace, at which the guests were consoled for the Tsar's absence, by the thought that the preparations made for his reception had not been utterly wasted.¹

At last, on the evening of the 10th of May, Peter entered Paris, escorted by 300 mounted Grenadiers. He had been offered, and had accepted, the Queen-Mother's lodging in the Louvre, and there, till the very last moment, he was expected. Coypel had received orders to clean the paint and gilding. Sergeant tells us that the beautiful bed-hangings which 'Madame de Maintenon had caused to be made for the king, and which were the richest and most magnificent in the world, had been put up.' In the great hall of the Palace, two tables, each for sixty persons, had been prepared, in the most magnificent style. As the Louvre did not seem sufficiently spacious to accommodate the whole of the Sovereign's suite, the Hall of Assembly, belonging to the French Academy, had been requisitioned by the authorities. This illustrious body, in answer to the formal notification of this fact, sent by the Duc d'Antin, who had charge of all buildings belonging to the Crown, thanked him for his 'politeness,' and lost no time in removing itself into the neighbouring apartment, the Hall of the Académie des Sciences, where it remained till the 24th of May.²

Nevertheless, advised by Count Tolstoi, who had preceded his master, the Regent had taken the precaution of preparing another, and less sumptuous lodging, in the Hotel Lesdiguières. This fine house in the Rue de la Cerisaie, had been

¹ Correspondence between the Bishop of Beauvais and the Agents of the Duc d'Orléans, French Foreign Office, May 1717. See also, for this part of Peter's Journey, Lemontey, *Histoire de la Régence* (Paris, 1832), vol. i. p. 113.

² *Records of the French Academy*, 1895, vol. ii. pp. 26-29.

built by Sebastian Zamet, and bought from the heirs of the celebrated financier by Francois de Bonne, Duc de Lesdiguières. It belonged, in 1717, to the Marshal de Villeroi, who himself had rooms in the Tuileries, and therefore was willing and able to lend his private residence. Here too great preparations were made; the Royal tapestries were brought under contribution, and all the other houses in the street were taken up, to provide additional accommodation.¹ Peter, with his unfailing knack of foiling every expectation, went first to the Louvre, entered the apartment in which he was expected to sup, glanced carelessly at the sumptuous preparations made for his special behoof, called for some radishes and a piece of bread, tasted six varieties of wine, swallowed two glasses of beer, caused the numerous candles, —the profusion of which offended his sense of economy,—to be put out, and departed. He had made up his mind to stay at the Hotel Lesdiguières.²

Even here, the apartment prepared for him was too fine, and, above all, too spacious, for his taste, and he had his camp bed placed in a closet. Fresh tribulations awaited the persons appointed to replace de Liboy and de Mailly about the Sovereign's person. St. Simon asserts that he suggested Marshal de Tessé to the Regent for this office, 'as being a man who had nothing else to do, who had all the habits and speech of good society, whose journeys and negotiations had accustomed him to deal with foreigners. . . . It was just the work for him.' But the Tsar's preference was at once bestowed on the person associated with the Marshal, a certain Comte de Verton, *Maitre d'Hôtel* to the King of France, 'a sensible fellow, fairly well born, fond of good cheer and high play.' The Tsar gave worry and trouble to both these functionaries.

To begin with, he shut himself up for three whole days like a prisoner within the hotel. My readers will imagine his curiosity as to the wonderful sights of the French Capital, and the impatience natural to such an extraordinarily turbulent and constantly eager nature. Yet he contained himself, and did violence to his own feelings, because he insisted that the King should begin by coming to him.

¹ Buvat, *Journal de la Régence* (Paris, 1865), p. 269. A commemorative tablet has been recently affixed to No. 10 Rue de la Cerisaie.

² Sergent, Letter, dated May 10, 1717.

This pretension was quite unforeseen. On former occasions he had always been more accommodating, or perhaps more careless, and little inclined to stand on ceremony. At Berlin, in 1712, he had gone straight to the Royal Castle, and found the King in his bed. At Copenhagen, in 1716, he had literally forced his way into Charles IV.'s chamber, through the double row of courtiers who had opposed his entrance, on account of the late hour selected by him for this irruption. But his behaviour in both these Capitals had all been of a piece,—familiar, cavalier, and, occasionally, even somewhat improper and uncouth.¹ He would appear to have taken it into his head that the widest difference existed between the Courts he already knew so well, and that he now approached for the first time. And he himself was quite different,—very much on his guard, apt to take offence, and rigidly and fastidiously observant of an etiquette, the laws of which he himself claimed the right to dictate.

The morning after his arrival, the Regent came to greet him. He took a few steps forward to meet his visitor, embraced him, according to St. Simon, 'with a great air of superiority,' pointed to the door of his cabinet, entered it first, 'without further civility,' and seated himself 'at the upper end.'

This interview, which lasted an hour, and during which Kourakin acted as interpreter, took place on the Saturday. It was not till the following Monday that the Regent made up his mind to respond to his Russian Majesty's demand, and send the little King to visit him. This time Peter went as far as the courtyard, received the Royal child at the door of his coach, and walked on his left hand, to his own apartment, where two State chairs had been prepared, that on the right for the King. Compliments were exchanged for a quarter of an hour, Kourakin still acting as interpreter, and the King took his leave. Then, with one of those sudden impulses which swept away all thought of etiquette, and brought back his natural simplicity, the Tsar took hold of the child, lifted him up in his strong arms, and kissed him as he held him. According to St. Simon, 'The King was not at all frightened, and got through the business very well.' Peter wrote to his wife, 'I give you notice that, last

¹ Sbornik, vol. xx. pp. 57-63.

Monday, I received a visit from the little King of this country, who is a very little taller than our Lucas' (a favourite dwarf); 'the child is exceedingly charming, both in face and figure, and fairly intelligent for his age.'

The visit was returned the next day, with the same ceremonies, all of which had been minutely discussed and arranged beforehand. Then the Tsar felt free to go and come. He took full advantage of his freedom, and forthwith began to go about the town as a private tourist, and in the simplest dress. He wore, according to Buvat, 'a quite plain overcoat of rather coarse grey barracan, a waistcoat of grey woollen stuff with diamond buttons, no cravat, no cuffs, and no lace on the wristbands of his shirt.' To this was added 'a black wig in the Spanish fashion, the back of which he had caused to be clipped, because he thought it too long, and without any powder . . . His overcoat had a small cape, like that of any ordinary traveller . . . and round his waist, outside the overcoat, was a silver laced belt, on which hung a cutlass, after the manner of the East.' This style of dress was the fashion in Paris, for a time, after the Sovereign's departure, and was called 'habit du Tsar,' or 'du Farouche.' Peter inspected public institutions, and went about in the shops, striking every one who had to do with him by the familiarity of his manners, which, nevertheless, had a certain touch of grandeur about them,—the suddenness of his movements,—his insatiable curiosity,—his uncertain temper,—his complete absence of shyness,—and his extreme stinginess. He frequently went out without informing anybody about him, would get into the first coach he came across, and have himself driven whithersoever his fancy listed. Thus one day, when Madame de Matignon had driven up close to the Hotel Lesdiguières, 'to gape,' as St. Simon puts it, he carried off her coach to Boulogne, and she was obliged to go home on foot. De Tessé, poor man, spent his life running after the Sovereign, and never knew where to find him.

On the 14th of May, Peter went to the Opera, where the Regent did him the honours of the Royal box. During the course of the performance he asked for some beer, and appeared to think it quite natural that the Regent should offer it to him, standing, with the salver in his hand. He took his time about emptying the glass, asked for a napkin

when he had drunk, and received it with 'a civil smile and a slight inclination of his head.' The public, according to St. Simon, was more than a little astonished at the sight. The next day, the Tsar climbed into a hack coach, inspected various workshops, went to the Gobelins, plied the workmen with questions, and left a single crown amongst them when he went away. On the 19th of May, he gave 25 sols. to the turncock at the Ménagerie; he paid ready money to the tradesmen who crowded his house, but he was a hard bargainer, and after having, as we have seen, maltreated a splendid wig, made by the greatest hairdresser in Paris, he gave the artist 7 livres and 10 sols., for what was worth at least five-and-twenty crowns!¹

He showed not the slightest regard for the rank and precedence of other people: took no more notice, as St. Simon says again, of the Prince and Princesses of the Blood, than of the chief nobles of the Court, and paid the former no more respect than the latter. When the Princes refused to wait on him, until they were sure he would return the civility to the Princesses, he sent them word they might stay at home. The Duchesses de Berry and d'Orléans sent their equerries to pay him their compliments, and he condescended to visit these two ladies at the Luxembourg and the Palais Royal, but still 'with an air of great superiority.' The other Princesses only saw him as sightseers, and from a distance. The Comte de Toulouse was the only one of the Princes who was presented to him, and this only when he received him at Fontainebleau as Master of the Royal Hounds. The Duc du Maine appeared at the head of the Swiss Guard, and the Prince de Soubise commanded the Gendarmes, at a Review to which the Tsar was invited, and at which 3000 coaches, filled with sightseers, male and female, surrounded the parade ground. But he did not offer the slightest civility, either to them or to any of the officers present.

On the 21st of May, he went to see Pajot d'Onsen Bray, the Director of the Posts, at Grand Bercy, and spent his day inspecting his curious collections, accompanied by the celebrated Pere Sébastien, a gifted physician and mechanic, whose real name was Jean Truchet. He showed all kinds of attentions to Carme, a Savant, but when the Duchesse de

¹ Sergeant, Letter of 19th June 1717.

Rohan, who happened to be at her house at Petit Bercy, waited upon him, she retired utterly discomfited, and complained to her husband that the Tsar had not treated her with the slightest civility. 'And why, Madame,' replied the Duke—(loud enough to be heard by one of the Russian gentlemen, who happened to understand French, and retorted very sharply)—'Did you dream of expecting any civility from that brute?'¹

St. Simon saw the Sovereign in the house of the Duc d'Antin, and watched him at his leisure, having specially requested not to be presented to him. He struck him as being 'rather talkative, but with the air of considering himself the master everywhere.' He remarked the nervous convulsion which suddenly contracted his features, completely altering their expression. De Tessé told him that this would happen several times a day. The Duchesse d'Antin and her daughters were present at the festivity, but the Tsar 'walked past them proudly,' with a mere bend of his head. An excellent picture of the Tsarina, which d'Antin had contrived to procure, and which he had hung over one of the chimney-pieces, pleased Peter greatly. He spoke very politely on the subject, and his lack of courtesy would really appear to have been some remnant of timidity and shyness, for he certainly improved, by degrees, in this respect. Towards the end of his stay, he went from house to house, accepting all invitations, and ended by behaving delightfully even to the ladies. At St. Ouen, where he went to visit the Duc de Tresmes, and where a great number of fair sight-seers were assembled, he forgot his pride, and took pains to make himself pleasant. One of the lady guests, his host's daughter, the Marquise de Béthune, was presented to him, and he invited her to sit at table with him. Paris had ended by civilising the Tsar.

Whatever may be said to the contrary, he was fairly well behaved, if not over-gallant, when he went to see Madame de Maintenon at St. Cyr. St. Simon's description of this visit, which has been so frequently repeated, is universally known. According to him, the Tsar burst unexpectedly into the lady's apartment, and subjected her to a silent and even brutal scrutiny. Auger, in the biography which he has added to Madame de Maintenon's letters, published by

¹ Sergent, Letter, dated May 29, 1717.

Santreau de Marsy, confirms these details, and even declares that the Tsar's unseemly curiosity extended to the niece of the lady who had been the great King's wife. 'He noticed her (Madame de Caylus) one day at a festive gathering, and, learning who she was, he went straight to her, took her by the hand, and looked at her long and intently.'¹ The most unlikely legends need not surprise any historian, but it is somewhat astonishing that Auger does not appear to have read the following letter from Madame de Maintenon, which is included in the collection to which his biography of her is affixed. The letter in question is addressed to Madame de Caylus. 'M. Gabriel has just come in, and told me that M. Bellegarde gives me notice that he (that is to say, the Tsar) desires to come here after dinner, if I will permit it. I dare not refuse, and shall await him in my bed. I have been told nothing more. I do not know whether I am to give him a ceremonious reception, whether he desires to see the house and the young ladies, whether he will go into the choir. I am leaving everything to chance. . . . The Tsar arrived at seven o'clock in the evening, he seated himself beside my bed, and asked me if I was ill. I replied that I was. He then caused me to be asked what was the matter with me. I answered, "great age, and a somewhat weak constitution." He did not know what to say to me, and his interpreter did not appear to hear what I said to him. His visit was very short. He is still in the house, but where, I know not. He caused the curtains at the foot of my bed to be opened, so that he might look at me ; you may imagine I gave him his way !'²

On the 11th of June, the date of this interview, and after a month in Paris, Peter was no longer the extraordinary person he has been described as having been on this occasion. But he still felt more at ease, when far from the elegance and ceremony of Courts and drawing-rooms. He was quite happy, for instance, at the Invalides, where he treated the pensioners in the most friendly manner, tasted their soup, and patted them familiarly on the back. At the Mint,

¹ I. CCXXXVI.

² June 11, 1717, vol. v. p. 205. See also, for confirmation, the *Memoirs of Mme. de Cr  qui*, niece of Marshal de Tess   (vol. ii. p. 9). But these memoirs are of somewhat doubtful authenticity. Dangeau (vol. xviii. pp. 101 and 104) declares every detail of the Tsar's visit to St. Cyr was discussed and arranged beforehand.

where he saw a medal struck to commemorate his stay in France; at the Royal Printing works; at the College des Quatre Nations; at the Sorbonne—where advantage was taken of his presence to discuss the reunion of the Greek and Latin Churches;—at the Observatory;—at the house of Delisle, the geographer, and that of the great English oculist, Woolhouse, who performed an operation for cataract in his presence, he struck observers as being too nervously and strangely curious, perhaps, but full of intelligence, greedy of knowledge, and not altogether discourteous. He replied politely and modestly to the doctors of the Sorbonne, that he knew too little about the matter they discussed to speak of it, being more than occupied with the task of ruling his Empire, and bringing his war with Sweden to a close. But that he should be glad to see them enter into correspondence with the bishops of his Church. He graciously received the memorandum finally remitted to him on the subject, to which, some three years later, the Russian clergy sent a curious reply, beginning with a panegyric on the Sorbonne, and ending with an acknowledgment of their own impotence. The Russian Church, maimed by the suppression of the Patriarchate (one of Peter's reforms), was quite incapable of taking part in such a discussion.¹

Art was less attractive to the Russian Sovereign. When he was shown the Crown jewels in the Louvre, valued at 30,000,000, he pulled a wry face; the money, in his opinion, might have been better spent. When Marshal de Villeroi, who superintended this exhibition, suggested that a visit should be paid to 'the greatest treasure in France,' the Tsar had some difficulty in realising that the treasure referred to was the little king.²

It was not till the 19th of June, on the eve of his departure, that he went to the Institute. No warning having been sent to the Academy of France, only two or three of the members were present to receive him. They showed him nothing but their Hall of Assembly, which had been prepared as a dormitory for some of his own officers, explained the

¹ This reply, which was drawn up by the head of the old ecclesiastical party in Russia, Iavorski, reached its destination through an indirect channel. Peter had already forwarded other objections, put into official shape by Prokopovitch, who had assisted the Tsar's reforming work in Church matters. See P. Pierling, *The Sorbonne and Russia* (1863), p. 50, etc.

² Sergent, May 29th, 1717.

nature of their deliberations, and exhibited their picture of the King. He was better treated at the Académie des Sciences, where all the members were assembled, not, I suspect, without some complicity on Peter's part. The curiosities of the Dictionary of the Academy cannot have had much charm for him, but at the Académie des Sciences, he saw M. la Faye's machine for raising water; M. Lemery's 'Arbre de Mars,' the screw-jack invented by M. Delesse; and M. Le Camus' coach,—and thanked the company for his reception, in a letter written in Russian.¹

He was present on the same day, in a private gallery, at a sitting of the Parliament, held in full-dress, and great ceremony. The Duc de Maine and the Comte de Toulouse were prevented by his presence from bringing forward their protest against the decision of the Regency, as to the rights they claimed.²

It was a full, almost an overwhelming programme, but Peter,—though he took every advantage of it, observing everything, putting endless questions, and cramming his note-book, which he opened perpetually and unconcernedly wherever he might chance to be, at the Louvre, at church, or in the street,—did not deny himself any of the pleasures, extravagances, and excesses to which he was addicted. And here the worst side of his visit to Paris appears. At the Trianon he astonished French society by turning the water of the fountains on to the onlookers for his own amusement. But at Marly he did not content himself with such undignified pranks. This was the place chosen by him, so a contemporary relates, 'to shut himself up with a mistress whom he has taken here, and with whom . . . in Madame de Maintenon's apartment.' He then dismissed the girl with a couple of crowns, and boasted of his performance in presence of the Duc d'Orleans in terms which the above-mentioned contemporary only ventures to reproduce in Latin. *Dixit ei se salutavisse quemdam meretricem decies nocte in una, et, huic datis pro tanto labore tantum duobus nummis, tunc illam exclamavisse: Sane, Domine, ut vir magnifice, sed parcissime ut imperator mecum egisti.*³ The news of the orgies with which he disgraced the royal residences reached Madame de Maintenon's

¹ *Bulletin du Bibliophile* (1859), p. 611, etc.

² Marais' *Memoirs* (Paris, 1863), vol. i. p. 207.

³ Louville's *Memoirs* (Paris, 1818), vol. ii. p. 241.

ears in her retreat, and she wrote of them to her niece: 'I have just heard that the Tsar takes a low mistress about with him, to the great scandal of Versailles, of the Trianon, and of Marly.'¹ At the Trianon he had to be attended by the Paris doctors; at Fontainebleau he seems to have shown little interest in the coursing, but he supped so freely that the Duc d'Antin thought it prudent, on the return journey, to slip away from him, and get into another carriage, which action, according to St. Simon, was justified by the event, for at Petit Bourg, where the Tsar stopped for the night, two country women were sent for, to clean up his Majesty!

The general impression, influenced by incidents of this nature,—exaggerated, doubtless, in the telling,—was somewhat doubtful, but rather unfavourable than otherwise. 'I remember hearing from Cardinal Dubois,' writes Voltaire, 'that the Tsar was nothing but a wild fellow, born to be boatswain of a Dutch ship.'² This was much the same opinion as that of Burnet, twenty years previously, during Peter's visit to London. St. Simon himself,—so decided otherwise in praise or blame,—seems doubtful on the subject. The famous 'Memoirs' contradict the 'Additions to Dangeau's Journal.' The 'Memoirs,' being the more spontaneous, strike me as being also more sincere, and they are certainly far from laudatory. Even in the 'Additions,' which are more conventional and affected, I find mention of 'indecent orgies' and of 'a strong tinge of ancient barbarism.'³

When Peter took leave of the King, he would accept no gift but two splendid Gobelins hangings. He refused, for some reason of etiquette, 'a sword splendidly mounted with diamonds,' and he gave the lie, in the most unexpected fashion, to those stingy habits which had so largely contributed to make him unpopular in the capital. I read in a letter from Sergent, 'The Tsar, who has been so much reproached, during his stay here, for his lack of generosity, gave most brilliant proof of it on the day of his departure. He left 50,000 *livres* to be distributed amongst the officers who have served his table since he entered France; 30,000 *livres* for his guard; 30,000 *livres* to be divided among the Royal manufactories and workshops which he went to see; his por-

¹ Letter quoted above.

² Letter to Chauvelin, Oct. 3, 1760, *General Correspondence*, vol. xii. p. 123.

³ Dangeau, vol. xvii. p. 81.

trait, set in diamonds, for the King, another for Marshal de Tessé, another for the Duc d'Antin, another for Marshal d'Estrées, another for M. de Livry, and another, worth 6000 *livres*, to the King's *Maitre d'Hôtel* who attended him. He has also distributed a great number of gold and silver medals, bearing the principal actions of his life, and incidents of his battles.'

Thus, having never lost an occasion of showing off his whims and freaks of temper, he ended by paying his score right royally. The shabby gratuities distributed during his stay were bestowed by the private individual he professed to be, even though, from time to time, the incognito was cast aside. At the moment of departure, the Sovereign allowed his true personality to appear.

In Paris, as we have seen, his incognito was never taken seriously, and, from first to last, he was given Royal honours. All along the road to Spa, where Catherine awaited him, the Provinces vied with the Capital in gorgeous hospitality. At Rheims, where Peter only spent a couple of hours, and looked at nothing but the famous 'shaking pillar' in the Church of St. Nicaise, the Municipality spent 455 *livres* and 13 *sols* on the collation offered to him. It cost the town of Charleville 4327 *livres* to entertain the Sovereign for one night. There a richly-decorated barge, adorned with his colours, waited to carry him by the Meuse to Liège, and a whole cargo of provisions was shipped—170 lbs. of meat at 5 *sols* a lb., 1 roe deer, 35 chickens or capons, 6 large turkeys at 30 *sols* each, 83 lbs. of Mayence ham at 10 *sols*, 200 cray-fish, 200 eggs at 30 *sols* a 100, 1 fifteen-pound salmon at 25 *sols*, 2 large trout, and 3 casks of beer.¹

The Regent, on his part, pushed his courtesy so far as to desire Rigaud and Nattier to paint him two portraits of the Russian Sovereign.

Let us now proceed to examine the practical results of this first and last appearance of the victor of Poltava, amidst the declining splendours of the French Monarchy.

III

Two stumbling-blocks stood in the way of the political and commercial alliance which Peter had hoped to secure by

¹ Archives of the town of Châlons. See *Revue Contemporaine*, 1865 (Barthélemy).

his visit to Paris ;—the Treaty, signed in April 1715, which bound France to Sweden until 1718, and ensured the latter country a quarterly subsidy of 150,000 crowns ; and the personal ties existing between the Regent and the King of England. Negotiations were opened as soon as the Tsar arrived, but Marshal de Tessé,—to whom they were confided, in conjunction with Marshal d'Uxelles,—soon perceived that the only object of his own Government was 'to dance on the slack rope,' thus amusing the Russian Sovereign until his departure ;¹ while, at the same time, English Statesmen being kept on the alert, the friendship of England was to be secured, and Sweden, tamed by the prospect of a French understanding with the Tsar, was to be rendered yet more manageable. In vain did Peter boldly and frankly take the initiative. He straightforwardly offered to replace Sweden in that system of alliances which had, hitherto, guaranteed the balance of power in Europe. He would follow that country's example, make 'diversions,' and accept subsidies. So far, so good. But figures had to be discussed, and on this preliminary point the agreement dragged for weeks. When that was settled, Prussia demanded, through Baron de Cnyphausen, her Minister in Paris, to be included in the Treaty. This again was very welcome. France and Russia undertook to guarantee her the possession of Stettin, but it became necessary to alter the prearranged form of the projected alliance. Peter stirred up his plenipotentiaries and his secretaries, and the Regent, having private information from Berlin which set his mind completely at rest regarding this vast expenditure of ink, let him work his will. When the Treaty had been duly drawn up, and only awaited signature, it became evident that the whole labour had been in vain, for Cnyphausen had no powers from his Government. And the Tsar was forced to depart empty-handed.

The Regent laughed at the Muscovite Sovereign, but De Tessé was not free from anxiety as to the possible and more distant result of Peter's discomfiture. Might not the Tsar, mortified and discouraged, be driven to throw himself into the Emperor's arms, or to treat directly with Sweden ? But no ! Prussia, the only strong footing left him in all Germany, held him firmly. A meeting at Amsterdam, to recommence negotiations, was brought about the following month, at the

¹ De Tessé's *Memoirs* (Paris, 1806), vol. ii. p. 319.

pressing instance of the Tsar. The Regent agreed, but his resolution not to take any serious action was unshaken, and all he did was to change his tactics. Cnyphausen had been provided, by this time, with full powers, but the pretensions of France had suddenly altered. When, on the 2nd of September, and largely owing to the eagerness of the Tsar, a new Treaty was drawn up, duly provided with 'public' and with 'secret' articles—as was only proper in the case of a diplomatic document fresh from the hands of the representatives of three great Powers—another matter was arranged—a platonic hope and *desideratum*. According to the public articles, the mediation of the King of France for peace in the North was accepted, but subject to the definite rupture of the engagements absolutely binding his Most Christian Majesty to Sweden. The secret articles stipulated for a defensive alliance, on the basis of the Treaties of Baden and Utrecht; but any definition of the reciprocal duties of the allied Powers, resulting from it, was deferred to some future negotiation. France did indeed undertake not to renew her Treaty of Subsidies with Sweden, at its expiration, but this undertaking was merely verbal. The King's plenipotentiaries had so insisted on this point that Peter mistrusted them: and the event proved him right.

Nothing was done, in fact. There was not even a beginning of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The individuals selected to represent each side were, moreover, most unfortunately chosen. Peter had expressed a desire to see M. de Verton, whose character and qualities pleased him, as French Envoy at St. Petersburg. M. de Verton was duly appointed, received his instructions, and was on the point of starting, when he was arrested and thrown into prison by his creditors. The representation of French interests on the banks of the Neva remained in the hands of La Vie, who could hardly pay the postage of his letters. Russia, too, was represented in Paris by Baron von Schleinitz, whose experiences were no less unpleasant.

The emptiness of the Treaty of the 2nd of September soon became apparent. In the following year, 1718,—while Schleinitz was conferring with Cellamare,—France, with England, Holland and the Emperor, entered into quadruple alliance against Spain, and the four allies vowed each other mutual support until the end of the Northern war. The Comte de

Rotembourg, French Envoy at Berlin, was labouring to conclude a Treaty between Prussia and England, which was to end in a separate peace between Prussia and Sweden, in return for the surrender of Stettin. Meanwhile, at Stockholm, Campredon was quietly negotiating for the renewal of the Treaty of 1715!

Thus Russia and France were in open opposition. Both countries, it is true, shrank from any idea of declared hostilities. Each acted cautiously, and there was even a certain exchange of civilities. Peter's eyes were turned on Constantinople, where the Emperor's Envoy was soliciting the Turk's alliance against Russia, and the Regent, on his side, aware of the possibility that Goertz's plan might be realised independently of France, authorised De Bonac, who had great influence at the Porte, to stand by Prince Dashkof. The Tsar begged the King to stand godfather to his daughter Nathalia, and the Regent replied to this courtesy by assuring Schleinitz that Campredon should be disowned. But the discovery of Cellamare's conspiracy, and of the letters of Schleinitz, amongst the imprudent Minister's papers, threw more cold water on the Russo-French relations. And the Regent's indignation at the complicity of the Russian Minister—offensive enough, in all good truth—was likely to be increased by the fact that all fear of Goertz was now a thing of the past. The headsman had settled his account. But the Tsar's conciliatory attitude, and an early peace with Spain, gradually brought things back to their former condition. Peter had set his heart on emerging from his state of isolation, and, in January 1720, Schleinitz was again at work, bombarding the Regent with requests for French mediation. All he claimed was a written declaration that the King was bound by no engagement incompatible with the impartiality indispensable to a mediator. But the Duc d'Orléans took a high stand: declaring he had already said Campredon was disowned, and that his word was worth all the documents in the world. The Tsar gave in at last, on every point, even on the association of England with France in the matter of mediation, although he had considerable grievances against the former country.¹

This prompt agreement and obsequiousness had their real

¹ Letter from the Tsar to the Duc d'Orléans, May 29, 1720 (Paris Foreign Office).

foundation in another reason—a secret one, which was to sway the policy of the Russian ruler in all his future negotiations with the Regent and with France. In July 1719, poor La Vie made a heroic effort to send a special despatch to Paris, with a sensational piece of intelligence. The Tsar had taken it into his head to marry his second daughter—‘very handsome and well proportioned, and who would be taken to be a perfect beauty, if the colour of her hair were not a little too fiery’—to the young King of France. The Lady in question was the Princess Elizabeth. Peter at first thought of finding her a husband in the person of the King of England’s grandson.¹ When this request was denied, he turned, with all his usual swiftness and eagerness, to the idea of a French alliance. But, once again, his Diplomatic representative in Paris failed him. Hardly had Schleinitz emerged from the unpleasant predicament into which his intercourse with Cellamare had brought him, before he found himself accused, by the Regent, of having betrayed the secret of the negotiations in which he had taken part. The French Government refused to treat with him. He was recalled, but was unable to return, being detained, like de Verton, by his creditors, and all his fortune having disappeared in Law’s speculations, he was soon reduced ‘to the last extremity of misery.’² Peter was obliged to fall back on La Vie’s good offices, but the wretched commercial agent’s communications were but coldly received at Versailles. The Tsar, it was replied, would have to begin by making his peace with Sweden. The Tsar was willing enough, and, to that end, accepted the assistance of Campredon, who spent the Spring of 1721 travelling backwards and forwards between Stockholm and St. Petersburg. But, when that clever diplomatist had successfully concluded his pacific mission, after having lavished all his skill, showered compliments on the Tsar, and whispered promises of ducats to his Ministers, Dubois,³ who then held the reins of French politics, as soon as the Treaty of Nystadt was safely signed, put forward fresh demands. Before France went any further, her mediation between Russia and England must be accepted. This was the Regent’s great

¹ *Kourakin Papers*, vol. ii. p. 121.

² Villeroi to Dubois, Aug. 13, 1721 (French Foreign Office).

³ Campredon’s Despatch, dated March 23rd, 1721 (French Foreign Office).

object, and his Minister's. The Tsar agreed to discuss the proposal, but he, too, was longing to introduce another subject, and hardly knew how to set about it. His plans had undergone a change. Dolgorouki, who had replaced Schleinitz in Paris, had heard the King was affianced to a Spanish Princess. But France was so richly endowed with Princes that a suitable husband for the Tsarevna might yet be found within its borders. In November 1721, Tolstoy flattered himself he had at last found means of broaching the subject. With an innocent air, he showed Campredon a copy of the *Gazette de Hollande*, which announced the nomination of the Marquis de Belle-Isle as the King's Ambassador Extraordinary to St. Petersburg, charged to request the hand of the Tsar's eldest daughter, for the Duc de Chartres.¹ Campredon knew his business too well to be deceived as to the origin of this false news. But he was somewhat taken aback at the extent of the political combinations which the Tsar desired to attach to this new plan. Russia was to guarantee the *status quo*; the King of Spain was to renounce his claim to the French Crown, in favour of the Regent; there was to be a mutual guarantee between Russia and France, ensuring the Russian succession to the future Duchesse de Chartres, and, meanwhile, the Duke de Chartres was to be elected King of Poland. All these points, and many others, were contained in a memorandum drawn up in January 1722, which the luckless Schleinitz, lifted temporarily out of his beggary, by means of a few thousand roubles, was charged to present to the Versailles Cabinet,—Dolgorouki's official intervention appearing both inadvisable and risky to the Tsar.² Campredon, too, was requested to bring forward these proposals and requests, and to solicit instructions to reply to them.

These instructions were long in coming, but I am inclined to think Dubois has been unjustly blamed for the prolonged silence in which he is said to have taken refuge. The Cardinal Minister, and his Representative at the Russian Court, are described as having been in complete conflict over the matter. The Diplomat, half distracted by a delay which compromised the success of his negotiation, and

¹ Campredon's Despatch, Nov. 24, 1721.

² Memorandum presented by Schleinitz, Feb. 10, 1722. Secret instructions addressed to him, Dec. 1721, French Foreign Office (*Russia*, vol. xi. p. 420).

imperilled the interests of his country;—the Cardinal, absorbed by personal anxieties, which rendered him indifferent to any other. Many picturesque details have been grouped about the incident. We hear of fifteen couriers hurrying one after the other from St. Petersburg to Paris, and vainly awaiting orders in the Versailles ante-chamber;—of Campredon himself, shut up in his house, and counterfeiting sickness, and of de Bonac, at Constantinople, intervening, on his own responsibility, in the disputes between Russia and Turkey, with the object of saving this invaluable alliance from the failure which threatened it.¹ French historical authorities are perpetually at war with the Government of the Regency, and a foreign writer can scarcely dare to contradict historians who are his own masters in his art, but he may, perhaps, venture to set forth actual facts. Campredon *never* sent fifteen couriers to Cardinal Dubois,—he would have found that more than difficult. No courier could travel, in those days, from St. Petersburg to Versailles, for less than five or six thousand *livres*, and, at that particular moment, the French Diplomat, whose salary was more than a year in arrear, had probably shut himself up in his house for reasons of economy. During the whole duration of his mission, *two couriers*, who travelled in company, for safety, carried all the extraordinary despatches between the two Capitals. And the Marquis de Bonac had no need, when he made up for the weakness of French Diplomacy on the banks of the Neva, by his personal efforts at Constantinople, to take counsel with his own patriotism and clear-headedness; all he did was to follow very clear, and by no means fresh instructions, which were constantly renewed up till January 1723.² Finally, the Cardinal, who, *at the close of* 1723, sent Campredon orders which set French foreign policy on a new path, bristling with difficulties, could not, *in* 1724, have been so absorbed by the anxieties of Home Government and of his own personal position, as to leave his agent, for almost twelve months, without any fresh instructions; and for this simple reason,—he was dead!

¹ See, amongst other authorities, Vandal, *Louis XV. et Elisabeth* (Paris, 1882), pp. 64, 65.

² De Bonac's Instructions, Jan. 6, 1723. His despatch to Dubois, Jan. 5, 1723, French Foreign Office (*Turkey*, vol. lxx.).

The Cardinal did indeed leave Campredon's despatches and Baron de Schleinitz' and Prince Dolgorouki's memoranda unanswered, *for just six months*. But this long silence did not *follow*, as has been generally supposed, on the despatch of his *first* instructions, as to the extraordinary Diplomatic overtures which had reached him through various channels from the Russian Court. The silence *preceded* the instructions, and was, *at that moment*, perfectly justified. The whole of the incident took place between the Spring and Autumn of 1722. Peter, having made peace with Sweden, had suddenly changed his views as to his French Alliance. Up to this point, he had only considered it as a warlike expedient; he now regarded it as the basis of a whole political edifice, which was to include the two farthest extremities of Europe—Poland and Spain—which edifice he desired to crown by a family contract and a brilliant marriage. This marriage was, as a matter of fact, the end and aim of the whole undertaking. The bomb once fired, he left his capital, and undertook a somewhat adventurous expedition, more than problematic in its results. I allude to his Persian campaign. His absence lasted six months; the Cardinal's silence covered the same period of time. I am inclined to think that Dubois did the wisest thing possible under the circumstances, and to affirm, that Campredon fully agreed with him. He made no attempt to multiply his couriers, and never lost patience, except as regarded the fact that he was left without money. Nothing really suffered, save and except his own strong taste for expense and luxury.

In the month of October 1722, news reached Versailles of the relative success of the Persian expedition, of the likelihood of a fresh conflict between Russia and Turkey, and of the departure of Iagoujinski for Vienna, on a, probably, important mission. Dubois forthwith concluded it was time to speak, and, pre-occupied as he may hitherto have been, by the crisis through which the Regent's Government was passing, in consequence of his own struggle with Villeroy, it was not too late. The two couriers already referred to, Massip and Puylaurent, left Versailles on the 25th of October 1722, and arrived at Moscow on the 5th of December—before Iagoujinski's departure. Campredon, who was warned of their approach, ventured, before their arrival,

to joke the departing Diplomat. Iagoujinski had just rid himself of his wife, and forced her to take the veil. Was he, the French Minister inquired, going to Vienna in search of a new partner? 'I would rather have sought one in Paris,' replied the Russian, 'but you have kept us waiting too long.' 'Pray wait a few days longer,' answered the Frenchman.

Massip and Puylaurent brought the French Envoy everything his heart could desire—clear and definite orders in the same sense as those De Bonac had received, money to set him on his feet again, and more money, to distribute to those about him. The sums bestowed on him were very liberal, and his orders, on the whole, were very reasonable. The Versailles authorities would not hear of mixing up the two affairs. The Franco-Russian alliance was one thing, the idea of marrying the Duc de Chartres to the Tsarevna was another. The first question depended on the subsidies to be paid by France, and the services to be rendered by Russia. 'France was willing to give as many as 400,000 crowns a year; would Russia absolutely promise the assistance of an army, in the case of a war with Germany?' The second question was a matter of expediency. If the Princess Elizabeth's dowry was to consist of the Crown of Poland, she must bring that dowry in her hand. All accessory conditions would be easily arranged. The Regent would even consent to recognise the Tsar's lately assumed Imperial title, though not, of course, without claiming a considerable price in return for this concession.

The negotiation seemed in a fair way to success. Why then did it fail? How came it to be delayed again, and for a considerable time? Through no fault of the Cardinal's, certainly. The first difficulties arose out of the nature and diplomatic habits of the Russian Government, to which I have already referred. Muscovite Diplomacy always worked secretly, groping its way. Every conference was hedged in with an amount of precaution which sorely hindered progress. The Ministers, full of suspicion and constantly on the *qui vive*, were inapproachable in their own offices. Secret interviews were held,—sometimes even in such places as the Café of the 'Four Frigates,' a favourite resort of common sailors. The Tsar, as distrustful and secretive as his Ministers, always made some public pretext for conferring with a foreign Diplomat, to mask the real

object of the interview. In February 1723, he took advantage of Campredon's request for an audience, to announce the death of *Madame*, to send for him to his house at Préobrajenskore, where, behind carefully closed doors, and assisted by Catherine, who acted as interpreter, he opened his heart ;—and then it became evident that the two Powers were once more utterly at variance. Campredon held to his instructions, which had not changed, and were not to change, even after Dubois and the Regent were dead, and the Duc de Bourbon was at the head of affairs. The Russian Sovereign's ideas had altered. He still desired to marry his daughter to a French Prince, and to give her Poland for her portion, declaring that the reigning king of that country would 'be easily persuaded, through the medium of some new mistress, witty and attractive, to vacate the throne.' But he seemed opposed, both in word and deed, to any political alliance between the two countries. He hinted at a possible rupture with Turkey, from which Power he desired to retake the town of Azof. He seemed to meditate an expedition into Sweden, with the object of placing the Duke of Holstein on the throne, aided by a popular insurrection. He even spoke of joining the Pretender, and sending Russian troops to make a descent on the shores of Great Britain.¹ In August 1723, just after the death of Dubois, the new Secretary of State, De Morville, then taking up the direction of foreign affairs, was fain to write to Campredon in the following terms: 'Your despatches have proved more clearly than ever the utter impossibility of treating with the Tsar, until he has settled his plans and ideas . . . we must wait till time and opportunity permit us to judge whether the King may safely make engagements with this Prince, and carry them out.' They waited thus, and vainly, until Peter died. No progress whatever was made. Campredon may, at one moment, have thought success was within his grasp. Early in August 1724, the Tsar was filled with joy at the news of a pacific arrangement, to which De Bonac had powerfully contributed, of his differences with Turkey. As he was leaving the Church, in which a *Te Deum* had just been sung, he embraced the French Envoy, and spoke these words, big with promise—'You have always been an angel of peace to me! I am not ungrateful, as you

¹ Solovief, vol. xviii. p. 131.

will soon perceive.' A few days later, the Russian Ministers appeared at the French Legation, their faces wreathed in smiles. Their master had given in on every point, even on that which had hitherto formed one of the principal difficulties of the negotiation—the admission of England into the arrangement to be made with France. The alliance seemed a settled thing. But all these rejoicings were premature. There was another long pause, and the signing of the Treaty was still deferred. Peter and all his circle were so completely absorbed by the Mons business, that, until the end of November, it was impossible to get speech with them. And besides, every time Campredon met Ostermann, he was obliged to risk his life in crossing the Neva. There was no bridge, and great blocks of ice came whirling down the stream. When, at last, communications were re-opened and a conference arranged, matters once more came to a full standstill; the Tsar had changed his mind, and would not hear of England being included in the alliance. What had happened? It was a very simple matter. Kourakin, who had been sent to Paris, to replace Dolgorouki, finding his new post a pleasant one, and desiring to remain there, had sent home accounts of certain imaginary diplomatic triumphs, of which the Russian Sovereign's friendly expressions to Campredon, and his conciliatory inclinations, had been the outcome. Kourakin had even gone so far as to give his master hopes of a possible marriage between the Tsarevna and Louis xv. himself, —whom he described as being tired of his Spanish fiancée.¹ But he had been forced, finally, to acknowledge the truth, and even to admit that the marriage of the Russian Princess with any one of the Princes of the Blood, was considered by the French Ministers 'too remote a possibility to be mixed up in the present negotiation.'

From that moment, the fate of that negotiation was sealed. It did indeed seem to return to some life and hope, after Catherine I.'s accession, but it soon fell back into oblivion. The Treaty lay unsigned, and the Tsarevna Elizabeth remained unmarried. The alliance thus prematurely projected was not to become a reality for another century and a half, and its way was yet to be prepared, amidst trials and convulsions which shook the whole European continent.

¹ Solovief, vol. xviii. p. 126.

The failure of the attempt, made on the threshold of the 18th century, may, I think, be explained and justified without necessarily casting blame on the Governments either of France or of Russia. No agreement was come to, because, in the first place, the separation between the two countries was too great, and in the second, because, while apparently desiring the arrangement, they were, in reality, marching, from the beginning to the end of the negotiation, in diametrically opposite directions. The very wish for any understanding was, in the first instance, quite one-sided. Peter was for some time the only person who seriously felt it. Then, when his desire was shared by both countries, one Government claimed to realise it in one fashion, and the other in another. France desired a political, and Peter a domestic alliance,—each of which only suited the purpose of the nation which put it forward. We cannot wonder, nor find fault, if the French King felt little inclination to espouse the natural daughter of a *ci-devant* laundress (to say no worse), whose birth had been legitimized by a tardy and secret marriage; nor that Russia was scarcely disposed to assume the ill-paid political yoke which had already galled the necks of Poland and Sweden. There was no clearly marked ground for the union of the two nations, and of their interests. That meeting-point was to be prepared in later days, by a recent cataclysm, which has affected the whole scheme of European politics.

BOOK II—THE INTERNAL STRUGGLE— THE REFORMS

CHAPTER I

THE NEW RÉGIME—THE END OF THE STRELTSY— ST. PETERSBURG

- I. The new Régime—Preliminary question—The Reforms and the customs of ancient Muscovy—Slavophiles, and Lovers of the West—Origin of the Reforming movement—From *evolution* to *revolution*—General characteristics of the work—The order in which its results may be studied—Typical features.
- II. The end of the *Streltsy*—Its causes—The new army and the old armed bands—Discontent of the latter—Mutiny—Peter makes it a pretext for extermination—A huge inquiry—Fourteen torture-chambers—Lack of results—The Tsarevna Sophia—Her complicity not proved—She is sentenced to take the veil—Wholesale executions—Peter's share in them—The Judge—The Moscow Place de la Grève—The *Lobnoïe mïsto*.
- III. St. Petersburg—Before and after Poltava—Fortress or Capital?—Peter's reasons for making it his seat of Government—Criticism and justification—The National traditions.

I

My Russian readers would not forgive me, if I began this section of my work without touching on a prefatory problem, which,—apart from historical criticism, properly so called,—is the inexhaustible subject of a most passionate national discussion. Did not Peter, when he cast Russia into the arms of European civilisation, do violence to the history of his country, and despise and overlook native elements of original culture, susceptible of a development which would, perhaps, have been superior to, and, at all events, more in conformity with, the spirit of his people? This is the great bone of contention between the *Slavophiles* and the *lovers of the West*.

The question of ethnical origin, which seems, nowadays, to be fairly settled, and cast into oblivion, may be put on one side. Physiologically speaking, Russia, whether she wills it or not, holds a clearly marked place in the great Indo-European family. Morally speaking, her civilisation is founded and built up with Indo-European materials. Certain of these materials, by their geographical and historical conditions, have been endowed with special characteristics, giving birth to customs and ideas, conceptions and habits, quite apart from those of other nations:—as, for example, in matters of property, of family life, and of the sovereign power. Did Peter make ‘a clean sweep’ of all this? And that being granted, did he act wisely in so doing? The whole discussion now lies in these questions.

The inquiry I am now about to make will, I hope, if it does not decide, at all events throw some light upon, the subject. It will lead us at once to the recognition, on one side, of the inconsistency, the rudimentary, embryonic, and inorganic condition, of the greater part of those elements upon which the great Reformer was called to work; and, on the other, of the persistency of certain features, some of which remained intact, under a factitious appearance of modification, while others completely escaped the action of the Reform.

The ‘clean sweep’ was not so complete as some have imagined. The old *régime* had, in many respects, become unworkable before Peter’s time. It was essentially founded on two principles—Orthodoxy and the absolute power (*samodierjavié*),—and these, for more than a quarter of a century, had been tottering to their fall; the first, ruined by the inward faults of its original organisation, and the second, by an exaggeration of its fundamental idea, due, in part, to that political competition, from which Peter himself only escaped by means of a *coup d’état*. After the Muscovite hegemony rose on the ruins of the ancient independent and rival States, the Sovereign’s personal power took on an Oriental form, based on his private right. All idea of feudal suzerainty was past and gone; the ruler held by a title of ownership, which affected both the persons of his subjects, and their property. No other title was acknowledged, save and except in the case of the Church. There

was no passage by legal inheritance from one subject to another,—nothing but a division, occasionally hereditary (*vottchina*), oftener a mere life interest (*pomiestie*), but invariably arbitrary, of lands, granted by the Sovereign, in exchange for service paid. There was no private commerce or industry, or hardly any,—for commerce and industry, like everything else, were the Tsar's property, and his monopoly, which was well-nigh universal, only brooked the existence of the middleman. The Sovereign even bought food of every kind,—meat, fruit, and vegetables,—wholesale, and sold it retail.¹ The independent Dukes of former times, the Rurikovitch of Tver, Iaroslav, Smolensk, Tchernihof, Riazan, Viasma, and Rostov, had ended by being no more than a mere aristocracy, among the servants of the common master. They balanced the peasantry,—all of them, except a few free peasants in the South, serfs, since the year 1600,—and avenged their own abasement upon it. There was no other social class, no trading corporations, no social existence. The Merchant Corporation of Novgorod, which had originally brought prosperity to the old city, had disappeared, with every other trace of Norman organisation and culture. Moscow, in her struggle with the Mongol power, had borrowed Mongol principles and forms of government, and, to ensure her supremacy over the neighbouring towns, had carried the application of those principles and methods to their furthest consequences.

The Tsar then was not only the *master*, he was, in the most absolute sense of the term, the *proprietor*, of his country and of his people. But his right and his might, soaring as they were, lacked firm support. Beneath them was an empty void, filled with the dust of slavery. There were no social groups, there was no hierarchy, there was no organic bond, of any kind, between these incoherent monads. They all came and went at random, driven hither and thither by elementary instincts, swarming in a wild confusion of unbridled passion and brutal appetite; falling on the nearest prey, passing from Peter to Sophia, and back again from Sophia to Peter, with all the unconscious indifference peculiar to untaught masses. The present was chaos, the future was black darkness.

The Church, when it reached Kief from Byzantium, was

¹ Kotoshihin, *Memoirs*, ch. x.

already worn out and degraded. All moral strength had been lost in the decadence of the Greek Empire; the spirit of the faith had been overlaid with forms; religion was swaddled in the bonds of a complicated devotion, stifled under relics, images, special prayers, fasts, and an utterly incomprehensible liturgy. The priests, thanks to the huge number of monasteries which sprang up all over the country, soon grew rich and influential. But these advantages were only used,—as the Catholic priests used theirs, in the worst periods of the Papal power,—for the intellectual debasement of the people, without any attempt to follow the example of the best Popes, by striving after the moral and economic improvement of the masses. When, under the Tsar Alexis, the Russian Church desired to introduce a simple reform in her ritual, her weakness instantly became apparent. Mutiny and schism raised their heads—and the *Raskol* broke out.

Peter reached power by a *coup d'état*. The *Streltsy*, influenced by Sophia, attempted to overthrow him by another. Thus, at a very early age, he became aware of the void on which his omnipotence rested. When,—Chief of a great Empire as he was,—he essayed, prior to the defeat of Narva, and under the walls of Azof, to employ the strength he believed himself to possess, everything gave way beneath his feet. Within a few hours, his armies were dispersed,—within a few days, his treasury was empty,—and his whole administration broken down.

The great Reformer's predecessors were fully conscious of this condition of things, and did what they could to remedy it. Their ideas, their attempts, and even their desires, may, in some cases, have been somewhat vague and undecided, but in other matters, they took active steps, and they sketched out a whole programme of reforms, with the object, not indeed of radically modifying, but of improving the existing *régime*, and fitting it for the new demands of a political position which was constantly increasing in importance, and ambitious possibilities. Their programme included the reorganisation of the armed forces, and, as an inevitable consequence, the improvement of the finances,—the development of the economic resources of the country,—and the encouragement of foreign commerce. They admitted the necessity of more direct intercourse and co-operation with

foreign countries. They looked to a commencement of social reforms, by the emancipation of the urban classes, and even of the serfs, and finally, under the auspices of Nicone, they laid a finger on the Church, and, consequently, on the National education,—the Church being the only vehicle of education in existence.

Then we come to Peter. What *other*, what *new* thing did he do? Nothing, or, at most, very little indeed. The programme above referred to was *his* programme; he enlarged it a little, added the Reform of the national customs; he modified the nature of the intercourse already in existence with the Western world; but he, too, left the foundations of the political edifice he had inherited, intact, and he even failed, from the social point of view, to carry out the plans his predecessors had conceived or prepared. In spite of the apparent universality of his efforts, his work—and this has not been sufficiently noted—is, generally speaking, somewhat limited, and exceedingly superficial, even within those limits. It is, as I have previously said, a sort of *re-plastering* and *patch-work* business, with nothing absolutely new about it. It was begun before his time,—what he did was to change the conditions under which it was to be carried on in future. The new factor was, in the first place, the endless war, which, for twenty long years, was to inspire, direct and drive him forward, and which resulted, on one hand, in hurrying the work of evolution already commenced, and, on the other, of inverting the natural order of the political and social modifications consequent upon it, to suit temporary requirements, not necessarily corresponding to the most urgent needs of the national life. In the second place, we have the tastes, habits of mind, manias and fancies, which the gifted but whimsical ruler owed to his education, his visits to the *Sloboda*, and his intercourse with Europe. These he erected into principles, giving them a place in his great scheme, quite out of proportion with their intrinsic value. These *innovations* of his were just the points which were most offensive to his subjects. Finally, the Reformer's personal temperament, which endued all his measures with qualities of violence, excess and hastiness, both painful and disconcerting to every one they affected, must be taken into account. What had been a peaceful *evolution* became, in consequence of these peculiarities, a *revolution*. Those very

tendencies and attempts which, in the reigns of Alexis and Féodor, roused but the slightest resistance, now provoked an insurrection, which, in its earlier days, was almost general, and necessitated strong and vigorous measures of repression. The reforms, promulgated at the will of the Sovereign, in sharp and sudden jerks, without any apparent order or consecutiveness, fell on his subjects like storms of hail, or thunderbolts. Peter himself, harried by his long war, carried away by his own eagerness, fascinated by what he had seen in Germany, in England, and in Holland, could neither clearly arrange his plans, nor prepare them thoughtfully, nor show patience in their execution. He swept over his country and his people like a whirlwind, extemporising and inventing expedients, and terrorising all around him.

But this peculiarity, as I should not dream of denying, gave the renovating movement, out of which modern Russia sprang, a fulness and a swiftness, which the timid attempts of Alexis and Féodor could never have imparted. Peter, in a few years, had performed the work of several centuries. It may be doubted whether this sudden bound across time and space was an unmixed benefit. That is another point, the study of which must, in my opinion, be preceded by that of accomplished facts,—in other words, of the results obtained.

The work of tracing these results, as they successively appear, in the history of the great reign, would be a most ungrateful task, and could only inspire a general sensation of chaos. The order of their appearance was determined, up to a certain point, by the great originating element to which I have referred. The war made military reforms a first necessity, and these called forth financial measures, which, in their turn, made economic enterprises indispensable. But this procession of things is not an absolute rule, as the attempt at municipal re-organisation, at the very beginning of Peter's reign, will prove. I shall be guided, in my inquiry, by the relative importance of the various points. But to clear the way, and cast some light upon the wide and crowded field I have to consider, I will first mention certain features, which,—though their relation to the Reformer's work is in itself merely accessory, and very secondary,—have been considered by the public to represent its essence, and its whole scope. And the public, elementary as its conception of matters naturally is, has not been alto-

gether in the wrong. Insignificant in themselves as these features may be, they are most invaluable as the expression and the apparent symbol of the new *régime*. And for this reason, doubtless, they have appealed to the imagination of the masses. I refer to the 'clipping of the beards,' the suppression of the *Streltsy*, and the building of St. Petersburg.

II

When the young Tsar returned from his first European journey, he appeared before his subjects in the cast-off garments of Augustus of Poland,—a Western costume, which, hitherto, he had never worn in their sight. A few hours later, at a banquet given by General Shein, he laid hands on a pair of scissors, and began to clip the guests' beards. His jester, Tourguénief, followed his example. The witnesses of this scene may have thought it a mere despot's whim. Peter himself was naturally hairless, his beard was sparse, and his moustache grew thinly. He had been drinking freely, and his behaviour may have been taken for a mere outburst of gaiety. But no! a few days later, the clipping was sanctioned by a ukase. A huge reform, moral, intellectual, and economic, had been initiated by an absurd festive incident, which took place between the drinking of two glasses of wine. I shall later refer to the more serious side of the matter.

Close upon this came the suppression of the *Streltsy*. This was an unexpected but a very natural consequence,—the first,—of the warlike projects which had haunted the young Tsar ever since he had made acquaintance with his Saxon-Polish friend, Augustus. He had learnt, under the walls of Azof, the true value of his armed bands, and had realised that the military strength he had believed himself to possess had no real existence. He had then openly declared his intention of training his new levies on the European system,—of the relative superiority of which he had already seen proof,—and of making his two 'pleasure regiments' the nucleus of the new organisation. And one of his apparent reasons for crossing the frontier, was to study the principles to be applied to this work. Thus the old Muscovite army,—the *Streltsy*,—saw itself

doomed to disappear. For some time past the most ungrateful tasks had been allotted to it. During the war games which had taken place before the campaign of Azof, the *Streltsy* were always ordered to represent the vanquished side. After the capture of Azof, the 'pleasure regiments' went to Moscow, where they made a triumphal entry, received an ovation, and were loaded with rewards,—while the *Streltsy* were left behind to rebuild the fortifications of the conquered town. Humiliated and ill-treated, even before they were absolutely destroyed, they broke out into mutiny. In March 1698, while Peter was in England, they sent a deputation to Moscow from Azof, to explain their grievances. It returned without having obtained satisfaction and bearing exciting news. Peter had gone over to the foreigners, body and soul, and his sister, the Tsarevna Sophia, who was shut up in the *Diévitchyi Monastyr*, appealed to her former partisans, to defend the Church and Throne against a revolutionary and impious Sovereign. Letters from the ex-Regent (whether false or genuine, no one knew) were circulated in the regiments. A body of *Streltsy*, numbering some 2000 men, was detached from the Azof garrison, and sent to Viélikié-Louki to guard the Polish frontier. The men were furious at being separated from their comrades, and forced to march from one end of the Empire to the other. The *Streltsy* had always been left at home in time of peace. They mutinied, and marched on Moscow. General Shein marched against them with superior forces and artillery, met them on the 17th of June, within sight of the Monastery of the Resurrection, killed some, took the rest, hung several of his prisoners, after having put them to the question,—and the incident appeared closed.¹

But it was far from being closed. Peter, when he learnt the news, hastened his return, resolved to take advantage of the circumstances, and strike a decisive blow. Ever since his childhood, the *Streltsy* had stood in his way. They had put his relations and friends to the sword; they had supported a usurper's power against his own, and on this last occasion, when parleying with Shein, before the skirmish in which they were routed, they had used the most violent language with respect to Lefort, and the other foreigners who surrounded him. He was weary of it all; he was

¹ Moscow State Papers, *The Streltsy*; Solovief, vol. xiv. p. 254.

determined to make an end, to clear his native soil of these seeds of perpetual revolt, and drown the visions which had haunted him, from his cradle, in a sea of blood. A few blows with the knout, and half a dozen executions, would not suffice him; the work, this time, was to be done on a large scale, and satisfy him wholly. The inquiry, which Shein and Romodanovski had hastily conducted and closed, was reopened, and took proportions unprecedented, as I would fain believe, in the history of the human race. Fourteen torture-chambers (*zastiénok*) were opened in the village of Préobrajenskoïe, and their hellish apparatus,—even to gridirons on which the flesh of the prisoners was left to grill,—worked day and night. One man was put to the question seven times over, and received ninety-nine blows from the knout. Fifteen such blows generally resulted in death. Lieutenant-Colonel Korpakof stuck a knife into his throat to put an end to his own anguish; but the wound was not fatal, and the torture went on. Many women,—wives, sisters, or relations of the *Streltsy*, and servants, or ladies, in attendance on Sophia,—were treated in the same manner. One of them bore a child in the midst of her torments. The inquiry was principally concerned with the part taken by the Tsarevna and her sisters in leading up to the insurrectionary movement. Peter was certain of their guilt. But he desired proof,—and proof was what the inquiry failed to elicit. ‘They may very well die for us,’ writes one of the princesses, coolly, about some waiting-women, who were to be put to the torture, and on whose silence she reckoned. One *Streletz* endured all the anguish of the strappado, received thirty lashes with the knout, and was slowly burnt, but not a word would he utter. Some half admission, some vague indication, was occasionally wrung from him; as soon as he recovered breath, he would contradict himself, or relapse, again, into stubborn silence. Sophia herself, whom Peter, it is said, examined, and put to the torture with his own hands, never wavered. All her younger sister Marfa would admit, was, that she had informed the ex-Regent of the approach of the *Streltsy*, and of their desire to see her rule re-established.

So far as this point was concerned, the inquiry was an utter failure. A most compromising letter from Sophia to the *Streltsy*, published by Oustrialof, is acknowledged, by

that generally well-informed historian,¹ to be made up of stray and incoherent scraps of depositions, gathered in the torture-chamber, and retracted most probably by those who made them. The Tsarevna was closely watched in her prison in the *Novodiévitshyĭ Monastyr*, a detachment of 100 soldiers mounted guard before the convent; but she still had means of corresponding with the outer world, and of keeping up daily intercourse with the Court, with the other Princesses, and with her own friends. She was even able to continue to exercise a most liberal hospitality. The Court officials daily furnished her with 10 sterlets, 2 pike, 2 barrels of caviare, 2 barrels of herrings, pastry of various kinds, and 'hazel-nut butter,' 1 viedro (about 12 quarts) of hydromel, another of March beer, and 4 of ordinary beer,—every sort of food and drink in fact, and extra provisions on feast days; barrels of aniseed brandy, and casks of the more ordinary species. Romodanovski allowed his sisters to send her extra dainties, and this, so it was thought, facilitated an exchange of secret messages. The partisans of the ex-Regent had always gained easy access to the monastery, amongst the crowd of beggars, of both sexes, who formed a privileged class at Moscow. At certain seasons of the year, hundreds of these mendicants were daily received and entertained in the great *Obitiels*; this floating population, full, generally, of malcontents, numbered many of the *Streltsy* widows.² A movement in favour of the ex-Regent certainly existed, and received co-operation in this quarter. One *Streltchiha*, named Ofimka Kondratiéva, the widow of three fierce warriors, was actively engaged in it; but no plot, properly so called, was ever revealed.

The investigation proved nothing, but it exasperated the young Tsar's instinctive violence, and hardened him yet more. He was present at the examinations, and in the torture-chambers. Is it true, as some writers have declared, that he enjoyed it,—delighting in the sight of the panting bodies, the long-drawn anguish, and all the bitter incidents of suffering and death?³ I cannot believe it. He may have watched it all, I will admit, with curiosity,—with the zest of a man thirsting for new sensations, and inexorably resolved

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iii. p. 159.

² *Ibid.*, p. 157.

³ Kostomarof, *History of Russia*, vol. ii. p. 516.

to see and touch everything himself,—his heart growing yet more hard, and his imagination running wild, amidst the bloody orgy of sovereign justice. When the trial was over, nothing would suffice him but wholesale executions, heads falling in heaps under the executioner's axe, forests of gallows, hecatombs of human life.

On the 30th of September 1698, the first procession, numbering 200 condemned men, took its way to the spot chosen for the final scene. Five of these were beheaded on the road, in front of the Tsar's house at Préobrajenskoïé, and Peter himself was their executioner. This fact is attested by numerous witnesses, adopted by contemporary opinion, and accepted by the majority of historians.¹ Leibnitz himself, in spite of his weakness for the Reforming Sovereign, expresses horror and indignation at the incident.² And Peter was not content with wielding the axe himself, he insisted that those about him should follow his example. Galitzin bungled at the work, and caused his victims terrible suffering. Menshikof and Romodanovski were more skilful. Two foreigners only, Lefort, and Blomberg, Colonel of the Préobrajenskoïé regiment, refused to perform their abominable task. When the doomed men reached the Red Square at Moscow, whither they were taken in sledges, two in each, holding lighted tapers in their hands, they were placed in rows of fifty along a tree trunk which served for a block.

There were 144 fresh executions on the 11th October, 205 on the 12th, 141 on the 13th, 109 on the 17th, 65 on the 18th, and 106 on the 19th. Two hundred *Streltsy*, three of them holding copies of a petition to the Tsarevna, were hung before the windows of Sophia's apartments in the *Novodiévitchyi Monastyr*. She herself escaped pretty easily. She lost the rank which she had hitherto retained, was

¹ Korb, p. 84. Guarent, in Oustrialof, vol. iii. p. 407; Vockerodt (Herrmann) p. 29; Villebois, *Unpublished Memoirs*; Solovief, vol. xiv. p. 286; Kostomarof, vol. ii. p. 517. The first edition of Korb's book, the earliest work which drew European attention to these atrocities, was suppressed in consequence of a request addressed by the Tsar to the Viennese Court. Only twelve copies were left in existence. An English translation of a copy preserved in the Frascati Library was published. I have had the good fortune of consulting one of the very rare copies of the original edition, which I owe to the kindness of M. Onéguine, a learned Russian Bibliophile, resident in Paris, whom I hereby gratefully thank.

² Guerrier, p. 20.

confined in a narrow cell, and thenceforth was only known as the Nun Susanna. Her sister Marfa was condemned to the same fate, in the Convent of the Assumption (*Ouspienski*), in the present Government of Vladimir, where she took the name of Margaret. Both sisters died in their cloisters, the elder in 1704, and the younger in 1707.

Other inquiries, followed by wholesale executions, took place at Azof, and in various parts of the Empire. The unhappy *Streltsy* were hunted hither and thither. It was a war of extermination. At Moscow, in January 1699, there were more inquiries and more executions. Peter's absence, during November and December, at Voronèje, had necessitated a pause of some weeks. The corpses which strewed the Square, were carried off in thousands, and thrown on to the neighbouring fields, where they rotted unburied,—and still the axe worked busily. The enclosure in the centre of the Red Square,—the Moscow 'Place de la Grève,'—which was generally devoted to the executioner's purpose, was all too small for the occasion. All round the *Lobnoïé miesto*,—a sort of brick-built platform surrounded by a wooden palisade,—pikes bearing heads, and gallows, laden with their human fruit, stood in ghastly array, until the year 1727.

That blood-stained spot, the *Lobnoïé miesto*, has a character of its own, and a strange history, well worth knowing, which explains (I dare not say, it justifies) both the sanguinary scenes in which Peter insisted on playing so active a part, and that part itself, inexcusable as it appears. The origin of the name is quite uncertain. Some authorities derive it from the Latin word *lobium*, 'a high or raised place'; others ascribe it to the Russian word *lob*—'head'—the place where the heads of criminals are placed. There is a legend, too, that Adam's head was buried on the spot, and here my readers will begin to perceive the strange and whimsical mixture of ideas and feelings, with which popular tradition has invested this ghastly enclosure. A place of execution indeed, but a holy spot as well! It stood, like the *Lithostrote* at Jerusalem, before one of the six principal gates leading into the Kreml, and had a religious and national significance of its own. Here the relics and holy images brought to Moscow were first deposited; here, even yet, on solemn occasions, religious ceremonies were performed; here it was, that the Patriarch

gave his blessing to the Faithful ; and here too, the most important Ukases were promulgated, and changes of ruler announced to the people. Here, in 1550, Ivan the Terrible came to confess his crimes, and publicly ask pardon of his subjects. Here too the mock Dimitri proclaimed his accession, and here, a few weeks later, his corpse was exposed to the mob, with a mask on the face, and a musical instrument in the dead hand.¹

Thus the executioner's tools, and his victims' corpses, and all the hideous paraphernalia of criminal punishment, did not here produce the impression which would elsewhere have made them objects of horror and repugnance. For they were associated with the most august incidents in the public life, and when Peter appeared on the scaffold, axe in hand, he neither derogated from his high dignity, nor made himself odious in the eyes of his subjects. All he did was to carry out his functions as their supreme judge. Any man, at that period, might turn executioner, if the occasion arose. When the work was heavy, supplementary assistance in the bloody business was sought for in the open streets, and the supply never failed. Peter, without ceasing to be Tsar, could still be the Tsar's headsman, just as he had been his drummer and his sailor. He turned his hand to the executioner's duty, just as he had previously turned it to the rigging of his ships. No one was shocked by his action nor blamed him for it. He was much more likely to be praised!

A knowledge of these facts is essential to a thorough understanding of men and things in this period of Russian history, which cannot, as a rule, be interpreted or judged according to our knowledge of a corresponding period in the West. Peter had made up his mind to suppress the *Streltsy*, and did what was necessary to ensure that object. The means he employed were terrible, but, in his country, terror had long been a recognised method of procedure. So the *Streltsy* disappeared. All those on whom he laid hands in Moscow, either lost their lives, or were sent into the most distant parts of Siberia ; their wives and children were driven out of the capital, and no one was allowed to give them either food or work.² 'What!' we cry, 'were they doomed to die of hunger?' More than probably. The very name

¹ Pylaief, *Old Moscow*, pp. 72, 412, etc.

² Gordon's *Journal*, English edition, p. 193.

of the hated corps was proscribed. The provincial war-bands, whose docility had disarmed the Tsar's anger, were reduced to the rank of private soldiery. Thus the way was cleared in every quarter, and the creation of the new army, which was to be the opening effort of Peter's fresh start, and one of a distinctly European character, was not only rendered possible, but became urgent and indispensable. The *Streltsy* had disappeared, but with them the army had vanished. And before three months were out, Peter became aware that he had gone too far and too fast, and was fain to call some of his dead back into life. At the Battle of Narva, in 1700, several *Streltsy* Regiments fought in the Russian army. These were the provincial bands whose organisation and title had been taken from them by a ukase, dated 11th September 1698, and reconferred by another, dated 20th January 1699.¹ In 1702, the Tsar himself ordered the formation, on the old system, of four regiments of Muscovite *Streltsy*, at Dorogoboujé, and a similar order was given in 1704. These were concessions to the necessities of the Swedish war. But in 1705, after the revolt at Astrakhan, in which the remnants of the old undisciplined war-bands were involved, their final and complete destruction was resolved on. Once more, long files of prisoners moved along the Moscow road, and hundreds of fresh executions, on the Red Square, completed the work of extermination.

III

It was the prospect of the great Northern war which induced Peter to strew the Red Square with the corpses of his soldiery. The chances of that same war led him to St. Petersburg. When he first threw down the gauntlet to Sweden, he turned his eyes on Livonia—on Narva and Riga. But Livonia was so well defended that he was driven northwards, towards Ingria. He moved thither grudgingly sending, in the first instance, Apraxin, who turned the easily-conquered province into a desert. It was not for some time, and gropingly, as it were, that the young Sovereign began to see his way, and finally turned his attention, and his longings, to the mouth of the Neva. In former years, Gustavus Adolphus had realised the strategical im-

¹ Milioukof, *Peter the Great's Reform* (St. Petersburg, 1892), p. 141.

portance of a position which his successor, Charles XII., did not deem worthy of consideration, and had himself studied all its approaches. Peter not only took it to be valuable from the military and commercial point of view: he also found it most attractive, and would fain have never left it. He was more at home there than anywhere else, and the historical legends, according to which it was true Russian ground, filled him with emotion. No one knows what inspired this fondness on his part. It may have been the vague resemblance of the marshy flats to the lowlands of Holland; it may have been the stirring of some ancestral instinct. According to a legend, accepted by Nestor, it was by the mouth of the Neva that the earliest Norman Conquerors of the country passed on their journeys across the Værgian Sea—their own sea—and so to Rome! Peter would seem to have desired to take up the thread of that tradition, nine centuries old; and the story of his own foundation of the town has become legendary and epic. One popular description represents him as snatching a halbert from one of his soldiers, cutting two strips of turf, and laying them crosswise with the words, 'Here there shall be a town!' Foundation stones were evidently lacking, and sods had to take their place! Then, dropping the halbert, he seized a spade, and began the first embankment. At that moment an eagle appeared, hovering over the Tsar's head. It was struck by a shot from a musket. Peter took the wounded bird, set it on his wrist, and departed in a boat to inspect the neighbourhood.¹ This occurred on the 16th of May 1703.

History adds, that the Swedish prisoners employed on the work died in thousands. The most indispensable tools were lacking. There were no wheelbarrows, and the earth was carried in the corners of men's clothing. A wooden fort was first built, on the island bearing the Finnish name of Ianni-Saari (Hare Island). This was the future citadel of St. Peter and St. Paul. Then came a wooden church, and the modest cottage which was to be Peter's first palace. Near these, the following year, there rose a Lutheran Church, ultimately removed to the left bank of the river, into the Liteinaia quarter, and also a tavern, the famous inn of the Four Frigates, which did duty as a Town Hall for a long time before it became a place of diplomatic meeting. Then the cluster of modest

¹ Pylaiet, *Old St. Petersburg*, p. 16, etc.

buildings was augmented by the erection of a bazaar. The Tsar's collaborators gathered round him, in cottages much like his own, and the existence of St. Petersburg became an accomplished fact.

But, up to the time of the Battle of Poltava, Peter never thought of making St. Petersburg his capital. It was enough for him to feel he had a fortress and a port. He was not sufficiently sure of his mastery over the neighbouring countries, not certain enough of being able to retain his conquest, to desire to make it the centre of his Government and his own permanent residence. This idea was not definitely accepted till after his great victory.¹ His final decision has been bitterly criticised, especially by foreign historians; it has been severely judged and remorselessly condemned. Before expressing any opinion of my own on the subject, I should like to sum up the considerations which have been put forward to support this unfavourable verdict.

The great victory, we are told, diminished the strategic importance of St. Petersburg, and almost entirely extinguished its value as a port; while its erection into the capital city of the Empire was never anything but madness. Peter, being now the indisputable master of the Baltic shores, had nothing to fear from any Swedish attack in the Gulf of Finland. Before any attempt in that direction, the Swedes were certain to try to recover Narva or Riga. If, in later years, they turned their eyes to St. Petersburg, it was only because that town had acquired undue and unmerited political importance. It was easy of attack, and difficult to defend. There was no possibility of concentrating any large number of troops there, for the whole country, forty leagues round, was a barren desert. In 1788, Catherine II. complained that her capital was too near the Swedish frontier, and too much exposed to sudden movements, such as that which Gustavus III. very nearly succeeded in carrying out. Here we have the military side of the question.

From the commercial point of view, St. Petersburg, we are assured, did command a valuable system of river communication,—but that commanded by Riga was far superior. The Livonian, Esthonian, and Courland ports of Riga, Libau, and Revel, all at an equal distance from St Petersburg and Moscow,

¹ See the Tsar's letter to Apraxin (July 9, 1709), Cabinet No. i. Book 28.

and far less removed from the great German commercial centres, enjoyed a superior climate, and were, subsequent to the conquest of the above-mentioned Provinces, the natural points of contact between Russia and the West. An eloquent proof of this fact may be observed, nowadays, in the constant increase of their commerce, and the corresponding decrease of that of St. Petersburg, which has been artificially developed and fostered.

Besides this, the Port of St. Petersburg, during the lifetime of its founder, never was anything but a mere project. Peter's ships were moved from Kronslot to Kronstadt. Between St. Petersburg and Kronstadt, the Neva was not, in those days, more than eight feet deep, and Manstein tells us that all ships built at Petersburg had to be dragged by means of machines fitted with cables to Kronstadt, where they received their guns. Once these had been taken on board, the vessels could not get up stream again. The Port of Kronstadt was closed by ice for six months out of the twelve, and lay in such a position that no sailing ship could leave it unless the wind blew from the east. There was so little salt in its waters, that the ship timbers rotted in a very short time, and besides, there were no oaks in the surrounding forests, and all such timber had to be brought from Kasan. Peter was so well aware of all these drawbacks, that he sought, and found, a more convenient spot for his shipbuilding yards, at Rogerwick, in Esthonia, four leagues from Revel. But here he found difficulty in protecting the anchorage from the effects of hurricanes, and from the insults of his enemies. He hoped to ensure this by means of two piers, built on wooden caissons filled with stones. He thinned the forests of Livonia and Esthonia, to construct it, and finally, the winds and the waves having carried everything away twice over, the work was utterly abandoned. On the other hand, and from the very outset, the commercial activity of St. Petersburg was hampered, by the fact that it was the Tsar's Capital. The presence of the Court made living dear, and the consequent expense of labour was a heavy drawback to the export trade, which, by its nature, called for a good deal of manual exertion. According to a Dutch Resident of that period, a wooden cottage, very inferior to that inhabited by a peasant in the Low Countries, cost from 800 to 1000 florins a year at St. Petersburg. A shopkeeper at Archangel

could live comfortably on a quarter of that sum. The cost of transport, which amounted to between nine and ten kopecks a pood, between Moscow and Archangel, five to six between Iaroslav and Archangel, and three or four between Vologda and Archangel, came to eighteen, twenty, and thirty kopecks a pood in the case of merchandise sent from any of these places to St. Petersburg. This accounts for the opposition of the foreign merchants at Archangel, to the request that they should remove to St. Petersburg. Peter settled the matter in characteristic fashion, by forbidding any trade in hemp, flax, leather, or corn, to pass through Archangel. This rule, though somewhat slackened, in 1714, at the request of the States-General of Holland, remained in force during the great Tsar's reign. In 1718, hemp, and some other articles of commerce, were allowed free entrance into the Port of Archangel, but only on condition that two-thirds of all exports should be sent to St. Petersburg. This puts the case from the maritime and commercial point of view.

As a capital city, St. Petersburg, we are told again, was ill-placed on the banks of the Neva, not only for the reasons already given, but for others, geographical, ethnical and climatic, which exist even in the present day, and which make its selection an outrage on common sense. Was it not, we are asked, a most extraordinary whim which induced a Russian to found the capital of his Slavonic Empire among the Finns, against the Swedes,¹—to centralise the administration of a huge extent of country in its remotest corner,—to retire from Poland and Germany on the plea of drawing nearer to Europe, and to force every one about him, officials, Court, and Diplomatic Corps, to inhabit one of the most inhospitable spots, under one of the least clement skies, he could possibly have discovered? The whole place was a marsh,—the Finnish word *Neva* means 'mud'; the sole inhabitants of the neighbouring forests were packs of wolves. In 1714, during a winter night, two sentries, posted before the cannon foundry, were devoured. Even nowadays, the traveller, once outside the town, plunges into a desert. Far away in every direction the great plain stretches; not a steeple, not a tree, not a head of cattle, not a sign of life, whether human or animal. There is no pasturage, no pos-

¹ Custine, *La Russie* (Paris, 1843), vol. i. p. 204.

sibility of cultivation,—fruit, vegetables, and even corn, are all brought from a distance. The ground is in a sort of intermediate condition between the sea and *terra firma*. Up to Catherine's reign inundations were chronic in their occurrence. On the 11th of September 1706, Peter drew from his pocket the measure he always carried about him, and convinced himself that there were twenty-one inches of water above the floors of his cottage. In all directions he saw men, women, and children clinging to the wreckage of buildings, which was being carried down the river. He described his impressions in a letter to Menshikof, dated from 'Paradise,'¹ and declared it was 'extremely amusing.' It may be doubted whether he found many persons to share his delight. Communications with the town, now rendered easy by railways, were, in those days, not only difficult, but dangerous. Campredon, when he went from Moscow to St. Petersburg, in April 1723, spent 1200 roubles. He lost part of his luggage, eight of his horses were drowned, and, after having travelled for four weeks, he reached his destination, very ill. Peter himself, who arrived before the French Diplomat, had been obliged to ride part of the way, and to swim his horse across the rivers!

But in spite of all these considerations, the importance of which I am far from denying, I am inclined to think Peter's choice a wise one. Nobody can wonder that the idea of retaining Moscow as his capital was most repugnant to him. The existence of his work in those hostile surroundings,—in a place which, to this day, has remained obstinately reactionary,—could never have been anything but precarious and uncertain. It must, after his death at least, if not during his life, have been at the mercy of those popular insurrections before which the sovereign power, as established in the Kreml, had, already, so frequently bowed. When Peter carried Muscovy out of her former existence, and beyond her ancient frontiers, he was logically forced to treat the seat of his Government in the same manner. His new undertaking resembled, both in aspect and character, a marching and fighting formation, directed towards the West. The leader's place, and that of his chief residence, was naturally indicated, at the head of his column. This once granted, and the principle of the translation of the

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 273.

capital to the Western extremity of the Tsar's newly acquired possessions, admitted, the advantages offered by Ingria would appear to me to outweigh all the drawbacks previously referred to. The province was, at that period, virgin soil, sparsely inhabited by a Finnish population, possessing neither cohesion nor historical consistency, and, consequently, docile and easily assimilated. Everywhere else,—all along the Baltic coast, in Esthonia, in Carelia, and in Courland,—though the Swedes might be driven out, the Germans still remained, firmly settled,—the neighbourhood of their native country, and of the springs of Teutonic culture, enduing them with an invincible power of resistance. Riga, in the present day, after nearly two centuries of Russian government, is a thoroughly German town. In St. Petersburg, Russia, as a country, became European and cosmopolitan,—but the city itself is essentially Russian, and the Finnish element in its neighbourhood counts for nothing.

In this matter, though Peter may not have clearly felt and thought it out, he was actuated by the mighty and unerring instinct of his genius. I am willing to admit that here, as in everything else, there was a certain amount of whim, and perhaps some childish desire to ape Amsterdam. I will even go further, and acknowledge that the manner in which he carried out his plan was anything but reasonable. 200,000 labourers, we are told, died during the construction of the new city, and the Russian nobles ruined themselves to build palaces which soon fell out of occupation. But an abyss was opened, between the past the Reformer had doomed, and the future on which he had set his heart, and the national life, thus violently forced into a new channel, was stamped, superficially at first, but more and more deeply, by degrees, with the Western and European character he desired to impart.

Moscow, down to the present day, has preserved a religious, almost a monastic air; at every street corner, chapels attract the passers-by, and the local population, even at its busiest, crosses itself, and bends, as it passes before the sacred pictures which rouse its devotion at every turn. St. Petersburg, from the very earliest days, presented a different, and quite a secular appearance. At Moscow, no public performance of profane music was permitted. At St.

Petersburg the Tsar's German musicians played every day, on the balcony of his tavern. Towards the middle of the eighteenth century, the new city boasted a French Theatre, and an Italian Opera, and Schlözer noted that Divine Service was performed in fourteen languages! Modern Russia, governed, educated, to a certain extent, intellectually speaking, emancipated, and relatively liberal, could not have come into existence, nor grown in stature, elsewhere.

And, to conclude, Peter was able to effect this singular change without doing too great violence to the historical traditions of his country. From the earliest days of Russian history, the capital had been removed from place to place, —from Novgorod to Kief, from Kief to Vladimir, from Vladimir to Moscow. This phenomenon was the consequence of the immense area of the national territory, and the want of consistency in the elements of the national life. From the beginning to the end of an evolution which lasted centuries, the centre of gravity of the disjointed, scattered, and floating forces of ancient Russia, perpetually changed its place. Thus the creation of St. Petersburg was nothing but the working out of a problem in dynamics. The struggle with Sweden, the conquest of the Baltic provinces, and the yet more important conquest of a position in the European world, naturally turned the whole current of the national energies and life in that direction. Peter desired to perpetuate this course. I am inclined to think he acted wisely.

CHAPTER II

MORALS—HABITS AND CUSTOMS

1. *Morals*—The Slavophile Theory of the morals of Ancient Russia—The reality—Coarseness and savagery—Brigandage—Brutal vulgarity of domestic habits—Drunkenness—Sanguinary scuffles—Absence of any moral ideal—Peter's work—The moral foundation ready to his hand—Inconsistency and paltriness of his first attempts—Dress reform—Ultior progress—The Reform of the Calendar—Liberal tendencies of the new régime—The great domestic Reform—The suppression of the Terem—Whither the women were to go—Peter creates society by Ukase—'Assemblies'—Failure, as far as sociability was concerned—Causes of this failure—Peter himself too little of a man of the world—No Court to give tone to society—The tone of the Sovereign's surroundings very different from that of Versailles—Coarse Habits—Official entertainments—Balls in the Summer Garden—The Diplomatic Corps received at Peterhof—Filthy and dissolute habits—Superficiality of the change—A great moral revolution—The school of example.
- II. *Education*—Scholastic establishments—Bold and far-stretching theories—Weakness and poverty of their practical application—General and professional education—Primary and high-class schools—Lack of pupils—Young men sent abroad—Indifferent results—Russia still dependent on Europe—The Academy of Sciences—The real teaching of the great reign—Example again.
- III. *Intellectual beginnings*—The new language—Books—Archives and a Library—Museums—Free entrance—A School of Fine Arts—The Theatre—The Press—General view.

I

THE Slavophile writers of the present day are fond of painting the habits and customs of Ancient Russia in the most brilliant colours, heightened by their gloomy description of contemporary existence amongst Western nations. This is the last refuge of a theory which finds it hard to hold its own in every other field. It has grown more and more difficult, in course of time, to claim all the elements of original culture,—letters, arts, and sciences,—with which, according to her adorers' ideal, the Russia of the 16th and

17th centuries should have been endowed. But, these zealots say, though her inhabitants could not read, their morals were beyond all reproach. Despite the triple corruption of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Modern Period, they had remained pure, and even holy. We shall see.

It is a singular fact that none of the witnesses of this idyllic condition of existence, nor even the actors in it, seem to have been conscious of its charm. Foreign testimony, such as that of Olearius, Margeret, and Fletcher, may be doubted. But what are we to think of that passage in the Memoirs of Jeliaboujski, to which I have already alluded, and which describes the current incidents of the day as a mere calendar of criminal procedure.

In November 1699, Prince Feodor Hotétovski was knouted, in one of the Moscow Squares, for having sold a single landed property to several purchasers. In December, two judges at Vladimir, Dimitri Divof, and Iakovlef Kolytchef, were flogged for breach of trust. Kolytchef had been corrupted by means of a sum of twenty roubles, and a barrel of brandy! That same year, a gentleman named Zoubof was prosecuted for highway robbery. A Voïvoide of Tsaritsine, named Ivan Barténief, accepted bribes, and carried off married women and young girls to be his mistresses. Prince Ivan Sheidiakof was convicted of robbery and murder.¹

Armed brigandage was such an ingrained custom, at that period, that all Peter's energy was powerless to suppress it. In 1710, troops had to be called out to protect the immediate neighbourhood of the Capital. In 1719, the judicial body was warned of the presence of well-armed bands numbering from 100 to 200 robbers, in the districts of Novgorod and of Mojaïsk.² The Saxon Resident writes, in 1723: 'A body of 9000 robbers, led by a Russian half-pay Colonel, had planned to burn the Admiralty and other buildings in St. Petersburg, and to massacre the foreigners. 36 of these have been taken prisoners, and impaled, or hung by the ribs . . . We are on the brink of some unpleasant

¹ Jeliaboujski, pp. 129-130; Korb, pp. 77, 78. Compare Kostomarof, *Picture of Russian Domestic Life and Habits in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, pp. 99-128; Bielaief, *Lessons on Russian Law*, p. 464, etc.; Goltsef, *Russian Laws and Customs in the 18th Century*, p. 17.

² Solovief, vol. xvi. p. 251.

outbreak; the popular misery is daily increasing, the streets are full of people trying to sell their children; orders have been issued that nothing should be given to beggars. What can they do but become highway robbers?¹

These robbers, who had taken up arms against the foreigners, were the authentic representatives of Old Russia, and I cannot perceive anything idyllic about them, nor about the principal and most characteristic features of past times—the savagery and coarseness—presented in their persons. Neugebauer, German tutor to the young Tsarevitch Alexis, was discharged, in 1702, because he ventured to object to his pupil's habit of emptying his own plate into the dishes intended for other guests. There was no sociability in the nature of a people so swayed by Byzantine asceticism as to reckon knowledge heresy, art a scandal, and music, singing, and dancing, an offence to the Almighty. Love itself, even hallowed by religious ties, was looked on with doubt and scruple. Possoshkof, in the true spirit of the Domostroï, advises all newly married couples to spend their two first nights in prayer,—the first to drive away the demons, and the second to do honour to the Patriarchs! Women of the aristocratic class wasted their existences within the padlocked doors of the *terem*. The men entertained themselves with their masculine surroundings, consisting of needy gentlemen, whom they sometimes petted, and often thrashed,—jesters, whose jokes were generally of the vilest description,—*bahars* or *scazotchniks*, who told ridiculous stories,—*domratcheïs*, who played on a sort of guitar, called the *domra*, and droned out religious chants,—and sometimes, but much less often, *skomorohi*, or jugglers, already looked at askance, and even prosecuted,—the civil power backing the attempts of the ecclesiastical authority to repress profane delights. The real pleasure of every man, from the Boyard to the peasant, was drink. Every festive gathering was a scene of drunkenness, which too often culminated in rough, and often bloody scuffles.²

On every rung of the social ladder, there was the same utter absence of morality, of any sentiment of self-respect, honour, or duty. Free men, according to Korb, cared little

¹ Sbornik, vol. iii. pp. 354, 360.

² Zabelin, *Domestic History of the Tsarinas*, p. 397, etc.; Dibiattine, *Contributions to the History of Russian Law*, p. 560, etc.

for their liberty, and willingly accepted serfdom. Informers swarmed in every class, and everywhere there was the same dead level of idleness, indifference, and meanness. When, in 1705, Shérémétief, the best of Peter's Russian Generals, was sent to Astrakhan to suppress a revolt, the growth of which threatened the living forces of the country, he stopped at Kasan, and turned his whole mind to getting leave to return to Moscow, and there spend the winter and the Easter festivities. Nothing but the Emperor's threats induced him to resume his journey.¹ Honour, duty, ambition, and even courage, were novelties, the knowledge of which Peter, as he himself boasted, was forced to propagate amongst his subjects.² He had to tear the degrading lesson of their national proverb, 'Flight is not a very noble thing, but it is a very safe one,' out of their hearts and minds. His methods of terror and of summary justice,—as when he hung a whole company of flying soldiers under the walls of Noteburg, in 1703,—would certainly not have succeeded, alone, as they did, to a certain extent, succeed. But he found a moral foundation, long buried in those darkened and degraded souls,—their fanatical love of home, their power of endurance, their limitless docility, and immense self-sacrifice. The work, apart from these, was all his own.

It was by no means a perfect work. It bore traces of all the faults and weaknesses inherent in the Workman. When the Reformer turned his first attention to clipping his subjects' beards, and reforming their costume, he overlooked far more pressing and serious matters. The dress worn in Russia, at the end of the 17th century, was, indeed, both inconvenient and ungraceful. But its distinctive features, and the fulness and number of the garments placed one above the other, were justified by the conditions of the climate. Over his embroidered shirt and wide trousers, tucked into his boots, the Russian gentleman wore a *joupan*, or waistcoat, of coloured silk, and a closely fitting *kaftan*, reaching to the knees, with a straight collar of velvet, satin or brocade. The sleeves, which were long and wide, were fastened at the wrist with buttons, made of precious stones of more or less value. This was his indoor garb. When he

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 493.

² See his conversation with the Duke of Holstein in 1722, reported by Bergholz, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xx. p. 387.

went out, he added a belt of some Persian material, and over his *kaftan*, he wore a *feriaz*,—a long, wide velvet garment, straight cut and collarless, buttoned down the front from the top to the bottom, and always with long and wide sleeves. Over the *feriaz* he wore, in summer, the *opachen* or *ohaben*, a wide mantle of precious stuff, falling to his heels, with long sleeves, and a square collar; or, in the autumn, the *odnoriadka*, a warmer garment of hairwoven material or cloth; while, in winter, he was robed in the *shouba*,—a fur-lined pelisse. A full and thick beard was the natural complement of this dress, and was equally well suited to the needs of the Russian climate. The æsthetic point of view need not come into this discussion. Fashion, in all times, and every country, has always disregarded it, and to this day the St. Petersburg coachmen thicken their waists by means of cushions, which they consider a most desirable addition to their personal appearance.

This reform, like most of those to which Peter's name has been attached, grew out of the general evolution which had carried Russia westward, ever since the days of Boris Godunof. Under Tsar Alexis, Shérémétief's father refused to give his son his blessing, because he appeared before him with his chin shaved; and the Patriarch Joachim had only stopped the movement, by thundering excommunications against it. The question was complicated by religious sentiment. In all orthodox Icons, the Eternal Father and His Son are represented with beards, and in long robes; and the popular belief, supported by ecclesiastical teaching, held that man, being made in God's image, committed sacrilege when he did anything to alter that sacred resemblance.¹ The civil power was forced to take these elements into account, and to adopt a policy of compromise. Alexis published a Ukase supporting the Patriarchal view on the subject of beards, but, in 1681, the Tsar Feodor Aléxiéievitch ordered all male members of his Court, and officials, to shorten the skirts of their clothing.

These controversies may provoke a smile, but my French readers will recollect that, even in France, a passionate controversy raged over the beard brought into fashion by Francis I., who grew his, to conceal a wound on his face.²

¹ Bouslaief, *Historical Sketches*, vol. ii. p. 216.

² Franklin, *Journal of the Siege of Paris in 1590*, pp. 108, 109.

Peter settled the question in his usual radical fashion. He would have no more beards, and everybody must wear European costume, either French or Hungarian. His Ukase on the subject was published on the 29th of August 1699, and patterns of the regulation garments were exposed in the streets. The poorer classes were granted a temporary delay, so that they might wear out their old clothes, but, after 1705, every soul was to appear in the new uniform, under pain of fines, and even of severer penalties.

The reform, thus violently imposed, met with desperate opposition, especially among the lower classes. The Boyards were easily managed,—they had worn Polish costume ever since Dimitri's time, and the elegance of the French style of dress distinctly attracted them; in March 1705, Whitworth did not notice a single well-born person wearing the old-fashioned dress. But the poorer classes hung back, and not without good reason. In such a climate, short-skirted garments, and uncovered stockings, were anything but rational. The old-fashioned Russian costume has been said to be only fit for idlers, but the Northern climate, with its long periods of enforced hibernation, had taught men idleness. Their limbs might be freer when they cast off their long pelisses, but they ran grievous risk of being frost-bitten; Peter himself died of a chill. The poor *Moujik*, forcibly deprived of the beard which had kept his cheeks warm in 40 degrees of cold, begged it might be laid with him in his coffin, so that, after his death, he might appear decently in the presence of St. Nicholas. This popular superstition was, like many others, the outcome of a thoroughly well-founded utilitarian instinct.

But all this was nothing to Peter. In 1704, at an inspection of officials of all classes, held as he was passing through Moscow, he caused Ivan Naoumof, who had failed to use his razors, to be flogged.¹ In 1706, soldiers were posted at all the church doors in Astrakhan, with orders to fall upon recalcitrant worshippers, and pull out their beards by main force. The Tsar also took upon himself to shorten the women's garments, and any skirts which exceeded the regulation length were publicly torn up, without the slightest regard for decency.² Peter had a special, and a

¹ Golikof, vol. ii. p. 513.

² Whitworth's Despatch, Feb. 20, 1706; Sbornik, vol. xxxix. p. 249.

kind of personal hatred, for all beards. To him they typified all the ideas, traditions and prejudices, he was resolved to overcome. In the admonitions addressed, in his Manifesto of 1718, to his unfortunate and rebellious son Alexis, the expression '*great beards*' is frequently repeated, and would appear to be his synonym for the whole reactionary party, on which he showers the most violent abuse. 'This is easily understood, in the case of such people as these, whose morals are corrupt, *quorum Deus venter est!*'—his Latin quotations were somewhat haphazard! Though, as time went on, he did, on condition of a heavy tax, tolerate the preservation of these hirsute appendages, it was only because his financial embarrassments pressed so heavily upon him. The *Raskolniks* paid as much as 100 roubles, yearly, for the privilege, and were obliged to wear medals, given them on receipt of the annual sum, engraved with the following inscription: '*Boroda lishnaia tiagota*' ('a beard is a useless inconvenience').

Thus we see Russia shaved, and dressed in European garments. The Reformer's next step was to put a pipe into every one's mouth. Even before his travels abroad in 1697, he had authorised the free sale of tobacco, which had hitherto been prohibited, without the smallest consideration for the offence thus given to the national prejudices. As we have already seen, he negotiated with Lord Caermarthen, during his stay in England, for a tobacco monopoly. A smoker himself, he was determined every one else should smoke. All this strikes us as being rather foolish, and even as denoting a somewhat unhealthy imagination. Yet this, so far as manners and customs were concerned, was the commencement of the great man's civilising work. He did better as he went on, but his beginnings, it must be acknowledged, were not over brilliant.

On the 20th December 1699, a Ukase appeared, ordering a reform in the National Calendar. The Russian Calendar was the outcome of Byzantine tradition; the year began on the 1st of September, the hypothetical date of the Creation, 5508 years B.C. It was to open, in future, like the European year, on the 1st of January. The whole world was commanded to be present at the services to be celebrated in the churches on that day, and, thereafter, to exchange the traditional congratulations and good wishes.

The Reformer would fain have gone a step further, and adopted the Gregorian Calendar, but this, with its Roman and Papal characteristics, was, in those days, strongly objected to, even in England, where it was not adopted till 1752. Moderate as it was, this Reform caused a great deal of ill-feeling. 'Could God have really created the world in winter?' it was inquired. Peter cared not a jot, and he was wise; for, this time, he was on the right track. He pushed steadily forward. In the year 1700, he published a Ukase ordering the first apothecary's shops,—eight of them,—to be opened in Moscow. Another Ukase, bearing the same date, forbade the carrying of knives,—which too frequently played a terrible part in the daily street quarrels in the city,—on pain of flogging and deportation. In the following year, the liberal spirit of the new *régime* was proved by a series of orders, doing away with the necessity for kneeling when the Sovereign passed, and of passing his palace with uncovered head, during the winter season. Then, in 1702, came the great domestic Reform. The doors of the *terem* were opened, and the married state was surrounded by moral guarantees. Peter stretched a merciful and protecting hand over Russian family life. In 1704, he did battle with an odious feature of the national habits,—the habitual doing away with deformed children, and infants born out of wedlock. He favoured the creation of an Asylum for foundlings, opened by Job, the Patriarch of Novgorod, in 1706, and, in 1715, he took more decided personal steps in this most painful matter, and ordered the foundation of similar establishments, in all the great towns in his Empire.

This part of his work, fragmentary and incomplete as it was, was excellent in its way. To make it more harmonious, the Reformer would have needed far greater leisure; but his mind was taken up, and distracted, by his great war. He called the Russian women forth from their *terems*—a good thing as far as it went—but what was to become of them now? He desired they should go into society, like their sisters in France and Germany;—but no Russian society existed, and Peter did not find time to remedy this defect until the year 1718. Then, during a pause in the war, he settled the question, as usual, by means of a Ukase. This fact, I imagine, has no parallel in history. He

ordered periodical receptions, which he called 'Assemblies,' to be held in a certain number of private houses, and issued precise regulations as to the arrangements, the order in which they were to be held, and all other details, even to the smallest. He had just returned, it must be remembered, from France, and was evidently guided and inspired by what he had seen in the Paris salons. But he added details of his own invention. These Assemblies were to last from four o'clock in the afternoon till ten at night. The hosts were forbidden, on pain of fine, to go forward to receive their guests, or to accompany them to the door when they departed. All they were to do was to prepare a more or less luxurious reception, lights, refreshments, and games. The invitations were not of a personal nature; a general list of admission was drawn up, and published, with a notification of the day of each reception, by the Chief of the Police in St. Petersburg, and by the Commandant of the city of Moscow. No games of chance were allowed, and, by a special Ukase, dated 28th June 1718, card and dice playing were punished by the knout.¹ A room was set apart for chess-players, and was also to be used as a smoking-room, but, as a matter of fact, and following Peter's own example, smoking went on everywhere. Leather tobacco-bags lay on every table, and Dutch merchants moved about, pipe in mouth, amongst smart gentlemen, dressed in the last Parisian fashions.² Dancing held a foremost place in the programme of these entertainments, and as his subjects, male and female, had no knowledge of that accomplishment, Peter himself undertook to instruct them. Bergholz describes him as a first-rate performer; he executed all kinds of steps before the gentlemen, who were expected to use their legs in exactly the same fashion as he used his. The memories of the drill ground, thus conjured up, were not likely to be displeasing to the Sovereign. The regulations provide that the servants, always so numerous in Russian households, should remain in the ante-chambers,—access to the reception rooms was utterly forbidden them: except in this respect, the most absolute equality reigned.

¹ Golikof, vol. iii. p. 44.

² See the picturesque description of one of these gatherings in a fragment of an historical novel by Poushkin: *Collected Works*, vol. iv. (1887 edition), *Peter the Great's Negro*.

Any gentleman might invite the Empress herself to dance with him.¹

As in the case of most of Peter's undertakings, the early days of this reform bristled with difficulties, more especially at Moscow, where, on Peter's arrival to celebrate the Peace of Nystadt in 1722, a special Ukase convoked an Assembly, at which all ladies 'above ten years of age,' were ordered to appear under threat of 'terrible punishment.' Only seventy put in an appearance. At St. Petersburg, on the other hand, the institution appears, by the end of the third year of its existence, to have taken firm root. Let us now consider the benefit accruing from it. Peter had three principal aims: the initiation of Russian women into the ordinary intercourse between the sexes, as it existed in Western countries; the initiation of the upper classes of Russian society, into the social habits general in those countries; and, finally, the fusion of the native classes, and their mixture with the foreign element in Russia. This last object, the most important, possibly, from his point of view, of all the three, was not attained, as is proved by the great mass of contemporary testimony. The Russian ladies stubbornly refused to choose their partners outside the ranks of their own fellow-countrymen, and their action, in this respect, was based on a deliberate and common understanding. Peter lacked the qualities necessary for the attainment of the two other points. He should have had more of the man of the world, and less of the sailor and carpenter, in his own person. His manners, like his dancing steps, were aped by his subjects, and his manners, from the social point of view, were neither polite nor pleasing. In the intervals between the dances, the partners, male and female, being devoid of conversation, sat apart in dreary silence. The Sovereign could think of no better plan to break the ice, than the introduction of a dance during the figures of which the gentlemen kissed the ladies *on their lips*.² And these poor ladies had hard work to appear at all like their fair models in the Parisian salons. They wore hoops, indeed, at the Tsar's Assemblies, but they still blackened their teeth!³

The Court in St. Petersburg, like the Court in Paris, gave

¹ Shoubinski, *Historical Selections*, p. 39; Kamovitch, *Selections*, p. 240.

² Kamovitch, p. 242.

³ Hymrof, *The Countess Goloukine and her Times*, p. 89.

the tone to society, and the tone of the circle surrounding Peter and his wife had nothing in common with that of Versailles. At a banquet given in the Imperial Palace, in honour of the baptism of Catherine's son, the centre of each of the two tables, devoted, one to the gentlemen, and another to the ladies, was adorned with a huge pasty, and, at a given moment, a male dwarf emerged from the first, and a female from the second, both of them *in puris naturalibus*!¹ On the 14th of November 1724, the Empress's fête-day, their Majesties dined in the Senate-house with a numerous company, including the Duchess of Mecklenburg and the Tsarina Prascovia. A Senator climbed on the table, and walked from one end to the other, putting his feet in all the dishes!² An important part was played, at all Court festivities, by six Grenadiers of the Guard, who carried in a huge tub of strongly spiced corn brandy, which Peter distributed, with a wooden spoon, to every one present, ladies included. In one of Campredon's despatches, dated 8th December 1721, I find the following words; 'The last banquet given in honour of the Tsarina's name-day, was very splendid, after the manner of this country. *The ladies all drank a great deal.*'

But indeed, Peter, as we know, had no Court, properly so called. One of the first acts of his reign had been to make over the sums formerly devoted to the Sovereign and his household, for the general benefit of the State. The various departments of the Tsar's household had entirely disappeared, and with them, the whole army of palace officials and servants. The 3000 saddle-horses, and the 40,000 draught horses, which had filled the stables, the 300 cooks and kitchen boys, who had sent up 3000 dishes daily from their kitchen, were nothing but a memory.³ Towards the end of the reign, some new Court officials were created after the European pattern, but they only did duty a few times each year, on days of great ceremony. On ordinary fête days, when the Tsar came back to dinner, after church, he was accompanied by his Ministers and by a host of military officers. But sixteen places only were laid at his table; for these there was a general scuffle, and the sole notice Peter took of the many who were left out in

¹ Pylaief, *The Forgotten Past*, p. 308.

² Siémiewski, *The Tsarina Prascovia*, p. 169.

³ Polevoi, *History of Peter the Great*, vol. i. p. 340, etc.

the cold, was to say, 'Go home, and delight your wives by dining with them.' No great receptions were ever held in the Tsar's palace, even when he came to possess one. Towards the end of his reign, the Post-Office was used for this purpose, instead of Menshikof's palace, and the scene, when Peter's guests were gathered there, was worthy of the vilest tavern. Bergholz has left a description of a banquet given in May 1721, in honour of the launching of a vessel. Before the middle of the meal, the guests, male and female, were all drunk, the wine having been mixed with brandy. Old Admiral Apraxin burst into a flood of tears, Prince Menshikof fell under the table, and his wife and sister endeavoured to restore him to consciousness. Then the company began to quarrel, blows were exchanged, and a general, who had come to fisticuffs with a lieutenant, had to be arrested.¹ It should be added, that during these orgies, which generally lasted six hours, and often longer, all doors were rigorously closed; the disgusting and deliberately courted consequences may be better conceived than described. They are an evident proof of Peter's utter and undisguised scorn of decency and propriety.

In January 1723, a Court mourning was ordered for the Regent of France, but at the next Assembly, most of the ladies appeared in colours, and declared they possessed no other dresses. Peter had them all turned out, but very shortly afterwards, having drunk several glasses of wine, he himself gave the signal for dancing to begin.²

During the summer season, the receptions and banquets were held in the Summer Garden which was turned into something like a noisy Fair ground. The smell of spiced brandy spread into the neighbouring streets, and thousands of spectators were entertained by the coarse laughter of the drinkers, the screams of the women whom they forced, willy nilly, to swallow their ration of brandy, and the burlesque songs of the mock cardinals. Dancing went on in the open air, in an uncovered gallery overlooking the Neva. In the Imperial summer residences, near Moscow and St. Petersburg, the coarse habits and vulgar tastes of the Sovereign and his immediate circle, were still more freely displayed!

¹ *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xix. pp. 94-96; one of Campredon's despatches, dated March 14, 1721, contains similar details.

² *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xxi. p. 191.

Here is a description of a visit to Peterhof, which the Diplomatic Corps was commanded to make in May, 1715 :— ‘On the 9th, the Tsar went to Kronsloot, whither we followed him in a galley, but a sudden tempest kept us there at anchor, for two days and three nights, in an open boat, without fire, or bed, or provisions. When we reached Peterhof at last, we were entertained in the usual manner, for we had to drink so much Tokay wine at dinner, that, when it was time to separate, we could hardly stand on our legs. Notwithstanding this, the Tsarina presented each of us with a glass of brandy, containing about a pint, which we were obliged to swallow. This completely deprived us of our reason, and we gave ourselves up to slumber, some of us in the gardens, some in the woods, and the rest on the ground, in all directions. At four o’clock in the afternoon, we were roused, and led to the castle, where the Tsar gave each of us a hatchet, with orders to follow him. He conducted us to a wood, and marked out an alley about 100 paces long, close by the sea, the trees of which we were to fell. He set to work before us, and although we were little accustomed to such hard labour, we contrived—there were seven of us besides his Majesty—in about three hours, to finish our task. The fumes of wine were by that time mostly dissipated, and no accident occurred, except that a certain Minister, who was working a little too vigorously, was slightly wounded by the fall of a tree. The Tsar having thanked us for our trouble, entertained us in the evening, in the ordinary fashion, and we were once more given so much liquor that we were unconscious by the time we were sent to bed. Before we had slept an hour and a half, we were woke by one of the Tsar’s favourites, and conducted, in spite of ourselves, into the presence of the Prince of Circassia, who was in bed with his wife. We were obliged to remain beside their bed till four o’clock in the morning, drinking wine and brandy, so that we hardly knew how to get back to our own lodging. About eight o’clock in the morning we were called to breakfast at the castle, but, instead of the tea or coffee we expected, we were given large glasses of brandy, after which we were sent to take the fresh air on a high hill, at the foot of which we found a peasant with eight miserable nags having neither saddles nor bridles, which cannot have been worth more than three crowns altogether. Each of us mounted one,

and we then passed, in comical array, before their Majesties, who were looking out of the window.'¹

It should further be pointed out that this kind of savagery was united with a dissoluteness and barefaced immorality of which Peter himself was a prominent exponent. When the Duke of Holstein, who was on the point of marrying the Sovereign's daughter, publicly appeared in St. Petersburg, with a mistress whose husband he openly protected, his future father-in-law never dreamt of finding fault with him.

In many respects, Peter only piled corruption on corruption, and in this particular matter the Slavophile theory is partly justified. All he gained, as regards external forms, was a sort of disguise, which flattered his own taste for travesty. His Russians might be dressed like Frenchmen, but few of them had lost any of their native coarseness, and they had grown ridiculous into the bargain. In 1720, a French Capuchin monk, residing at Moscow, thus summed up his observations:—'We are beginning to have some understanding of the spirit of the Muscovite nation. His Majesty, the Tsar, is said to have worked a great change in the course of the last twenty years. The people are so subtle-minded, it is true, that they may yet be humanised, but their obstinacy is so extreme, that the greater number of them would rather remain brutes, than become men. Besides this, they are distrustful of all foreigners, rogues, and thievish, to the last degree. There have, it is true, been terrible executions, but even that has not sufficed to terrify them. They would kill a man for a few copper coins, and consequently it is not safe to be in the streets at all late at night.'²

The change was very superficial. Any sudden paroxysm, physical or mental, the excitement of wine, or the heat of anger, caused the mask to fall. On the day of Peter's triumphal entry into Moscow, after the Persian Campaign, in December 1722, Prince Gregory Dolgorouki, a senator and diplomat, and the *Prince Caesar*, Ivan Romodanovski, flew at each other, before numerous witnesses, and fought

¹ *Memoirs* of Weber (then representative of the Hanoverian Court in Russia), v. p. 148 (Paris).

² Letter from Father Romain de Pourrentray to the French Envoy in Poland (French Foreign Office).

with their fists for a good half hour, without any attempt being made to separate them. The foreigners about the Sovereign were surrounded, in his presence, with every respect and flattery. The moment his back was turned, the Russians would pull off their wigs. Even the Duke of Holstein had some difficulty in keeping his on his head.¹ Those ideas of honour, probity, and duty, of which,—and herein lies his greatest historical merit,—Peter was the constant and energetic propagator, failed to penetrate the national heart, and slid over its refractory soul like an ill-fitting garment. Tatishcheff himself, when he was recalled from the Ural, where his peculations had been denounced by Demidof, rested his defence on a conception of morality anything but European in its character. 'Why should a judge be reprehended, on principle, because he takes money for his services to his clients? The reward is honest, so long as he judges honestly!'² In 1750, an investigation was opened into a huge system of fraud and embezzlement in the system of army supply. The accused persons were Menshikof, Admiral Apraxin, Korssakof, Vice-Governor of St. Petersburg, Kikin, the head of the Admiralty, Siéniavin, the Chief Commissioner of the same department, Bruce, the Master of the Ordnance, and Volkonski and Lapouhin, senators!

Peter, busy toiler as he was, could not altogether overcome the inveterate idleness, and physical and moral inertia of his subjects. Thousands of able-bodied men begged in the streets, in preference to working with their hands: some put irons on their legs, and passed as prisoners,—sent out, according to the habit in the jails of that period, to beg their food from public charity. In all the country districts, reckless idleness went hand in hand with frightful poverty. 'Once the peasant is asleep,' writes Possoshkof, 'his house must be in flames before he will leave his bed, and he will never take the trouble to disturb himself, to put out his neighbour's fire.' Conflagrations which devoured whole villages frequently occurred, and the bands of robbers who carried off what the fire spared, had an easy task, for the inhabitants never dreamt of combining to repulse the malefactors. These would make their way into a hut, force the

¹ Bergholz, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xx p. 589, vol. xxi. p. 231.

² Solovief, vol. xviii. p. 189.

Moujik and his wife to tell where their money was hidden, lay hands on the furniture, pile it on carts, and quietly depart. The neighbours looked on and never lifted a finger. Many young men went into monasteries, to escape military service, others obtained admission to the schools founded by Peter, and, once admitted, idled their time away.

But in spite of all that, a great moral revolution was accomplished. The seed Peter cast over his native soil, at random somewhat, irregularly, and sometimes capriciously, was to germinate and bear fruit. And, above all things, he set his people the example of a life in which the most deplorable vices,—arising from his original hereditary stain,—were mingled with the manliest and noblest virtues. History has proved to which side the balance inclined. A force, the elements of which are certainly not material, only, has been developed before the eyes of astonished and startled Europe, in a population of 100,000,000 souls. This force is rooted in the soul of the hero of modern Russia.

To him, too, his country owes her intellectual progress, although the scholastic establishments of the great reign are considered, and not unjustly, to have failed.

II

The Slavophile party has ideas, and somewhat presumptuous ones, of its own, as to Russian education, previous to the days of Peter the Great. According to these the great Reformer rather put his country back, by substituting for the system of *universal* education carried on, in a very satisfactory manner, in primary and secondary schools, and in the Slavo-Greco-Latin Academy at Moscow, that of education by professors, already discredited in Western Europe. Let us first consider the nature of these schools, and to what the universality of their teaching really amounted.

The only schools in existence were those attached to a few monasteries. The *universal* education consisted in the perusal of the Sacred Books, and some very bare and elementary notions of geography and history. After Peter was dead, Feofan Prokopovitch, who cannot be suspected of undue spite against the ecclesiastical system of education, called attention to the fact, that, when no other system

existed in the country, it would not have been easy to find such a thing as a *compass* within the borders of Russia. The elementary text-books of the period are drawn up in the form of conversations, which give curious proof of the intellectual level of the times. (Q.) What are the elevation of the sky, the extent of the earth, and the depth of the sea? (A.) The elevation of the sky is the Father, the extent of the earth is the Son, and the depth of the sea is the Holy Ghost. (Q.) To whom was Christ's first writing given? (A.) To the Apostle Caiaphas (*sic*)!

No real period of education existed in those days for Russian men. There was no clearly marked point of transition from childhood into adult years, and the Russian mind, even in maturity, kept something of the freshness, but at the same time some of the gullibility of childhood. It was filled with a sort of uncertain dawning light, peopled with dim shapes, and confused forms—a mixture of pagan superstition and oddly disfigured Christian legend. *Peroun*, the God of Thunder, was replaced by the Prophet Elijah, in his chariot, riding the clouds. Moral and physical phenomena were accepted as the result of terrible and mysterious forces, in the face of which man stood defenceless, and miserably impotent.¹

This chimerical conception of the realities of life, so favourable to all cowardly instincts, Peter especially desired to overthrow, by means of education. His personal views on the subject were far-reaching; they even extended to the system of compulsory and gratuitous teaching advocated by Possoshkof. This principle was confirmed by a Ukase, dated 28th February 1714. But its application was confined to a single class of pupils, the only one attainable,—the children of the *Diaks* (persons employed in the Administrative Offices) and of the popes. The Senate refused to go a step further, holding that commerce and industry must come to ruin, if the supply of apprentices was entirely cut off. The Reformer yielded, and applied his system, in its restricted form, with all his wonted vigour and severity. The son of a *Diak*, named Peter Ijorin, refused to study in a mathematical school at Olonets, and was sent back to St.

¹ Zabielin, *Russian Society before the Time of Peter the Great; Historical Essays* (Moscow, 1872), p. 90, etc.; Solovief, *History of Russia*, vol. xiii. p. 184, etc.

Petersburg with irons on his legs.¹ Schools there must be everywhere, and schools of every kind. This was Peter's watchword.

But what schools? It was long, unfortunately, before Peter came to any decision on this point. In the earlier days he seemed to lean towards that pseudo-universal type of literary tendency, which Polish and Little Russian influence had hitherto supported. Even on his return from his first foreign journey, his view was simply to extend the programme of the old Muscovite Academies, but his meeting with Glück inspired him with a different idea, though somewhat in the same direction. Catherine Troubatshof's former employer was suddenly nominated Director of an establishment, the curriculum of which was to include geography, ethics, politics, Latin rhetoric, Cartesian philosophy, the Greek, Hebrew, Syrian, Chaldean, French and English languages, riding and dancing!² Glück soon lost the few wits he possessed;—and then, with his usual swiftness, the Reformer turned him about. He knew his mind at last. He would have schools for special professional instruction, like those he had seen in Germany, Holland, and England. But he did not give himself time to prepare a general plan, and to begin at the beginning,—by establishing primary and secondary schools. He passed at a bound, to the higher subjects: Engineering, Navigation, and High Mathematics. His principal idea was not so much to diffuse knowledge, as to prepare the officers necessary for his army and navy, and this utilitarian view long continued to sway all his efforts. A Naval Academy was established at St. Petersburg, while Moscow was given a School of Military Surgery, in which richly endowed Professorships were held by German and English teachers. Pupils were the only thing lacking. The sons of the *Diaks* and popes, the only learners at the Tsar's disposal, could not well attempt to study High Mathematics, until they knew how to read and write! Peter's hasty stride brought him to the top of the ladder, but he had never given a thought to the lower rungs. A Ukase was indeed published, in 1714, containing a plan for establishing Provincial Schools, both Primary and Secondary, in connection with the Bishopricks and Monasteries. But in 1719, the

¹ Popof, *Tatishchev and his Times*, p. 38.

² Piekarski, *Literature and Science in Russia*, vol. i. p. 128.

Director of these establishments, Gregory Skorniakof-Pissaref, informed the Sovereign that it had only been found possible to open one school, containing six-and-twenty pupils, at Jaroslav. Forty-seven schoolmasters were sent from St. Petersburg and Moscow into the Provinces during the year 1723; eighteen found nothing to do, and returned to the two cities. During that same year the question of fusing these projected Provincial schools with the Church schools, which a recently published edict had called into being, was raised. The Synod informed the Tsar that only one such Church school, that of Novgorod, was in existence.¹ Up to 1713, there were only three-and-twenty pupils in the Engineering School. Peter, in that year, forcibly caused seventy-seven youths, taken from the families of the Palace servants, to enter it, and their learned teachers were driven to begin by teaching them their alphabet!

The Reformer was not unaware of the poor results obtained, and endeavoured to supply the want by sending a great many young men into educational establishments abroad. But here again difficulties arose. England protested against this foreign invasion. The necessary funds, too, were not forthcoming. Two young men sent to Paris in 1716 and 1717,—one of them the negro, Abraham,—complained that they were starved; they had not a crown a day between them. Idleness and misconduct, too, played their part. In 1717, Prince Repnin besought the Sovereign to allow his two sons to return from Germany, where, instead of learning to be good soldiers, they were doing nothing but running into debt. The authorities at Toulon were obliged, at the same period, to take strong measures with the young Russian gentlemen who had been allowed to enlist in the *Gardes Marins*. Zotof, the Tsar's Agent, reported that they quarrelled amongst themselves, swore at each other 'as no one here, even of the lowest condition, would do,' and even killed each other, 'otherwise than in open duel.' It was found necessary to deprive them of their swords.²

Russia, take it all in all, was still dependent on Europe for her military, scientific, artistic and industrial staff, and though, by some means or other, the barracks were filled, all other services betrayed a distressing void. Yet Peter did not lose courage. He pushed steadily forward. After his

¹ Piekarski, vol. i. p. 125.

² *Ibid.*, p. 163.

stay in Paris, he was haunted by the desire of possessing an 'Académie des Sciences' at St. Petersburg.

He had endless plans drawn up; he collected information from every quarter; he superadded ideas of his own, and ended by attempting something at once ambitious and ill-defined. His hope had been to fill up, by this means, all the disappointing gaps of the scholastic organisation he had endeavoured to create, and of the intellectual life he had hoped to arouse. He was well aware, up to a certain point at least, of the inadequacy of the materials at his command, and therefore, contrary to his usual habit, he moved slowly, as though groping his way, until several years had gone by. It was not till 1724, just twelve months before his death, that he settled the question, in his characteristic fashion, with one stroke of his pen. Below Fick's report on the necessity of finding capable men for the various Russian staffs, he wrote the words, '*Sdielat akademiou*' (Found an academy).

In small provincial towns, and in some of the remoter quarters of Paris, general establishments are to be seen—half shops, half '*bureaux de tabac*'—where stamps, groceries, cigars, household utensils, newspapers, and even books, are retailed. They are the typical remnant of the ancient bazaars, a form to which the huge general emporiums of our period seem, by a process not unfrequent in the history of civilisation, to be returning. The difference between the two resides in the confusion apparent in the first, and the methodical arrangement so remarkable in the second. The Academy, as created by Peter the Great's ukase, was like a primitive bazaar. The three classical forms—the German Gymnasium, the Teutonic University, and the French Academy, were mingled and confounded in whimsical juxtaposition. It was to be a school, but, at the same time, it was to be a learned society, and an artistic coterie. This strange idea is easily explained. It corresponds with an inferior degree of specific development, just as in the case of those general shops, where packets of candles lie on the same counter with yellow-backed novels. The Moscow Academy, founded before the Reformer's accession, was half ecclesiastic and half secular.

This work has been severely and not unjustly criticised.¹

¹ The unfavourable verdict of Pleyer and Vockerodt, contemporary diplomatists, as published by Herrmann, roused a somewhat lively discussion (in which the

As a teaching centre, it never accomplished anything serious, for it had no pupils capable of following the lectures of such men as Hermann, Delisle, and Bernoulli, on the highest problems of speculative science, abstruse mathematical questions, and Greek and Latin antiquities. But as a learned society, it certainly did good service, both to scientific interests in general, and to those of Russia in particular. There can be no doubt as to the practical value of Delisle's work in Russian cartography, nor as to Bayer's studies of Greek and Roman antiquities. It may be disputed whether the 24,912 roubles, assigned for the support of the institution, and charged on the revenues of Narva, Derpt, and Pernau, might not have been better employed, in a country where intellectual luxury may fairly have appeared ill-placed, and at a period when, before providing highly scientific books, it was not easy to find readers able to digest far more elementary works.

But the real teaching of the great reign, and the only one which did not fall short of the Tsar's hope and endeavour, is that which Peter himself bestowed for thirty years—the teaching of his great example, to which I have already referred: his universal curiosity, his feverish love of learning, contagious in their essence, and which, to a certain extent, he succeeded in communicating to his subjects. And apart from this, no one can reproach him with having neglected the elements and rudiments of that intellectual initiation which he so earnestly desired to bestow.

III

Peter did more, to begin with, than teach his subjects to read—he gave them a new language, which, like the rest, was almost wholly his creation. When he was at Amsterdam in 1700, he ordered a Dutchman, John Tessing, assisted by a Pole, named Kopiewski, or Kopiewicz,¹ to set up a

eminent French Slavist, M. Léger, shared), during 1874. Herr Brückner defended Peter and his Academicians in the *Journal du Ministère de l'Instruction Publique* (Jan. 1874), and in the *Revue Russe*. An article published by M. Léger in the *Revue critique* (1874, No. 14), attracted Herr Herrmann's attention to this argument, to which he replied in a very aggressive pamphlet (*F. G. Vockerodt und der Professor für Russische Geschichte zu Dorpat*, A. Brückner, 1874), which elicited a somewhat sharp rejoinder in the *Revue Russe*, 1875, vol. vi. p. 113.

¹ He himself spelt his name in two different fashions.

Russian printing-press in that town. A batch of works on the most varied subjects, history, geography, languages, arithmetic, the art of war, and the art of navigation, was here published: most of these were translations, or adaptations, without any scientific value, but useful for popularising purposes. In 1707, this printing-hive sent off a swarm, and a compositor, a printer, and a typesetter arrived at Moscow, with a Russian alphabet of a novel kind,—the *grajdanski shrift*, or ‘civil alphabet,’ thus named to distinguish it from the ancient Slavo-Servian alphabet, to which the Church still adhered. This was at once adopted by Peter for two new publications; a *Treaty on Geometry*, and a *Manual of Complimentary Phrases*, translated from the German. These were followed by translations of military works, the proofs of which the Tsar himself corrected. But this new alphabet did not satisfy the eager creative spirit of the Reformer. The faithful subjects of Queen Victoria are fond of calling their language ‘the Queen’s English’; ‘the Tsar’s Russian,’ is, historically speaking, a far more veracious phrase. In 1721, Peter desired the Holy Synod, then recently called into existence, to undertake the translation of part of Puffendorf’s works. A contention arose amongst the members of the Assembly. Should the contemplated work appear in the ancient Slavonic language of the Church, or in the current form, which, in course of time, had undergone great alteration? The Sovereign settled the question in most unexpected fashion, decreeing the employment of a special language, which, up to this moment, had only been used in the Tsar’s Diplomatic Chancery, and which clearly betrayed its cosmopolitan origin, crammed as it was with foreign words, or existing ones used in a novel sense,—a lisping of barbarians striving to spell out European civilisation. This was, in future, to be the official tongue. At the present moment, it is written and spoken by one hundred millions of men.

The very idea of having Puffendorf translated by a body of ecclesiastics, seems droll enough, but Peter, as we know, was apt to use any means he found to his hand. He wanted books, and after having desired the manager of his printing press, Polycarpof, to supply him with a history of Russia, and found his work far from satisfactory, he confided the duty to the officials in his Diplomatic Chancery, the lan-

guage of which he had lately adopted. When he wanted a Museum, he appealed to the zeal of all his subjects, and accepted, without inquiry, any curiosities they offered him,—even two-headed calves and deformed children,—endeavouring, all the while, to convince the givers that these ‘monsters’ did not come from the Devil, as they were inclined to think. There is something touching after all, in his perpetual struggle, ill-calculated often, clumsy, missing its object, but ceaseless and unwearying, always straining towards that point, bathed in the light of progress, on which his eyes were fixed. And in the end he generally won. Two officers of his fleet, Ivan Iévreinof and Féodor Loujin started, in 1719, on an exploring voyage to the coast of Kamtschatka, with orders to seek for the solution of a problem suggested by Leibnitz,—Were Asia and America united on that side, or did the sea lie between them? The only result of this first expedition was a map of the Kurile Islands, but Peter returned to the charge, and in 1725, the Straits which still bear the name of the bold explorer, were discovered by Behring.

In the Records of the Paris Academy, we find mention made, by the elder Delisle, of a map of the Caspian Sea, and the surrounding Provinces, which Peter had shown him in 1717, and which, though not absolutely correct, did much to rectify the contemporary Western idea of those countries. In 1721, thirty cartographers were already working independently in different Provinces in Russia. The instructions given them by Peter were characteristically scanty. ‘The latitude of each town will be taken by the sun-dial, and you will then work in a straight line to every point of the compass, up to the frontier of each district.’ Yet some work was done. Special explorers were also sent out, Lieutenant Gerber, to the Northern Caspian, Dr. Messerschmidt, and Tabbert, a Swedish prisoner, better known under the name of Strahlenberg, to Siberia. Florio Beneveni, an Italian, travelled into Persia and Bokhara, and to Khiva, while Lieutenant Buchholz and Major Liharef followed the course of the Irtysh. The Secretary of the Senate, Ivan Kirillof, was ordered to use the information thus collected, for the compilation of a general Atlas, on which he laboured till 1734, and which is a work of considerable value.¹

¹ Struwe, *Russische Revue*, vol. viii., 1876.

In 1720, the innumerable monasteries in the Empire were commanded to give up their stores of ancient charters, manuscripts, and books.¹ This was the beginning of the Russian Archives. The foundations of a Library, the direct result of Peter's Conquest, were laid with books, carried off from Mittau, in the course of the Northern War, and stored, in the first instance, in the Summer Palace at St. Petersburg. But a Museum of Art was still lacking, and Peter gave commissions, in 1717, to several Florentine artists, amongst others to Bonacci, from whom he ordered two statues, representing Adam and Eve. In 1713, he began to make purchases at Rome, and his Agent, Kologrivof, wrote him that he had acquired a Venus 'more beautiful than that at Florence, and in better preservation.' For this he paid only 196 ducats. A School of Fine Arts was added to the Museum, and attached, oddly enough, to the offices of the Arsenal. The entrance to all Museums was free. In vain did Peter's counsellors open a question which frequently attracts attention in the present day, and endeavour to enrich the National collections by means of a moderate entrance fee. He took a step in the opposite direction, and gave orders for the gratuitous distribution of refreshments to the visitors. This habit was continued till the reign of Anna Ivanovna, and cost about 400 roubles a year.² Sixty groups of figures, which adorned the fountains in the gardens of the Summer Palace, taught the St. Petersburg public the story of Æsop's Fables. The text of each fable was affixed to the group representing it. These gilded leaden figures possessed no beauty, but the intention with which they were placed in the gardens was excellent.

Peter did not overlook the value of the Theatre, as a means of intellectual instruction. Very little is known of theatrical history in Russia before the great reign. Periodical representations, on the model of those given in the Jesuit Educational Establishments, did certainly take place in the Monasteries at Kief and Moscow, and at the Hospital in the ancient Capital. The subjects of these plays were always religious, and the actors were seminarists and students. The scenery was of the roughest, and the general style extremely coarse. Jokes upon the subject were current in the German quarter. There was a story, that, in a piece

¹ *Collected Laws*, 3693.

² Golikof, vol. x. p. 42.

representing the Annunciation, the Blessed Virgin answered the Angel, 'Dost thou take me for a . . . ?'¹ In 1672, the year of Peter's birth, actors first appeared at Court. Alexis' first wife, the Miloslavska, ruled by Byzantine asceticism and the laws of the Domostroï, had opposed all such representations, but his second consort, who was cheerful in temperament, and altogether more open-minded, welcomed them to the Kreml. The company was a German one, but it was expected to make Russian actors out of the pupils belonging to the State offices (*poddiačhyi*) who were confided to it as apprentices. These actors performed, before Racine's time, a version of the story of Esther and Ahasuerus, which was considered to recall that of Nathalia and Alexis. The Tsar's death, and the troubled years that ensued, put a stop to these entertainments. There is, indeed, a story that Sophia caused plays of her own, amongst others a translation of Molière's '*Médecin malgré lui*,' to be performed within the *terem* about 1680. She is even said to have taken a part herself. But the Regent's well-known character, and the disturbed history of her Regency, render this a very unlikely supposition. She may have been confused with Peter's elder sister, the Tsarevna Nathalia, then about seventeen years of age, who was later to give proof of real theatrical talent.

All these performances were private in their character, and this quality Peter caused to disappear. He installed the theatre on the Red Square, and summoned the general public to the performances. He set his heart on having a Russian company, playing Russian pieces, and his desire was accomplished. In 1714, the Tsarevna Nathalia lodged a company of native actors, who played both tragedy and comedy, in a huge house at St. Petersburg, which had been lately built, and hastily abandoned. She herself superintended the staging and machinery, sketched scenery, and wrote plays full of political allusions, of a moral tendency. The orchestra was composed of Russian musicians;—the conductor's baton, so Weber tells us, was not unfrequently replaced by a cudgel. Peter was a great lover of music, especially of religious music; he had a fair choir of church choristers, in whose performances he was fond of joining, and he also had horn

¹ Haigold, *Beilagen zum neueränderten Russland* (Leipzig, 1770), vol. i. p. 399.

players, and performers on the Polish bag-pipes. After the year 1720, the Duke of Holstein's orchestra frequently played at the Russian Court, and there introduced the sonatas, solos, trios and concertos of such famous German and Italian masters as Telemann, Kayser, Haynischen, Schultz, Fuchs, Corelli, Tartini, and Porpora.

Finally, the usefulness and the power of the periodical press did not escape the great man's watchful eye. In the year 1702, Baron von Huissen was charged with the duty of keeping up good relations between the Tsar and European opinion, and was granted financial means for the purpose. He translated, published and disseminated the Sovereign's decisions as to the military organisation of his Empire; he encouraged learned men, in every country, to dedicate their works to the Tsar, and even to write books in his honour; he inundated Holland and Germany with pamphlets, according to which Charles XII. had been beaten, and altogether worsted, long before the Battle of Poltava. A Leipsic newspaper, '*Europäische Fama*,' was in his pay, and conscientiously flattered and toadied the Tsar, in return for his money. In 1703, the first Russian Gazette appeared at Moscow—yet another 'window' opened to admit Western air and light. Until that time, the Tsar had been the only, or almost the only, person in Russia who knew what was happening abroad. The extracts from the foreign Gazettes (*Kouranty*), made in the Office of Foreign Affairs, were only intended for the Sovereign and his immediate circle. All the domestic news of the country was transmitted from mouth to mouth, and so disfigured in the process, that error sprang up, in every direction, amongst the simple-minded populace. This first number of the new Gazette gives information as to the number of cannon recently cast at Moscow, and the number of pupils in the newly-founded schools.

Even in the present day, the Russian press is very far from having reached the level of its Western fore-runners, and if, generally speaking, Peter's work in this matter were to be judged by its apparent and immediate results, the benefit would appear but small. The only literary efforts we can find are a few very faulty translations; a memorandum by Shafirof, the Secretary of State, on the

motives of the Tsar's war against Sweden, written in Russian, but full of French words; an historical compilation by Peter Krekshin; another by Prince Hilkof, as badly expressed as Shafirof's production; and one more, far the best, by Basil Tatishtchef. The only poet of the period is Prince Antiochus Kantémir, the son of that Hospodar of Moldavia whose friendship so nearly proved fatal to Peter; but his eight satires, in syllabic verse, did not appear till after the great Tsar's death. As far as science is concerned, we have a second-rate arithmetical treatise and a few maps; in art, some statues brought from Italy, and three painters who studied there, Nikitin, Merkoulief, and Matviéief. The portrait of Peter by the last-mentioned artist is not a masterpiece.

But this is not the manner in which to assess the distance covered by the great leader, and by the subjects who followed him. These dimensions must be sought in the general change of mind and feeling brought about by the reforms, and the consequent modification of the national thought and sentiment. I will refer, if written evidence is absolutely required, to two documents, set, like frontier posts, at the beginning and end of the reign. Possoshkof's will, at its commencement, and Tatishtchef's, at its close, are both of them addressed, not so much to the writers' direct heirs, as to their intellectual posterity. Possoshkof was an enthusiastic admirer of the Reformer and of his work; he followed him faithfully, so far as his ideas and principles of order and administrative government were concerned, but, in the matter of scientific beliefs, he was bound by the monastic spirit of the fifteenth century. When Tatishtchef appeared, those bonds were broken. He was the embodiment of Modern Russia, hearkening readily to the wind that blew from afar; the open current had no terror for him; he was over eager, rather, to cast himself into it. All progress charmed him; no step was too bold for him; there is something almost American in his inclination to eccentric methods. All this was Peter's doing.

It was no light undertaking to turn the national mind from purely religious subjects, and interest it in profane and human things. It is a curious fact, though easily explained by the circumstances, that the man who did most to help Peter in this matter, Féofan Prokopovitch, was himself a

priest. He never spoke, save within churches—he never wrote, but on matters of theology or ecclesiastical discipline; but his sermons were political pamphlets, and his religious rules were satires. Peter laicised even the priesthood—for the movement he created was driven, in its search for men worthy to take part in it, to take hold of this priest within the walls of his sacristy, and sweep him into the outer world. Out of this sudden whirlwind of new sensations and ideas, which snatched men from their habits and their prejudices, from the sanctuaries in which they had spent centuries of idleness, and threw them headlong into the budding tumult of an intellectual and moral world just breaking into life, Modern Russia has arisen. This too, and above all other things, was Peter's work.

CHAPTER III

THE ECCLESIASTICAL REFORMS AND THE SUPPRESSION OF THE PATRIARCHATE

1. *The Church*—Feofan Prokopovitch—Intellectual Propaganda and Ecclesiastical Reform—Precarious condition of the ancient Muscovite Church—Material prosperity, moral degradation—The *Raskol*—The Reform forced on the Reformer—The death of the Patriarch Adrian opens the way.
- II. *The Patriarchate*—A temporary guardian of the Patriarchal throne—Stephen Iavorski—Peter first attacks the Monasteries—The Black Clergy submit—The revolt of the *Raskolniks*—The struggle—It carries Peter away—Stephen Iavorski betrays his mission and cheats the Government—The conflict—Gradual destruction of the Patriarchal authority—An open void—A more radical reform necessary.
- III. *The Holy Synod*—Ecclesiastical regulations—Programme and pamphlet—Universal discontent—It does not check the Reformer—Suppression of the Patriarchate—Establishment of the Holy Synod—The spirit of the Reform—Results.

I

FÉOFAN PROKOPOVITCH came into the world at Kief in 1681. By his origin, he belonged to the sphere of Polish influence, and, by his education, to the Catholic Church. He first studied in a Uniate School, and then was sent to Rome. Thence he brought back a hatred for Catholicism, a mind open to all the ideas and thoughts of the century, to philosophy, science, and politics, and even certain Lutheran tendencies. Long before his acquaintance with Peter, while still nothing but an ordinary teacher of theology, he became known as a restless spirit, an innovator, a partisan of all bold action.¹ He belonged to the movement of which Peter himself was the outcome, and which had already reached the foot of the altar. The moral features of this priest were, in themselves, a novelty in Russia. He was the type, unknown in those days, and almost extinct in these. of

¹ Piekarski, vol. i. p. 481.

the great Western Prelate. Nothing was lacking. He had the varied knowledge, the literary and artistic taste, the ambition, the spirit of intrigue, the touch of scepticism, and the sybaritic instincts. Propokovitch had a library of 30,000 volumes, he kept open house, he never ate meat from one year's end to the other, but every year 1500 salmon, 21,000 fresh-water herrings, 11 poods of caviare, and as many barrels of smoked fish of various kinds, were consumed at his table. He lived freely, and gave alms equally freely. In 1701, he established a school, the best of that period, in one of his houses in St. Petersburg. The instructions drawn up for its guidance might have been compiled by a full-fledged Jesuit, and the teachers, in several cases, were foreigners and Lutherans. He wrote verses and plays, which he caused the pupils in his school to perform. He was heard to say, when he was lying on his deathbed, in 1736, 'Oh! head, head, thou hast been drunk with knowledge; where wilt thou rest now?'¹

The movement which bore him along originated largely, as I have already pointed out, in a Polish and Little Russian circle, which gave birth to a whole generation of open-minded and cultivated men. It supplied Peter with his principal resources and chief helpers, both in his educational undertakings, and his ecclesiastical reforms. Before Prokopovitch's time, another Little Russian priest, Dimitri, Bishop of Rostov, served the Reformer with tongue and pen. 'Is it better to cut our beards or to have our heads cut off?' he was asked, and he replied, 'Will your head grow again, after it has been cut off?'² Féofan, more intelligent and energetic, was to do a different work. He was to be Peter's battering ram, to break down the defences of the old Muscovite Church.

This was a fortress which the great reform could not leave unbreached; and indeed, apart from any external interference, it was tottering to its fall. Priests and monks, white clergy and black, formed a world apart; they were numerous, powerful, rich, and utterly degraded. The Church property was enormous, the monasteries owned more than 900,000 serfs,—one alone, that of St. Sergius, near Moscow, possessed 92,000 serfs, besides fisheries, mills, fields and

¹ Tshistovitch, *Biography of Féofan Prokopovitch* (St. Petersburg, 1868).

² Solovief, vol. xv. pp. 125, 126.

forests without number. The Archimandrites who ruled these convents, wore diamond buckles on their shoes; all the clergy lived freely, many in scandalous luxury. The most characteristic trait of the Russian family life of that period, was its isolation. Each household lived apart, and every householder desired to have a church and priest of his own. In default of this, a family would deposit a sacred picture within the parish church, and never pray before any other. When means were not sufficient to hire a priest by the year, one or several were engaged by the hour, for special ceremonies. Priests stood in the public squares, and waited to be hired.

The power of the clergy in the State was enormous. Peter's ancestor, the Patriarch Philaretus, ruled the country, from 1619 to 1633, in the name of his brother Michael, the first of the Romanofs. The Patriarch Nicone held out against the Tsar Alexis, who, in order to overcome his resistance, was forced to appeal to the rival Patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch. Catholic influences, and the weakness of the civil power, had imparted a Papal air to the Ecclesiastical Government, but, as I have already pointed out, this tremendous position was not counter-balanced by any virtue, or moral strength. The priests, sought after as they were, knew the routine of their ritual, but they had forgotten how to treat men's souls. They were far too prosperous, besides being too ignorant. In the year 1700, there were only 150 pupils in the Moscow Ecclesiastical Academy, and these lived a life of idleness, within a building which was rapidly falling into decay. Godunof rendered a doubtful service to his Church, in 1589, when he ensured its independence by the final rupture of the bond that connected it with the Œcumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. The Russian Church had, indeed, a separate head after that period, but, in another sense, that head had been cut off. The Moscow Patriarch's authority was purely administrative; spiritual power, properly so called, slipped from his grasp. He could not even interpret questions of faith and dogma; all these matters were in the hands of the Œcumenical Council, and no meeting of that Council was probable or even possible. When the Church lost the power of touching these problems, she lost the principle of life and motion. She was doomed to inertia. When she tried

to bestir herself, the *Raskol* straightway rose in her path. A mere attempt at innovation, in the very limited field of the external formula of devotion, raised a shriek of rebellion from one end of the country to the other. The Patriarchate, as an organ of administration, was already discredited and broken-down.

This reform, then, like others, was forced on the Reformer. He was not sorry, we may be sure, to seize the opportunity; the legacy of Philaretus and Nicone would have been a most inconvenient element in the State he wished to bring into existence. The young Sovereign's intimacies in the German quarter, and his visits to Holland and to England, had not prepared his mind to accept any idea of divided power, nor even the scholastic principle of the two planets, which shed an independent light on the peoples of the earth. When the Patriarch Adrian ventured to find fault with the Tsar's English tobacco treaty, he received a cutting reply: 'Is the Patriarch the director of my customs?' inquired Peter. Yet, in this new matter, he went carefully. Indifferent as he was to the wills of other men, he seems to have shrunk from offending their consciences. He left the Pontiff on his throne, and when, during his absence, and even sometimes in his presence, the spiritual ruler took on the air of presiding over the secular Government of Moscow, he patiently endured it. But the news of the Patriarch's death, in October 1700, came as a sound of victory to the monarch.

II

Kourbatof is believed to have advised the Tsar to put off appointing a successor to the office. Had the idea of the suppression of the Patriarchate already occurred to him? I hardly think so. His plan at that moment would rather appear to have been to deprive the vacant office of part of its prerogatives, and to confer it, at a later date, on some more submissive holder. Advantage was to be taken of the temporary absence of the master to sweep out his house and make the necessary repairs. A ukase, dated 16th December 1700, provided for the provisional administration of ecclesiastical affairs, by a body appointed for the purpose; the different branches of the business were confided to

various departments, and the most important matters were nominally confided to a 'temporary guardian of the Pontifical throne.'

This post was conferred upon a Little-Russian. Stephen Iavorski, Bishop of Riazan and Moscow, was born at Kief, and educated in foreign schools. Peter deliberately deprived him of the management of the monasteries, which he placed in the hands of a department, presided over by a layman, Moussin-Poushkin. In this quarter the first clearance was to be made. The convents contained an enormous floating population of men and women, most of whom had never dreamt of taking vows. These mock monks and nuns, who had assumed the conventual habit to escape from the results of some intrigue, to avoid performing some unpleasant duty, or simply to enjoy the sweets of well-fed idleness, travelled from one monastery to another, scouring the country and the towns, and living a life of scandalous profligacy. Two radical measures were at once adopted. A general census was taken of all monks and nuns, whose comings and goings were in future to be regulated by the Sovereign. The conventual garb was henceforth not to be considered to constitute the conventual condition. Further, the convent revenues were, after a fashion, confiscated; all income was to be paid to the department directed by Moussin-Poushkin; the monasteries were to receive an amount sufficient for their actual needs, and the surplus was to be spent in supporting charitable institutions.

This reform had a result which Peter had not foreseen. Left to themselves, the clergy would have submitted tamely. The Tsar's absolute power in temporal matters was a tradition of the Church itself. When the priests refused to contribute to the expenses of his war with the Tartars, Ivan Vassilévitich forced twenty of them to fight with as many bears in a sort of circus.¹ Peter was not driven to such lengths as these, but Prokopovitch, acting as his mouthpiece, openly declared that any pretension, by priest or monk, to independence of the Tsar's will, was a Popish delusion.² The call to resistance came from without. The monks' cause, which they themselves had almost utterly abandoned, was taken up by other malcontents, who carried it out of its proper limits,

¹ Galitzin's *Memoirs* (Paris, 1867), p. 410.

² Tshistovitch, *Life of Prokopovitch*, p. 29.

and invested it with a purely religious character. The standard of insurrection was raised by the *Raskolniks*. Peter was astounded, and no wonder. He had never had anything to do with the *Raskol*. The movement had been aroused by Nicone's action, before his birth, somewhere about 1666, and he had never taken any interest in those ritualistic questions which were at the bottom of the great discussion. There is a sort of mingled pity and scorn in his language about the unfortunate sectarians, whom the official Church desired to persecute: 'Why make martyrs of them, they are too foolish for that?'¹ And why not, he further asked, live at peace with them? A certain number, residing in the neighbourhood of Olonets, on the banks of the Wyga, near a recently established factory, were accused, in the course of the year 1700, of desiring to form a settlement, and a regular religious community. The Tsar wrote, 'Disagreeable neighbours, you think? A piece of good luck! Let them come and work at the forges. If they will do that, they shall pray after their own fashion.'²

But the *Raskolniks* themselves, unfortunately, were much less peaceably inclined. A ruler who was friendly to Lefort and Gordon,—the one a Calvinist, and the other a Catholic,—was an object of suspicion in the eyes of such austere believers. He must be the accomplice, even if he were not the author, of the impious innovations which revolted the consciences of the Faithful. He might even be Antichrist. Besides all this, the defence of religion was an attractive phrase, and these defenders were most valuable allies. Like most persecuted classes, they were brave, and ended by becoming important. Hard-working, temperate and economical, relatively well taught,—having, at all events, learnt to read for the sake of understanding the subjects of their eager discussions,—they soon rose to wealth, influence, and consideration. They bribed officials, were protected in high quarters, took advantage of the ignorance of the official clergy, and soon grew powerful. They were sought for, their support was solicited, and their protests against the reform of the national ritual was gradually united with, and fused into, the universal opposition to Peter's reforms in

¹ Solovief, vol. xvi. p. 295.

² *Ibid.* See also *The Raskol and the Russian Church in the Days of Peter the Great* (St. Petersburg, 1895), p. xiii., etc., p. 327, etc.

general. An eloquent proof of this fact is found in the legend which describes Peter as Nicone's illegitimate son. The monks' cause was certainly strengthened by this story.

The Reformer, then, was forced to wrestle with the *Raskolniks*. But how was this to be done, unless he first made common cause with that official Church whose privileges he attempted to break down, whenever they came into collision with his own? He was driven into this course, unwillingly enough. At first he endeavoured to avoid it.

As in the case of the monks, he ordered a Census and a Fiscal measure:—the *Raskolniks*, rich as they were, refused to share the common expenses; nothing could force them either into the Army, or into the Administration; the Tsar was determined they should pay for their privileges, and doubled their taxes.¹ Naturally they refused to pay, and the struggle began. It soon raged round Peter. In September 1718, George Rjevski went with the monk Pitirim, a converted *Raskolnik*, to Nijni-Novgorod, one of the principal centres of the *Raskol*, where he laboured, knout in hand, to re-establish order. Meanwhile Stephen Iavorski used the same arms to repress the Calvinist and Lutheran heresies. In 1717, the wife of an inferior employé, in the Department of Provincial Affairs, named Nathalia Zima, who was accused of Protestant leanings, was knouted three times, receiving eighty-five blows in all, and only saved her life by abjuring her errors. Other, and less docile heretics, were executed, Peter himself signing the sentences.²

This was in utter contradiction to the ideas, principles, and tendencies, the Reformer had intended to put forward with the assistance of that very man, Iavorski. But, since his elevation, the 'temporary guardian of the Pontifical throne' had changed his skin. Whether out of care for his budding popularity, or from a sense of his recently assumed responsibilities, he yearly inclined, more and more, not to Orthodoxy only in all its ancient fanaticism, narrow and uncompromising, but to the old Muscovite instinct of rebellion against any idea of progress. In 1712, he actually ventured to find fault with the Administrative Reforms of the new régime, and thundered, from the pulpit, against the unpopular fiscal regulations!

¹ *Collected Laws*, pp. 2991, 2996.

² Solovief, vol. xvi. pp. 302, 315.

With such a companion, Peter could scarcely fail to go astray. The acknowledgment of his error, which, in characteristic fashion, he did not hesitate to make, was to open out new destinies before the official church and its leader.

Before the final experience of their common campaign against the *Raskol*, and his own consequent disgust, the Reformer felt the necessity of protecting himself and his work against this hostile leader, by gradually reducing the already diminished power and privileges allotted to him. Iavorski's authority, even on those questions which had been left in his hands, was soon further limited;—first, by an Episcopal Council, which met periodically at Moscow, and then by increasing interference on the part of Moussin-Poushkin. His last shadow of independence disappeared, when the Senate was created in 1711. Church affairs were, in future, to be submitted, like all others, to the supreme jurisdiction of this newly-constituted body. The Patriarch's representative could not even appoint an *Arhurei* in an Eparchy, without the approval of the Senate. When he tried to intervene in the discussions, which arbitrarily disposed of the interests committed to his care, and to claim his own rights, he was brutally treated, and quitted the Assembly in tears.¹ In 1718, Peter, suspecting his former favourite of connivance with Alexis, removed him from Moscow, kept him at St. Petersburg under his own eye and hand, and gave him a rival in the person of Prekopovitch, whom he created Bishop of Pskof, and whose influence steadily increased.

By the year 1720, scarcely a trace of the ancient power and prestige of the Patriarchs remained. Everything had passed out of Iavorski's hands. But Peter soon perceived the abnormality of a state of things, whereby the spiritual authority was subordinated, not to that of the Sovereign only,—Byzantine tradition was not opposed to that—but to a mere department of his Government. The clergy had grown tame enough, but was it still worthy of its name? It was more like a regiment, kept under military discipline, but bereft of the honour of the flag. The Abbot flogged his monks, the Bishop flogged his Abbots, the Government knouted the Bishop, and then degraded him and sent him

¹ Olchevski, *The Holy Synod under Peter the Great* (Kief, 1894), p. 9.

into exile. All classes, high and low, from the top of the ladder to the bottom, were falling into the same state of degradation, into idleness, ignorance, drunkenness, and the worst vice. Such a condition of things could not continue. Some change was indispensable. That presbyterian institution, 'known as the Holy Synod, dictated by imperious necessity, and inspired by the friends of Prokopovitch, who owed the greater part of his knowledge to such Protestant theologians as Quensted and Gerhard, was summoned, in 1721, to draw Russia out of the abyss, which threatened to engulf her religious and moral future.

III

The idea of the Holy Synod was occupying Peter's attention in 1718, and some people have thought the complicity of the clergy in the rebellion of the Tsarevitch had something to do with his resolution.¹ But I am inclined to believe he took a broader view. In the following year, he drew up, with Prokopovitch's assistance, a Code of regulations, intended to justify the new Reform, and explain its basis. The document is a curious one;—a striking picture of the ecclesiastical customs of the time, in which the Bishop's satirical turn finds free play, and a strange mixture of ideas and doctrines, drawn from the most distant corners of the Western world of religion, philosophy, and politics. The advantages of a collective authority are forcibly maintained, with a strange indifference to the arguments thus supplied against the Sovereign's own personal and individual power. No other proof could be needed of Peter's incapacity for abstract conceptions.

These Regulations, which were read before a special meeting of the Senate and the Episcopal Council, and sent into every Eparchy, to be signed by the Bishops and the principal Archimandrites, raised a perfect tempest of fury. They were at once recognised for what they were—a pamphlet, whose authors put themselves forward as the physicians of men's souls, and, before citing their chosen remedies, described the disease with terrible exactness. They desired to remove out of the priesthood all that numerous body who had entered it as a matter of

¹ Pierling's *Russia and the Sorbonne*, p. 47.

calculation, and without any real vocation. The Episcopal Schools, through which future candidates would have to pass, and the strict examinations to be conducted by competent authorities, until these schools could be established, were to ensure this fact. These examinations were not only to deal with the knowledge, but with the moral worth, of the future Popes. No priest, according to Peter and Prokopovitch, must be either a mystic or a fanatic; the examiners were to make sure he saw no visions, and had no disturbing dreams. Domestic chaplains,—the usual instruments, according to this Regulation, of hidden intrigues, and the prime movers in irregular marriages,—were to be questioned and tested, with special severity. As for the priests who served chapels *kept up by widows*, they were to be completely suppressed. All miraculous places not recognised by the Holy Synod were also to be done away with. Fees were to be replaced by free-will offerings, and the 'death-tax,' as the document describes the price claimed for prayers for the dead, which, according to custom, were offered for forty days, was utterly forbidden. The expenses of this part of the ritual were to be paid by means of a fixed tax on all parishioners.

But the Black Clergy were more especially attacked. No man was to enter a monastery before he was thirty, all monks were to confess and communicate at least four times a year. Work was to be compulsory in every monastery, no monks were to visit nunneries or private houses; no nun was to take final vows before she was fifty, and until the final vows were taken any female novice might marry.¹

Discontent, this time, was universal, but Peter held on his way. The regulation was published on the 25th of January 1721, and on the 11th of the following February, the Ecclesiastical College,—later, out of some tardy deference to the Byzantine tradition, entitled the Holy Synod,—held its first meeting. The Patriarchate was suppressed. The civil and religious interests of the Church, with all the necessary powers, legislative, judicial, and administrative—these last under the management of a duly appointed

¹ This regulation was published in Russian, in the Collected Laws, No. 3718, and frequently in German translations. See *Catalogue des Russica*, 265-268. I have seen a copy, printed at St. Petersburg during the reign of Catherine II.; in this the paragraph as to 'widows' chaplains' was suppressed, but, through some carelessness, it had remained in the Index.

Government official—were made over to a permanent Assembly, in which an ordinary priest might sit, in the company of Bishops. This body held equal rank with the Senate, and took precedence of all other Administrative bodies.

It should be remembered that, at this period, the substitution of administrative bodies, for individual administrative chiefs, was much in fashion in all Western countries. Peter had just returned from Paris, where Louis XIV.'s ministers had given place to the Councils of the Regency. And again, this revolution of the Tsar's may be looked on as the consequence of a progressive evolution, two centuries old already, which had modified the constitution of the Eastern Churches. The Holy Synod was to replace, to a certain extent, the Patriarch, who had been suppressed, and the Council, which had disappeared. And the six Oriental Churches, one after the other, organised themselves on this same pattern. Finally, the reaction against the Papacy, so strong in the old Patriarchate, was evidenced in the Democratic and Presbyterian nature of the institution which took its place.

This, the most sharply contested, perhaps, of all Peter's reforms, has, since his time, received the double sanction of internal duration, and external expansion. I will not take upon myself to discuss the value of the work. But it has been a lasting one. The Holy Synod still sits at St. Petersburg. Has it fulfilled its Founder's expectations? Has it given, or brought back, to the Russian Church, together with her dignity, independence, and power, her old authority over human souls, and the virtue necessary to the wielding of it? These are matters which I cannot broach, without venturing into burning questions, which I have determined to avoid. The Reformer's chief desire was to take measures to prevent the Church from being a present or future difficulty, in the new State he had called into existence; and no one can deny that his success, in this respect, was admirable and complete.

CHAPTER IV

THE SOCIAL REFORM—THE TABLE OF RANKS

- I. *The Nobility*—Was Peter a social reformer?—Social classes in ancient Muscovy—Ivan III.'s *Sloujilyi Lioudi*—Their triple part: military, administrative, and economic—Peter turns them into a Nobility—New distribution of offices and privileges—Universal enrolment—A table of ranks—Collectivism.
- II. *The Peasants*—The rural population—Two classes of peasants—How their condition was influenced by Peter's policy and laws—General servitude—State reasons—The greatness of Russia and its price—Paid by the peasant.
- III. *The Middle Class*—Peter's attempt to found one—Failures and inconsistencies—Municipal autonomy and bureaucracy—Nobles and Commons—A far-reaching work—The socialisation of the Church.

I

WAS Peter a social reformer? The title has been denied him. It has been argued that the changes, important as they were, in the condition of the various social classes during his reign, were only the indirect consequences, and, occasionally, those he had at least foreseen and desired, of his legislative work. This argument does not affect me. Observation, indeed, has taught me, that most contemporary reforms of that period had something of this accidental quality. Peter made no alteration, either in the constitution of the various classes, or in the nature of their respective rights and duties. All he did was to modify their distribution. But, if he did not actually introduce a far-reaching political and social principle into this reorganisation, he certainly affirmed its existence in the clearest and most energetic manner. Let us now, without further discussion as to names, come to facts.

Even before the Mongol invasion, Ancient Russia possessed three social classes, vaguely corresponding to those of the Carolingian and Merovingian periods in the West. The *Mouji* or *Notables* bore some resemblance to the *Rachim-*

bourgs and *Bonshommes* of those days. They have all the mixed and confused character of the Gallo-Frankish aristocracy. Next in order, the *Lioudi*, like the *Homines* in the West, formed a compact body, comprising all the free men of the country. Last of all, came the serf population. This family resemblance may be explained by the Norman origin of the Russian State. This was almost entirely wiped out, under the Mongol yoke, by the levelling hand of a common servitude. It was not till the second half of the fifteenth century, that a commencement of organic life began slowly to rise out of the barren ground. Ivan III., in his merciless endeavour to unify the country, gathered a new group about him, a class of 'men who gave service,' *sloujilyié lioudi*, who were, at the same time, the only landed proprietors in existence—for the Sovereign, in return for compulsory service, both in time of peace and in time of war, gave them hereditary or life interest in certain lands. From the military, from the administrative, and from the economic point of view, this body played an important part, both in the State and in society. These men made war, helped the Sovereign to govern, and owned the whole, or almost the whole, of the social capital of the country. Yet, before Peter's accession, this class had no regularly constituted form. It was not a caste, nor an aristocracy. Peter was the first to give it this character, and to bestow on it a generic title borrowed from Polish phraseology, *shlahetstvo*, or nobility. Until that period, the body had remained somewhat undefined and unsettled in character, and even the title conferred by the Tsar did not entirely remove this embryonic quality. The condition of these *sloujilyié lioudi*, or *d'vorianié*, was the first to be affected by Peter's reorganisation of the military and civil services. Military service in the provincial armed bands, called out in case of war, was exchanged for permanent service in standing regiments. Thus the budding aristocracy was removed out of its natural surroundings. The corporate instinct, which had begun to develop in the provincial centres, was broken up, and removed into regiments and *corps d'armée*, which gave it a special character. At the same time, the civil was separated from the military service. The *d'vorianié* had formerly performed a double office. They had been soldiers and magistrates in one, wielding both sword and

pen. Now, each service was to do its separate duty—but that duty grew all the heavier. The official, whether civil or military, was laid hands on when he was fifteen, and worked till death set him free. And this was not all. Until the age of fifteen, he was expected to prepare himself to do his duty. He was to study, and his progress was to be strictly examined. Peter expected his nobility to be a nursery of officers and officials. The gaps in his army, civil and military, were to be filled up with men of lower condition, amongst whom the *dvorianié* were to act the part of leaders. But this was the Reformer's only concession to the principle of a social hierarchy. Faithful to the tendency evident in those reforms which preceded his own accession, he determined that in his apportionment of the various ranks, the claims of aristocratic origin should be balanced by the democratic claim of merit. A peasant might rise to official rank, and, by the fact of his becoming an officer, he became *dvorianin* (noble). There was something fine about this, but it certainly sounded the knell of any autonomous distribution of social elements. Nothing was left but a universal enrolment of the units at disposal, in the ranks of an official hierarchy. The famous 'Table of Ranks,' published in 1721, is the official expression and sanction of this system. Those who served the Sovereign were thus divided into three departments, the Army, the State, and the Court. But the staff, in each case, held equal rank. There were fourteen classes, or degrees of official rank (*tchin*), corresponding, in every department, like the rungs on a triple ladder. The list was headed by a Field-Marshal on the Military, and a Chancellor on the Civil side; immediately below these two, we find a General, beside a Privy Councillor, and so it goes on till we come to a Standard-Bearer and a Departmental Registrar, at the bottom. The same order of precedence was extended to families of officials—the wife shared her husband's rank, and the daughter of a first-class official, so long as she remained unmarried, held the same rank as the wife of one of the fourth class.

This artificial classification clearly has nothing in common with those spontaneously developed in other European societies. Yet it may perhaps be the only one suited to the country of its birth. Peter's *acting Privy Councillors* and *Departmental Registrars* were nothing but a reproduction of

Ivan III.'s *sloujilyie houbi*, in a French or German disguise. This particular method of grouping the population was historical and traditional in Russia, and may very possibly be bound up with the existence of a people, which, all through the centuries, has shown but little disposition towards the formation, either of a free Democracy, or of a powerful Aristocracy. Peter, rather than let his subjects wander at random, enrolled them all. Each person was given his place and duty, and individual or corporate rights and interests were, as a general principle, subordinated to those collective ones represented by the law of the State. A certain writer has declared that Peter, in this respect, was a century before his time.¹ I should be disposed to double the period. His plan strikes me as bearing the closest resemblance to modern Collectivism. It remains to be seen whether the principle already affirmed by Ivan III. constituted a real step in advance.

Peter, when he arranged his *dvorianié* into classes, and carefully numbered them, did not overlook what they owed him as landed proprietors. He invented a strange part, which he expected them to play; they were to serve the State as '*rural stewards*.' This is the real meaning of the Ukase published on the 23rd of March 1714, on the subject of *uni-personal* inheritance, the *iédinonaslédie*, which has been wrongly taken to be a law of entail on the eldest son. Peter did indeed, before attempting this Reform, inquire into all the information obtainable on the subject, from the Codes of foreign countries. But, after having commissioned Bruce to collect a whole library of works on the order of property succession in England, in France, and at Venice, he finally fell back on the nearest possible approach to the local rights and customs of his own country. His Ukase simply confirmed the two forms of ownership already existing in Russia, the *vottchina* (freehold) and the *pomiestié* (fief), with the principles of transition affecting both. Thus he invented a right of uni-personal inheritance, united to free testamentary powers. The *dvorianin* must leave his landed property intact to *one* of his children, but he was free to choose which that child should be. This was not the principle of entail on the first-born son; it was simply the enforcement of the autocratic spirit in domestic life. There was nothing in the system approach-

¹ Filippof, *Peter the Great's Reform of the Penal Code*, p. 55.

ing to that known as a '*majorat*.' Peter did certainly consider the question of the impoverishment of the nobility, and hoped to put a stop to it, by preventing the subdivision of their fortunes. But he looked at the matter from his personal point of view, and therefore in the interests of the State. The *dvorianié* must be rich, if they were to serve him as he expected to be served, spend all their lives working, unpaid, in his armies and his State Offices, and build palaces at St. Petersburg into the bargain. Now, speaking generally, they were completely ruined; even the Rurikovitch were forced to earn their bread in private houses. Prince Biélosielski was acting as major-domo in the house of a rich merchant, and Prince Viazieski managed the landed property of an upstart parvenu.¹

The Tsar also desired to constitute a class of well-born younger sons, who would form an excellent nursery for commerce and industry. The disinherited sons of these *Dvorianin* were not to lose caste by going into trade, and, after seven years' soldiering, ten in the Civil Service, and fifteen in commerce or industry,—service of some sort they must give!—they had the right to acquire landed property, and thus retake their place in the so-called aristocracy they had been forced to leave. Those who would not work were not to possess anything, and those who would not learn were even denied the right to marry.

And finally, Peter desired to improve the condition of the Serfs. Their owners, if they were richer, were likely to be more merciful. All this is expressed in the Ukase, which even contains phrases about the glory of the 'illustrious families' which the legislator proposes to protect. But this was not the real question. The law was general in its application, the rule of uni-personal inheritance touched every form of real property, from arable fields to drapers' shops, and Peter's chief anxiety was to have security, both in town and country, for the payment of his taxes, and the performance of the service exacted by the State from every subject. These sole inheritors were the Tsar's *chief deputies*, and his law was, above all things, a fiscal measure.

It failed of success. When, seventeen years later, the Empress Anne repealed it, she declared her reason to be that its provisions had produced no effect. The great mass of

¹ Karnovitch, *Great Russian Fortunes*, p. 33.

landed proprietors had contrived to elude the lawgiver's will. Only two fortunes had been built up by its means—those of the Shérémétief and Kantémir families.¹ Entail on the first-born son, according to the English system, has never taken real hold in Russia; there are not more than forty instances of it in existence, in the present day, throughout the whole length and breadth of that great Empire.

II

At Peter's accession, the rural population of Russia, as apart from the landed proprietors, consisted of two principal classes of peasants, greatly differing from each other, from the political, judicial, and economic point of view—the *Krestianié* and the *Holopy*. Another class of 'free men,' who tilled the ground, was rapidly disappearing. The *Krestianié* had two masters, the State and their owners. Each of these had a right to tax them, and demand forced labour of them. They lived in perpetual serfdom, and might be sold, with, or without, the ground they tilled. The *Holopy*, or, at all events, the *Holopy kabalnyié* or 'mortgaged' peasants (the *Polynié holopy*, or 'full serfs,' had almost disappeared at this period) owed nothing to the State, and were only united to the owners of the land on which they lived, by a personal bond, a kind of mortgage (*kabala*) on their own persons, agreed to by themselves, and which ended with the death of their holder. These could not be sold on any pretence whatever. Peter's policy, with regard to this population, was a double one. He intervened, in its favour, with a series of regulations of a liberal and humanitarian tendency. His ukases forbade the sale of serfs, except in cases of absolute necessity, and insisted, in such cases, on whole families being kept together. Special commissioners were appointed to prevent abuses, etc.² But the indirect action of his government and legislation was very different. Its invariable tendency was to fuse the two categories of peasants, and to tighten the yoke of serfdom about their necks. This fusion, politically speaking, took place in the year 1705, when compulsory military service was imposed on the *holopy* by ukase. Judicially and economically speaking, the general census of 1718, and a

¹ Karnovitch, *Great Russian Fortunes*, p. 33.

² *Collected Laws*, 3294, 3770 (1719 and 1721).

series of ukases dealing with the composition of the census papers, published between 1720 and 1722, completed the operation. At that period the land tax was replaced by a poll tax, and the Sovereign's chief object became to find the greatest possible number of taxable heads or 'souls.' How was this to be done? The landed proprietors, who were called upon to play the part of tax-collectors, and made responsible for the new tax, neither could nor would be answerable for any 'souls' save those in their own possession, over whom they had complete control; and they, naturally, endeavoured to diminish the number borne on the census papers, while the State did all in its power to increase it. The State did not succeed in carrying the day, until it consented to agree to the general and complete serfdom of the whole body of the agricultural population. Every peasant appearing on the list had to be considered as the permanent serf of the person answerable for him, who, otherwise, refused that responsibility. Thus, little by little, the whole peasantry was swallowed up.¹

This certainly was Peter's work. Soon it was completed by a new series of ukases, the object of which was to put a stop to the exodus of peasants, who fled from this fresh severity, and crowded to take refuge beyond the frontier, in the border districts of Poland. These were so many locks on the prison of universal serfdom. Then a fresh class of serfs was called into existence. There were no workmen for the factories the Reformer had established. Where were these to be found? The serfs supplied the only manual labour known to the country; such a thing as free labour did not exist. There must be factory serfs then, as well as agricultural serfs. And the manufacturers received permission to recruit their necessary staff by purchase.²

Peter was no inhuman Sovereign; this is eloquently proved by the sixty charitable establishments called into existence, in 1701, in connection with the Moscow churches.³ But the State reasons he represented were a hard and even a cruel law. The grandeur and the glory he bestowed

¹ Klioutchevski, *The Poll Tax and its Influence on the Condition of the Peasantry, in Russian Thought* (Rousskaïa Mysl, 1886).

² Ukase dated Jan. 18, 1721. See Biélaïef, *The Peasantry in Russia* (Moscow, 1860), p. 257.

³ Pylaïef, *Old Moscow*, p. 419.

on Russia cost a heavy price, and that price, up to the year 1861, was paid, for the most part, by the Russian peasantry.

III

Peter never, according to his apologists, had any intention of lessening the reforming programme left him by his predecessors, by the omission of the emancipation of his rural subjects. All he did, we are assured, was to subordinate the solution of this problem, to the preliminary accomplishment of another work—the emancipation of the Urban class. The town, once raised out of its misery and degradation, was to free the village. I cannot find any trace of such an idea, either in the actions or the writings of the great Tsar. He certainly took great pains to create a middle class, in the young cities of his Empire, and to make that class worthy of its natural vocation. According to his usual habit, he made a trial of every system at once, English Administrative Autonomy and Self-Government, French Trade Corporations, Companies and Wardenships, and German Guilds. His success did not equal his expectations. His reign marked a period in the history of the gradual development of the industrial and commercial centres of Modern Russia, but his attempted organisation of the industrial and commercial classes had nothing to do with these results. It only brought him disappointment. The development of the Russian towns grew out of political successes, and economic victories, out of the conquest of ports, and the establishment of new means of communication, which gave a fresh impulse to the national commerce and manufactures. In the Baltic Provinces, Peter found a middle class ready to his hand; his endeavour to evolve one elsewhere proved a mere waste of time. I do not myself believe the nature of the Russian people to be so averse to the corporate idea, as some writers have affirmed. There are many forms of corporation, and the *Artel*,—that eminently Russian, and democratic, method of association, is, after all, one of these,—more liberal, and in greater conformity with the original fraternal principle, which, in the case of most Western corporations, has been vitiated by the despotic influence of Rome. I believe, —and Peter's example confirms me in this belief,—that it is

not possible to create social forces by law and regulation. Peter issued many such, and all in vain. And, as so often happened in his case, his whole method was full of inconsistencies. In 1699, he sketched out a huge plan of municipal autonomy on social lines. In 1722, he finally replaced this by an ordinary Magistracy of the bureaucratic type. He never took the trouble to consider whether the exotic forms he so hastily imposed on the industrial and commercial existence of his country were fitted for its needs. He never perceived that they were a garment, which had already seen hard service on the shoulders of his European neighbours, who were about to cast it aside, and that he was dressing his own people in mere rags. While he claimed to favour the development of commerce and industry, he did not relinquish the fiscal policy of his predecessors, who regarded the urban population chiefly as a taxable element, from which forced labour might be obtained. He increased the burden thus injudiciously imposed,¹ and finally, —though, as I have already indicated, he held that his so-called nobility, the *dvorianié*, did not lose caste by engaging in Middle Class occupations,—he recognised the formal entrance of any member of that aristocracy into the middle class, as a disgraceful thing,—a blot on his reputation. Voltaire's enthusiasm on this point is difficult to understand.²

Peter's social reforms were unconscious, and this is his best excuse. All he did, in town and country alike, was to brush carelessly past, or else to stumble gropingly upon, certain great problems, the full comprehension of which demanded a far more powerful and extended range of vision than he possessed.

Yet, from one point of view, the work he performed in this particular sphere, though unconscious and indirect, was far-reaching in its consequences. He introduced into the social organisation of his country,—perhaps we should say, he drove back within its borders,—an element which may be held to have brought about a more harmonious combination of its every part. The Church, before his time, was outside the general community. Church rights and privileges rivalled and resembled those of the State; a huge Church

¹ Ditiatin, *The Administration of Russian Towns*, p. 175.

² See the views expressed by Damaze de Raymond in his *Historical, Geographical, etc., Picture of Russia*, vol. i. p. 119 (Paris, 1812).

property was managed without any reference to the temporal power; the Church was served by her own army of dependants, her jurisdiction was not restricted to ecclesiastical affairs; she formed a separate State. Peter, as we have seen, made an end of all this. During his reign, priests and monks went back to their proper place. If he could not make them citizens, at all events he made them subjects of the State; it was a good beginning.

CHAPTER V

PETER'S ECONOMIC WORK

- I. Industry—Guiding ideas—Their great scope and relative consistency—Causes which partially imperilled their success—A mortal error—Peter expects to create commerce and industry by ukase—The mercantile theory—Protection—State manufactures—Peter manufactures cambric—Precarious position of his establishments—He ends by finding fruitful ground—The mining industry.
- II. Commerce—A commercial monopoly—Peter's liberal tendencies—His war obliges him to put them aside—Liberal in theory—Practical continuation of arbitrary methods—The Port of St. Petersburg—Canals—Highways—The caravan trade—The Persian and Indian markets.
- III. Rural economy—Peter as an agriculturist and forester—Political and moral obstacle to economic progress.
- IV. The finances—The Budget—Appearance and reality—The necessities of war—A policy of disorganisation and robbery—The revision of the Cadastral Survey—Disappointing results—More expedients—A deficit—Return to healthier methods—General reform of taxation—The land tax replaced by a poll tax—Partial adherence to former mistakes—Bankruptcy.

I

AT the period of Peter's accession Russian commercial industry had no existence. The Tsar was the only great merchant in Russia. During the Du-umvirate of Peter and Ivan, a large reward was offered to a French sea-captain for introducing white paper, wine, and certain other merchandise, which would otherwise have been unobtainable, into the country. Just at that moment, the earliest Russian economist, Possoshkof, was writing a book—his '*Will*'—in which he openly affirmed his contempt for wealth. Twenty years later the very same author drew up, on white paper, *made in Russia*, a *Treatise on Poverty and Riches*, in the course of which he points out every possible method of increasing private fortunes and the wealth of the State, and forestalls

both Smith and Turgot in pressing the superiority of task-work over daily labour. This again was Peter's work.

It was far-reaching in its effects. In spite of some inconsistencies, it deserves a place of honour in the great Tsar's history, both on account of the magnitude of the effort, the multiplicity and ingeniousness of the means employed, and the logical sequence of the ideas which guided it. Peter desired, and attempted to attain, the [increase of private happiness, and of State resources] to simultaneously create fresh sources of taxation and production] to replace foreign importations by the produce of the national industry; to stimulate the activity and originating power of his subjects; to remove all idle persons, monks, nuns, and beggars into the ranks of the industrious classes; to check administrative indifference, and even hostility, to the productive forces of the country. > He endeavoured to supply what was lacking in public justice, to develop public credit, and atone for the absence of public security, for the non-existence of a third estate;—to bring Russia, in fact, into touch with contemporary economic existence.

The partial failure of this enterprise was brought about by an unlucky coincidence, and a mortal error. The coincidence was the war, with its natural consequences and necessities. The war it was which drove Peter, the resolute adversary of all monopolies, to create fresh ones, and thus pull down with one hand what he had built up with the other. The fundamental error was his belief that, by dint of ukases and physical force, he could create a commercial and industrial life, endow it with the necessary organs, give it muscles and blood, and rule its movements, driving it to the right and left, just as he embodied regiments and drilled them. His commercial and industrial companies, founded in 1699, were his first attempt in this direction. The Dutch began by being alarmed, but they soon ended by laughing them to scorn.

Money was indispensable to carry on the war. The standing armies of the West laid the foundation of the mercantile doctrine, and Peter soon became a devoted follower of Colbert. The national tradition was with him in this respect. In the time of Alexis Mihailovitch, and probably earlier, all entrance duties were paid into the Muscovite Custom-house in Hungarian ducats or Dutch thalers. Peter

enforced and aggravated this system, which is still in existence at the present day. In spite of all Bodin's or Child's advice to the contrary, he forbade all exportation of the precious metal. He had never read the works of Klock, Schröder, or Decker; he went beyond their view, and actually forbade his subjects to accept payment for their merchandise in the national currency.¹ He believed in the balance of trade, and contrived to make it incline to his own side, a privilege which his Empire preserved in common with Spain, until a recent date. According to Marperger, Russia, towards the year 1723, gained several tons of gold yearly on her foreign exchange.² Peter also believed in protection. He ruled a country, the external commerce of which is almost entirely confined to the production of raw material; he forbade the exportation of certain produce of this nature, as, for instance, of wool, and hampered all others by an almost prohibitive export tariff. He was not yet in a position to dress his whole army in native-made cloth, but he would wear nothing else himself, and made its use for all liveries compulsory.³ A Frenchman, named Mamoron, established a stocking factory at Moscow, and Peter forbade his Moscovian subjects to buy stockings elsewhere. When certain manufacturers under his protection seemed little disposed to turn the felt they manufactured into hats, their courage was stimulated by an official ukase which forbade them to sell their merchandise at all, unless they put a certain number of hats on the market. This system of entreaty, of persuasive and coercive arguments, and of moral and pecuniary assistance, ended by producing its effect. Factories sprang up in all directions, some of them subsidised by the Sovereign; others directly undertaken by him, and others again worked by independent persons. The Empress was interested in a tulle factory, and starch works, at Ekaterinhof. Peter's efforts were limited, at first, to the production of supplies for his navy; sailcloth, saltpetre and sulphur, leather and arms, but in time, and somewhat against the grain, he enlarged his sphere of operations. He manufactured cambric at St. Petersburg, made paper at Douderof, and had cloth mills all over the country.

¹ *Collected Laws*, 2793, 2889, 3441. Comp. Stieda, in the *Russische Revue*, vol. iv. p. 206.

² *Moscovitischer Kaufmann* (1723), p. 218.

³ Solovief, vol. xvi. p. 203.

But none of these establishments, unfortunately, made money. In vain did the Tsar sell his cambric at a loss, giving material which had cost him fourteen kopecks for five. As usual, he grew stubborn, went further and further, and even endeavoured to introduce artistic production into the manufactures of his country. Russia began to make tapestry before she knew anything about cotton-spinning. And he was not satisfied with urging her on, he dealt blows. In 1718, a ukase forbade the use of tallow, in dressing leather; tar was to be employed, on pain of confiscation and the galleys! But, in the course of this wild struggle, he came on a most promising field, teeming with riches, easily and promptly realised; and forthwith his eagerness, his passionate keenness, and creative activity, worked wonders. In the reign of Alexis, a Dutchman and a Dane had attempted mining operations in the neighbourhood of Moscow, and had extracted several tons of mineral.¹ The work, when Peter put his hand to it, took on vast proportions. This new departure was, it must be acknowledged, that inspired, guided, and hurried forward by the necessities of war. When the ironworks of Vierhotour and Tobolsk were established by ukase, in 1697, Peter was entirely prompted by his military needs;—he wanted guns and heavy artillery. But once started, he went steadily forward, and the prodigious development of Russian mining industry, in the present day, is the result.

The Sovereign began by seeking iron, and working it. But soon, as might have been expected, the gold fever was upon him. He grew more and more eager, collecting every kind of information, searching in all directions. The various expeditions he organised,—that sent towards Persia in 1717, under the command of Bekovitch-Tcherkaski, and that despatched to Siberia in 1719, under the leadership of Liharef, were unsuccessful. Up till 1722, only one silver mine was brought into actual work; but in the course of these expeditions copper was found, and more iron,—and in 1722, coal was discovered. Thirty-six foundries were opened in the Government of Kasan, and thirty-nine in that of Moscow.

Private enterprise, apart from that of Demidof, was slow

¹ Storch, *Historisch-Statistische Gemälde des Russischen Reiches* (Riga, 1797), vol. ii. p. 485.

to appear. A ukase published in 1719 gives us an insight into this question. By it all men are declared free to seek, and work, any kind of metal, in any ground. The only right of the proprietors of metalliferous soil is that of priority; if they fail to take advantage of it, so much the worse for them. If they venture to conceal the presence of workable seams, or to prevent their being worked by others, death is to be their punishment.¹ In 1723, the legislator made another step. He resolved to break, finally, with the system of the industrial monopoly of the Crown. He published a regulation for the embodiment of a *College of Manufactures*, and added a manifesto, whereby private individuals were invited to replace the State in the working of all his industrial establishments of every kind, and offered the most advantageous terms. The sum-total of these repeated efforts bore fruit at last. The creative movement increased and broadened, and the national industry became an accomplished fact.

II

The history of the National Commerce closely resembles that of Peter's industrial undertakings. The Tsar, when he ascended the Throne, was greatly inclined to do away with those Crown rights which made him the foremost, and, indeed, the only considerable merchant, in the country. But the necessities of the war forced his hand. Want of money obliged him to continue his trading operations, and, as he never did anything by halves, he increased these to such an extent as to monopolise and absorb all markets, both internal and external. He created new branches of traffic, but every one of these was a monopoly. He bought wholesale, and sold retail, in every department, even going so far as to sell Hungarian wine in small quantities, at Moscow.² At a certain period, overwhelmed, as he was, by the cares of government, and worried by the irregularity of the income they brought in, he began to farm out his rights. Menshikof took over the Archangel Fisheries, and the trade in castor oil and otter skins. But, when the hope of an early peace diminished the Sovereign's financial anxieties, he came back to his own natural and liberal tendencies. The Corn Trade was de-

¹ *Collected Laws*, 3464.

² Golikof, vol. vi. p. 326.

clared free in 1717, and, in 1719, all monopolies were done away with. Meanwhile, the 'College of Commerce,' which had been founded in 1715, was beginning to do good work. The education of the commercial class was made the object of its special care, and dozens of young men belonging to the rich merchant families of Moscow—a rapidly increasing class—were sent into Holland and Italy. Diplomatically speaking, efforts were made, in all directions, to extend commercial relations with other nations. The war had led Peter into some regrettable errors in this respect,—such as the sale, in 1713, of certain rights and privileges to the town of Lubeck, for a sum of between 30,000 and 40,000 crowns, and similar arrangements with Dantzic and Hamburg. After the year 1717, Peter showed an evident intention to put an end to this condition of things, and no further reference to such proceedings appears, either in his negotiations with France, or in the instructions sent to the Consuls, simultaneously appointed, at Toulon, Lisbon, and London.

Yet he could not resist the temptation of trying to direct this budding intercourse after a somewhat arbitrary fashion. This fact is evidenced in the history of the Port of St. Petersburg, and of the pitched battle between the Tsar and the merchants, native or foreign, who persisted in preferring the Port of Archangel. When all pacific means of persuasion were exhausted,—when Peter realised that nothing would attract the merchants to St. Petersburg,—neither the establishment of a huge *Gostinnyi dvor* (bazaar), nor of a special Magistracy largely composed of foreigners, nor the pains he himself had taken to ensure a good and cheap supply of their favourite article of commerce—hemp—in his new Capital,—he boldly appealed to his ancestral traditions. Though he did not forcibly transfer the citizens of Archangel to St. Petersburg, as his predecessor, Vassili, had removed the Novgorod burghers to Moscow, he decreed that the recalcitrant merchants must, in future, buy and sell their hemp at St. Petersburg, and nowhere else.¹

The result of this measure was easy to foresee. The new Capital, as a commercial mart, was still far from desirable. The system of canals, by which the Volga and the Neva were to be joined to the Lake of Ladoga, had, as yet, no

¹ Tchoulkof, *Historical Description of Russian Trade*, vol. vi. p. 488; Storch, vol. v. p. 19, etc.

existence except on paper. The great English engineer, Perry, to whom the work had been confided, disgusted by the ill-treatment he had received, had retired from the work while it was in its earliest stage. Peter planned a second canal, by which the dangerous Lake was to be avoided, and the Neva directly united to the mighty affluent of the Caspian. But this canal was not completed till 1732. A third system, based on the utilisation of various intermediate streams, served no purpose, but that of enriching a miller named Serdioukof, who invented it, and who took advantage of the concession, all too hastily granted him, to dot the banks of the Tsna and the Shlina with mills and taverns, which brought no advantage whatsoever to the Port of St. Petersburg. Thus, hemp and furs, and every other merchandise,—for after 1717 two-thirds of all produce had to be sent thither—were brought up to the Capital with the greatest difficulty, and at terrible expense. And there, as no purchasers were to be found, they were heaped up, depreciated by over-keeping, and ended—this was especially the case with the hemp—by actually rotting.

But Peter cared not. Somehow or other, he was resolved, St. Petersburg was to become a commercial port. Only sixteen foreign vessels touched there in 1714, but the next year there were fifty-three; in 1722 there were 119, and in 1724 the number rose to 180. Peter laid the foundation of that system of river communication, which all his successors, down to Catherine's time, laboured to complete, connecting the basin of the Volga with those of the Neva and Dvina, opening the way from the Caspian to the Baltic and White Sea, and uniting seventy-six lakes, and 106 streams, by means of 302 versts of artificial waterway. This result was not achieved without enormous waste of money, of labour, and even of human life. But the secret of Russian strength and success has always largely consisted in the will and the power not to count the cost of the object to be attained. Here again the patient *Moujiks*, who lie buried in their thousands in the Finnish marshes, paid the price uncomplainingly!

Peter attached by no means the same importance to land communications, and did not, indeed, make any endeavour to develop them. He made no roads, and even in the present day, this is one of Russia's weak points. The very inade-

quate highways which do exist, have been entirely constructed by the Engineering Corps called into existence so lately as 1809. Yet, the great man did not overlook the value of caravan trade, as practised by his ancestors. He engaged in it himself, bought the harvests of Tokay, on the spot, and carried his purchases to Moscow on hundreds of carts, which returned into Hungary laden with Siberian produce.¹—And, though his best thoughts and efforts were turned towards the Baltic, and western commerce, he did not, as I have already shown, lose sight of his South-Eastern frontier, and of the commercial interests which beckoned him in that direction. Probably, if he had reached Bokhara, he would have founded an Indian trade. Occasional caravans already came to Orenburg and Astrakhan, bringing not only silken and cotton stuffs, made in Bokhara, but Indian merchandise, precious stones, gold, and silver. At all events, he took possession of the Irtish,—thereby moving the Siberian frontier back, and protecting it against the Kalmuks and the Kirghiz,—and of the Kolyvan Mountains, the treasures of which, discovered at a later period, confirmed the old Greek story of gold mines guarded by gnomes. If he had maintained his hold on Azof, he might, too, have sought, and succeeded in obtaining, the re-establishment of the ancient commercial route, followed by the Venetians and the Genoese. Driven back on the Caspian, he attempted, we may believe, to turn trade by Astrakhan, towards St. Petersburg. This idea would seem to have dictated his great expedition in 1722, and the project for a great commercial depôt, at the mouth of the Kour, on which 5000 men of various tribes were actually working, when he died. There was, it may be hinted, some fancy, and even a touch of madness, in all this: there was no attempt, certainly, at any reasonable calculation of possibilities, distances, and cost of transport. But in spite of the exaggerated boldness of his plans, and of the utter oblivion into which the indifference of his earlier successors soon cast them, one result was gained. The Persian and Indian markets, to which a kind of road was opened, were thus included in the inheritance, which, even in our days, Russia is yet receiving and reckoning up, and the huge benefits of which she continues to enjoy.

¹ Storch, vol. v. p. 37; Golikof, vol. vi. p. 326.

III

A man so catholic in his tastes as Peter could hardly have failed to be an agriculturist. And he was an eager one. His reign marks an era in the history of Russian rural economy. He did not, like the great Frederick, in later years, content himself with teaching his peasants to plant potatoes. Near Moscow, he taught them, by his own personal example, how to cut their corn, and near St. Petersburg, he showed them how to make their *lapti* (bark shoes). He treated them as a schoolmaster treats his scholars, and forbade them to wear nailed soles, because they spoilt the floors. He fixed the width of the coarse cloth they made in their cottages. He was struck by the beauty of a French Curé's garden, and as soon as he returned to Russia, he fell out with his own popes, because they had nothing of the kind. He interested himself in the matter of seed-corn, in the care of domestic animals, the manuring of fields, the use of agricultural instruments, and the improvement of methods of cultivation. He endeavoured to introduce vines into the country of the Don Cossacks, and to develop that branch of culture near Derbent, where he planted Persian and Hungarian vines. In 1712, he established the first Russian breeding studs, and in 1706, he began to breed sheep in the Governments of Harkof, Poltava, and Iékatierinoslav, which now swarm with that useful quadruped.¹ He was the first forester in his own country, the first to protect the woodlands against the inveterately destructive habits of his subjects. It must be confessed that no Minister of Agriculture, even in Russia, would venture, in these days, on his methods. All along the Neva and the Gulf of Finland, at every five versts, a gallows was set up, on which depredators were to be hanged. Within the boundaries of St. Petersburg, on the space now occupied by the Custom-house, there was a pine wood. As the people continued to cut and steal the wood, Peter ordered a sudden descent by the police, had every tenth prisoner hanged, and knouted the rest.²

Generally speaking, the Reformer's good intentions, with regard to economic progress, met with a double obstacle,

¹ Russian State Papers (1873), p. 2288.

² Sobof's Paper in the *Journal of Agriculture*, 1872.

moral and political. On the 13th of March 1716, a Ukase to the Senate pronounced the penalty of death on those Russian merchants who should continue to carry on a practice of which their English customers had long complained,—that of hiding damaged merchandise inside their bales of hemp, or even of introducing stones to increase the weight.¹ Notwithstanding this effort, the commercial and industrial morality of the country remained a problem, to be solved in future reigns. When Peter died, the elements of industrial and commercial activity, which he had created and called out of the void, were still in a condition of savagery. In 1722, Bestoujef announces the arrival, in the city of Stockholm, of certain Russian merchants from Abo and Revel. They had brought over a small quantity of coarse cloth, wooden spoons, and nuts, which they sold from their sledges in the streets; they cooked their *casha* in the open air, refused to obey the police, got drunk, quarrelled and fought, and the disgusting filthiness of their habits made them an altogether shameful spectacle.²

The political difficulty was connected with Finance. The Tsar's financial policy was the dark spot on his reign. It was the part of Peter's work, most directly inspired and commanded by the necessities of his war, and bears that mark. It was far from being a policy of reform, and was, almost always, thoroughly bad. I can only give a hasty summary of its more salient features.

IV

The pecuniary resources which Peter found at his disposal, when he succeeded to the Russian throne, cannot be directly compared with those of any other European State. Their sum did not, according to Golikof, exceed 1,750,000 roubles.³ The mere internal existence of the State, independently of all external matters, would, at first sight, appear impossible, on such slender means, but the very-exceptional conditions which then specially favoured the State exchequer, must be taken into account. In the first place, except for the army, there were hardly any State expenses whatsoever. The servants of the State were all

¹ Sbornik, vol. xi. p. 308.

² Solovief, vol. xviii. p. 164.

- Vol. xiii. p. 706.

unpaid. They either gave their services in exchange for privileges granted, or they were indirectly rewarded by the system known as the *kormlénie*. There were no roads, and consequently no expenses for keeping them up. And so forth. I subjoin the Budget of State Expenses for the year 1710, which is instructive—

Expenses of the Army . . .	1,252,525 roubles
" " Artillery . . .	221,799 "
" " Fleet . . .	444,288 "
" " Garrisons . . .	977,896 "
Recruiting Expenses . . .	30,000 "
Purchase of Arms . . .	84,104 "
Diplomatic Service . . .	148,031 "
Other Expenses, including Chief Gunners' pay . . .	675,775 " ¹

In 1679, before Peter's time, a great and salutary reform was introduced into this rudimentary organisation, by the centralisation of all revenue in the Great Treasury Department (*Prikaz Balshoi Kazny*) which was replaced in 1699 by the 'Hotel de Ville.' When Peter came, he undid what had already been done. He was in too great a hurry to attempt to carry out any programme, the benefits of which were not likely to accrue to him for a considerable time. He wanted money quickly, and a great deal of it, and he behaved like many young men who find themselves in a difficulty. Instead of carrying on the process of centralisation, and gradually suppressing those special and local departments, which sucked up and swallowed the National wealth, he invented new ones, such as his *Financial War Departments*, which received the special war taxation. Instead of endeavouring to increase the already existing sources of revenue, which were suited to the productive forces of the country, he began a policy of financial brigandage, taxing anything and everything which struck him as being taxable, even to his subjects' beards. He seized *oaken coffins* in the joiners' shops, had them taken to the monasteries, and there sold, four times as dear, for the benefit of the Treasury! In 1700, he took possession of the taxes hitherto paid by the merchants, to the private proprietors of the various

¹ Bloch, *The Finances of Russia* (Warsaw, 1884), vol. i. p. 20.

market-places. In 1704, he laid his hands upon the taverns; in 1705, he seized the salt and tobacco monopolies; in 1707, he extended this system to a whole series of articles of commerce, including the principal exports of the country. Meanwhile, advised by Kotoshihin, he had attempted to recoin the National Currency; but this only resulted in greater poverty, for the value of the rouble diminished one-half.¹

A more judicious attempt was that to work the State farms (*obrotchnyĭe stati*) through a special department (the *Ijora Chancery*), opened, in 1704, in Menshikof's house, met with better success, and the revenue from this source rose from 299,000 to 569,000 roubles,—but as expenses had correspondingly increased, the Treasury remained in as bad a case as ever. From the outset, there was a struggle between the 'Hotel de Ville' and the new departments, which resulted in constant waste and confusion. The great financial and administrative reform of 1708 only added a fresh element of disturbance and disorder. All the departments claimed the various revenues. In 1711, there was a deficit in the budget of the Moscow Government. The revenue of the Artillery *Prikaz* had been assigned to it, and this *Prikaz* had no revenue of its own; it was expected to subsist on subsidies given to it by other departments! The disputes, mutual recriminations, and general confusion, went from bad to worse.

In 1710, Peter, who was still at war, and sorely pressed for money, was tempted by a plan to revise the Cadastral Survey or list of inhabited houses and cultivated fields,—the basis on which the principal traditional, and really *National*, tax was levied. This operation gave most unsatisfactory results. It was found that since the last census, in 1678, taxable property had diminished by one-fifth. In the North, the loss amounted to 40 per cent. This was the result of the army recruiting, and of the flight of those subject to military service. Peter sought expedients to remedy this difficulty, and pitched on one which probably suited the national spirit, for, even at the present day, it is still in force, with regard to certain classes of the population. The actual population was condemned to pay the share of

¹ *Collected Laws*, 1799, 1977, 2014, 2015, 2132. Comp. Storch, vol. v. p. 131; Perry, *Present State of Russia*, p. 249; Oustrialof, vol. iv. pt. 2, p. 641; Sbornik, vol. xxxix. p. 361; Milioukof, p. 204.

the absentees, and the total revenue attained in 1678 was always to be kept up. But this measure was clearly not calculated to check the current of emigration, and the situation grew more and more serious. From 1704 to 1709,—though a deficit on the Budget frequently appeared,—the excess was always covered by what remained over from preceding years.

	Receipts.	Expenses.
1701.	2,860,000 roubles.	2,250,000 roubles.
1702.	3,150,000 "	2,470,000 "
1703.	2,730,000 "	3,340,000 "
1704.	2,490,000 "	3,240,000 "
1705.	2,640,000 "	3,340,000 "
1706.	2,520,000 "	2,710,000 "
1707.	2,410,000 "	2,450,000 "
1708.	2,020,000 "	2,220,000 "
1709.	2,760,000 "	2,700,000 " ¹

But in 1710 an absolute deficit appeared, and naturally increased from year to year. All attempts at borrowing from abroad ended in failure. As the finances at disposal barely sufficed for the necessities of the war, they were entirely devoted to that purpose, and the other branches of the public service were left to struggle on as best they could. At last the very sinews of war began to fail, and then, and not till then, Peter's soul fell into distress, and he began to betray an inclination to more rational principles, and a wiser practice. Soon afterwards, his stay in France brought him into more direct contact with the economic doctrines then beginning to govern the Western world. He finally put away his methods of violence and robbery, and turned his mind to increasing the resources of his country, and thus adding to its taxable capacity, by the organisation of his 'College of Commerce,' while he endeavoured to improve its fiscal management, by a general reform of taxation, carried out between 1718 and 1722.

This reform has not met with universal admiration. Certain of its qualities,—the substitution of a Poll Tax (*podoushnyi*), whereby each subject was taxed, instead of each inhabited house (*podvornyĭ*), or tilled field (*posochnyi*) gave the Russian fiscal system an artificial, and a certain

¹ Milioukof, p. 235.

anti-national character, which it still bears. Contemporary opinion, as in the case of Possoshkof, rose in indignation. 'How can the soul, an intangible and inestimable value, be taxed?' In later days, Count Dimitri Tolstoï, the eloquent historian of Russian financial institutions, has forcibly described the pernicious influence of the innovation on the economic development of his country. Count Cancrin, who must be acknowledged one of the best financial ministers possessed by Russia, in the course of two centuries, is almost the only native statesman who has attempted to support it. The immediate and palpable results of the reform speak in its favour. The only direct tax levied by the Treasury, doubled the revenue, which rose at a bound from 1,800,000 to 4,600,000 roubles, and the Budgets of the last years of Peter's reign show distinct progress, so far, at all events, as receipts are concerned. That of 1725 amounted, according to Golikof, to 9,776,554 roubles. At the same time the new spirit in which the finances were administered began to bear fruit. The list of expenditure shows 47,371 roubles assigned to schools, and 35,417 to the support of hospitals and refuges. But the progress, after all, was very trifling, and the improvement far more apparent than real.

As regards both receipts and expenses, these written Budgets continued most deceptive in their nature. The State really received and paid out far more than was shown in them. The revenue was increased by all sorts of devices, by contributions in kind, and even in money. The country furnished all food and forage for troops on active service. Every peasant gave half tons of rye and oats for the benefit of the Civil Service, and many pensions assigned by the Tsar were actually paid by private individuals. Thus that of Princess Anastasia Galitzin was exacted from Alexis Miloslavski, who, in return, was freed from military service.¹ In the same manner, when the clerks (*poddatchyîé*) of the Secret Office of the Chancery of the Senate complained, in 1713, of being insufficiently paid, their income was increased by a sum duly assigned them on 'the revenues of all foreign business, and all the business of Strogonof, except merchandise coming from Archangel.'²

¹ A Memorandum from Campredon, written at St. Petersburg in 1724, contains some curious details on this subject (French Foreign Office Papers, vol. xv. p. 75, Russia).

² *Collected Laws*, 2683.

Thus past mistakes were still adhered to, and this adherence, coupled with the incomplete and bungling application of the newer methods, prevented a really successful assimilation of the benefits conferred by the new *régime*. The maintenance of the army, still the great business and the chief burden of the Treasury, was a constant subject of dispute between the Financial Department, which had been re-organised after a fashion, since 1708, and the War Department, which disorganised all arrangements, and claimed to imitate the method followed in Sweden. But in Sweden, the population fed the soldiers by contracts, regularly made with the Government, which were a source, if anything, of profit; whereas in Russia, the army and the population were set face to face, as creditor and debtor; and the Government interfered, with all the weight of its authority, on the creditor's side only. The system had all the drawbacks of one of permanent billets.

And the chief cause of all,—the lack of moral education,—vitiating the principle of the wisest and most skilful measures, and destroyed their effect. The venality of the Fiscal Staff, and the ease with which the tax-payer could slip out of part of his obligation, were both proverbial. In a document which impresses me with a sense of its sincerity, I find the following words:—‘If, indeed, a tax-collector should be found who is proof against gifts,—which in Russia would be a most astonishing thing—there is another expedient by which he may be deceived; this is to join several houses together during the time of his inspection. These are easily separated and brought back to their own places within a few hours, for they are all made of wooden timbers, and easily carried about.’¹

In 1722, thanks to the Persian campaign, there was a fresh and alarming deficit; in 1723, a Ukase commanded that civil and military salaries should be paid in Siberian merchandise, other means being lacking. In the same year, these same salaries were diminished by a compulsory subsidy, to supply the Treasury's urgent needs, and the servants of the State were forced to hand back a portion of the money they had never received!² In 1724, according to the Saxon resident, Lefort, ‘neither troops, nor navy, nor departments,

¹ Memorandum from Campredon.

² *Collected Laws*, 4533, 4565.

re dying of hunger, and even by the soldiers, who had received no pay for the past sixteen months.²

Thus the financial policy of the great reign, inspired though it had been, by the necessities of war, and framed to supply its needs and demands, failed utterly, even as regards the army it was destined to serve.

¹ Sbornik, vol. iii. p. 382.

² Campredon's Despatch, February 6, 1725 (French Foreign Office).

CHAPTER VI

THE POLITICAL WORK OF PETER THE GREAT

- I. *Administration*—The Spirit and the Form—Municipal Autonomy a mere fiscal expedient—The first eight Governments—Another expedient—Decentralisation—The Senate—The Institution develops and becomes a centralising organ—Absorption and confusion of Power—Administrative and Financial control—The Fiscals—Their unpopularity—The Procurators—Lack of unity and equilibrium—The 'Colleges'—No general idea in their establishment—Fresh elements of confusion—Plethora of administrative organs—Poverty of individual administration.
- II. *Police*—Repression of Brigandage—The low moral level of society a hindrance to progress.
- III. *Justice*—Peter's tardy attention—His desire to accomplish everything at once—Reasons of his failure—General denial of the idea of Law—The progress of legislation a hindrance to codification—Lack of judicial principles and jurists—General view.

I

AS regards economic, social and intellectual progress, Russia lags, to this day, behind her Western neighbours and rivals. But she has already built up an apparatus of human power, one of the most formidable the world has ever known—archaic and Asiatic in its spirit and inner structure, modern and European in all its outward appearances. This is the undoubted outcome, and the crowning point, of Peter's work.

[No idea of any general reform of his Governmental institutions, or of the constituent elements of his power, ever entered the Tsar's brain.] For a considerable time, and during the whole course of the Northern war, his anxiety and his efforts were all directed to the solution of a comparatively limited problem—that of raising an army which should beat the Swedes, and a fleet which should make a good appearance on the Northern seas, and of finding funds to keep both up. Occasionally, accidentally and irregularly

only, his attention and activity were applied to the exercise of the essential rights of his sovereignty, as contained in those executive, judicial, and legislative powers, the nature and effects of which he modified and corrected, in obedience to what were, frequently, very ill-considered impulses. He ruled, and, at the same time, he reformed the administration; he dispensed justice and organised tribunals; he made innumerable laws; and, while maintaining the original, personal, and despotic principle, on which his Government was based, he modified its external appearance after a new pattern, which I shall endeavour to describe.

It is vain, in this endeavour, to look for very clear and well-defined outlines. Here, as elsewhere, the designer used his pencil roughly; his lines are scattered and run zigzag, there are gaps and dashes, and that general incoherence which marks all he did. There is not even any symptom of a deliberate attempt at transformation. The elimination of the old forms, and the substitution of new ones, were, for the most part, the result of a spontaneous work of decomposition, which prepared the way for new organic structures, and even called them into existence. The workman's will had nothing to do with this result. His work was the indirect outcome of his great war. Life flowed out of the old worn-out channels—worn out by long abuse—into the new ones, which the urgent necessities of the moment had hollowed out. On one side there was atrophy and a literal falling to pieces; on the other, a gradual development. Peter, in binding the two together, here and there, gave his country a new reform. But the progress of the phenomenon was most capricious, and its earliest effect was the production of incongruous and ill-assorted combinations, which did each other mutual injury. The new order of officials, and administrative departments, was superadded to the old one, and each worked against the other. Peter's new collaborators—Ministers, Chancellors, and Councillors, in their European dress, and equipment, and titles, elbowed the *Okolnitchyïe*, *Kravtchyïé* and *Postielnitchyïe* of the old régime, whose offices—which had been principally invented as a means of supporting their holders—were to last as long as they lived. The old *Prikaz* stood beside the new Departments, the Offices of the Navy and Artillery, of Supply and Mines, which had only risen into existence, and begun to

work in successive jerks, under the sudden pressure of some freshly recognised necessity. Execution, in every case, followed close on the heels of conception, but the necessary measures for regular practice were less quick in their coming.

To conclude, and this must be specially noted: these new institutions were Western in form only—the Western spirit did not exist. It would have been in too great contradiction with the essence and soul of the existing political organisation, the principle of which remained unchanged. This fact has not, as a rule, been sufficiently understood; yet it is clearly proved by the history of the first legislative edict of the reign,—the Ukase, dated 30th January 1699, decreeing the organisation of Municipalities in Russia. Historians, otherwise clear-sighted, have taken this for a thoroughgoing attempt at administrative autonomy, in the English or German style, and therefore as a measure of the greatest political, economic, and social scope. According to these opinions, the new Elective Magistracies, the Provincial Chambers (*Ziemskie Izby*), the Chamber of Burgomasters at Moscow (*Bourmistrskaia Palata*), were intended by the law-giver as the first Russian School of public life, in which the citizens were to learn to combine for defence of their common interests, to cast off that instinctive isolation which had hitherto left the power in the hands of the strongest, and deliver all merchants and manufacturers from the tyranny of greedy *Voievodes*.¹ But we shall find, if we consider the matter closely, that no such mighty programme can justly be ascribed to Peter. I am not even sure that it would do him honour. Thirty years before his time, Ordine-Nashtshokin, Voievode of Pskof, attempted to set up the principle of municipal self-government, with fifteen Starostes elected by the Burghers of the town, to whom the care of public interests was confided. He was checked by the difficulty of reconciling this institution with the general spirit of the régime then prevailing—with the principle, that is to say, of absolute power—and its existence was of the shortest.² In 1699, Peter was doubtless quite aware of this experiment, and had no idea of renewing it. His sole desire was to dress

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iii. p. 260; Brückner, *History of Peter the Great*, p. 506.

² Diliatin, *Studies for a History of Russian Law* (St. Petersburg, 1895), p. 460, etc.

up the old Administrative Departments (*Prikaznyé Izby*) already existing—and charged with the care, not of local interests, but of *those of the Sovereign*—in an English or German dress. He sought to increase the activity of his tax-collectors, and to provide them better for their work; and his general and somewhat simple-minded faith in the value of outward appearances and forms, inclined him to this imitation of autonomy. (But, apart from the electoral principle, now introduced into their organisation (which of itself was by no means a novelty in Russia), the new Magistracies were exactly like the old ones, and were only called to do their predecessors' work with greater severity. Those who came under their lash had no doubt on this point. The electors were driven to the poll, and the elected candidates were kept in their places, by dint of fines and heavy blows. As for the *Voievodes*, they thrashed the new Burgomasters just as they had thrashed their predecessors. The great work so pompously described was nothing, after all, but a fiscal expedient.

So also was the creation, in 1708, of the eight great Administrative centres called Governments. These, like everything else at that period, were the outcome of the war. The first military and financial centre arose out of the creation of the fleet at Voronèje, and the establishment of a Russian Port at Azof. The conquest of Ingria and Carelia resulted in the constitution of the first Government in the newly-acquired territory; this was intrusted to Menshikof. The advance of Charles XII. into the heart of Russia, centralised the military and financial resources for the defence of the country in the hands of the *Voievodes* of Smolensk and Kief; the repression of the insurrectionary movement on the banks of the Volga, brought about the establishment of a Government at Astrakhan. These were all so many new administrative units, each of which served as a nucleus for the new organisation set on foot just before the Battle of Poltava. This organisation was no more than the adjustment and fusion of the elements thus prepared, and, by it, the type of administration already developed on Swedish models in the Government of Ingria, was made general throughout Russia. From the territorial point of view, these eight Governments partly corresponded with former military and financial districts, already called into existence by local needs. The

very name of Governor was only a translation of the Russian name given to the heads of these districts, *Voievodes*, or 'Leaders of the War.' As early as 1694, Peter addressed the *Voievode* of Archangel, in Dutch, as '*Min Her Gubernor*.'

The Reform of 1708 belies, in this particular, the criticism so frequently made as to its accidental and mechanical character. The pre-existing military and financial districts, of which the territorial limits were partially adopted, were, in themselves, somewhat arbitrary and artificial. But the creation of provinces, in the European sense of that word,—conveying the idea of an organic unity,—does not exist in Russian history. Peter merely combined his work with an organisation already installed, after a fashion, on the shifting soil of his native country. Other fault may be more justly found with his endeavour.

As I have already pointed out, he thought less, in the first instance, of forging an instrument of government, than of finding means to fill his Treasury. Peter's temporary Minister of Finance, Kourbatof, resolutely opposed the new Governments, and defended the regular principles of administration, at which they dealt a blow. He was all for administrative centralisation at the 'Hôtel de Ville.' But the Sovereign would not hear of it. If the revenues of the State were centralised at the 'Hôtel de Ville,' they could not fail to be applied to the needs of the various branches of the public service there represented; and his great aim was to apply the greater part of them to one special need and service—the carrying on of his war. These isolated governments, whose only direct connection with the State would exist at the Ruler's will, were likely to be more manageable and more useful for this object. He had invented them for this purpose, and for the sake of it he had broken with the centralising principles of the seventeenth century, which had brought about the unity of the country. He put forward all the accessory advantages which, as he claimed, this rupture would confirm, declaring his new Governments would be easier of control, and the taxes more easily collected. But, in real truth, he looked at the question from the military, and not from the political point of view. And further, he studied his own personal convenience. He was an incessant traveller; he saw no necessity for having any centre of government, or rather, he thought the centre of government

might very easily follow his journeys. As for reconciling the advantages of centralisation with those of local autonomy, he was not learned enough (in 1708, at all events), to dream of such a thing. He had no idea, to begin with, of clearly defining the rights of the administrative bodies he had established. He first divided the country and the towns between his eight Governments, and then the anxieties of his war claimed him, and he appears to have forgotten all about them, and even kept his new Governors, who were also his generals, in his camp. It was not until the spring of 1709, when the melting of the snows gave him a little breathing space, that he presented them with the official statistics of their various districts, adding orders to 'give close attention to the collection of the taxes, and to all the interests of the State.' This was the only information vouchsafed as to their new duties.

The Governors' ideas on the subject were, as may be imagined, very limited. They really scarcely knew what they were expected to do, nor how they were to do it, and the Sovereign does not appear to have been in a position to give satisfactory answers to the piles of official correspondence addressed to him on the subject. How, to begin with, was the financial administration to be removed from the offices of the 'Hôtel de Ville,' where it was actually established, into those of the various governments, where it ought to be? This was more than either he or they could tell, and Kourbatof himself had to be appealed to. Then, how were the administrative functions of the governors to be reconciled with their permanent presence with the armies they commanded? This difficulty was solved by the appointment of substitutes, under the name of *Landrichters*. And how, to conclude, were these substitutes to be made to realise that their chief duty was to fill the Tsar's war-chests?

From the very first a bitter conflict arose over the contradiction between the real and apparent objects of the new organisation. Peter's only thought was to extract money from the provincial administrations, and as these felt obliged to defend the general interests of their provinces, a struggle began, like that between an unwilling debtor and an exacting creditor. Both sides played the keenest game; every kind of subterfuge was attempted, to forestall disposable funds on one side, and protect them on the other. Peter, of

course, always had the last word, for he could fall back on his usual methods. A ukase, dated 6th June 1712, simply deprived the Government of St. Petersburg of the revenues paid by certain districts, and made them over to the Admiralty. That same day a sum of 10,000 roubles was forcibly levied on the funds of the same Government, to pay the arrears due to Frenchmen and Hungarians serving in the Tsar's army. He was so pleased with this expedient, that it was frequently repeated, especially after the removal of the Senate to St. Petersburg. The local Treasury was constantly laid under contribution. Any idea of conforming to the table of receipts and expenses drawn up in 1711 was utterly abandoned. Absolute chaos reigned.

It should be added that Peter took it into his head to imitate a Swedish practice which had been reported to him, and charged the different Governments with the support of his regiments. As these regiments were constantly on active service, commissioners were delegated, by the various Governments, to provide for their food and equipment—a fresh complication in a machine already sorely clogged.

The most immediate and evident result of the reform was the constitution of fat offices, for the possession of which the Sovereign's favourites wrangled, in which they trafficked, and whose holders, having bought them at a heavy price, were driven to indemnify themselves at the expense of those under their care. If any information was laid against them—a rare event, for such traffickers are generally wary—they got out of the difficulty by following the example of the Turks, and offering their master a bonus on the fruit of their thievery. Peter's system tended, besides, to make his Governors a sort of farmers-general, possessing almost complete latitude as to the manner in which they raised the funds out of which the huge war contribution demanded of them was paid. The new organisation, wrong in its original conception, and still more faulty in its first workings, did not put on any appearance of decency, regularity, and system until the last years of Peter's reign, when it began to benefit by the peaceful condition of the country, and came in contact with the Swedish military and administrative system, established in the conquered Baltic Provinces.¹

¹ See, with regard to this subject, the remarkable, though somewhat gloomy picture drawn by M. Milioukoff, in his work already quoted, p. 297, etc.

The creation of the Senate, in 1711, was another great step in Peter's gradual elimination of the old administrative bodies, or their external assimilation to the western type. But the honour of having replaced the former Council of Boyards, or *Boiarskaia Douma*, by this new assembly, has been wrongly ascribed to Peter. Though nothing is known as to the precise date of the disappearance of this superannuated relic of the ancient Muscovite State, this one thing is certain, that, in 1711, it did not exist. It had already been replaced, since 1700, at all events, by a Council of Ministers, which sat in the Private Chancery (*Blijnaia Kantsełaria*), and is frequently confused with it. From the very outset Peter withdrew a most important department from the jurisdiction of this Council, and kept the management in his own hands. I refer to a whole category of Crown rights which he claimed to direct, according to his special personal views, with the assistance of special functionaries, the *Prybyshtchiki*. At the moment of his departure for the campaign of the Pruth, he was at a loss what to do with this administration, which had grown to considerable proportions, and the first duty he required of the Senate was to relieve him of it. This was another war expedient. The ukase which called the new institution into life was published the very day of the proclamation of a war with Turkey, and though the general idea, and the name, were borrowed from Sweden or Poland, the assembly was thus endowed with a character of its own. Peter was far from foreseeing the much more important part it was to play in later years.

It was intended, in the first place,—and this was natural,—to supply the want of those central institutions, which the work of decomposition, to which I have already referred, had caused to disappear. The Reform of 1708-1710 had made no provision for reconciling the new provincial organisation with the old administration, centralised at Moscow. Its only result had been to destroy this last. The Private Chancery had thus become the only centralising power in the country, and it had proved notably inadequate for the work it had to do. But it was not till 1714 that the new Assembly was charged with a permanent commission to remedy this inadequacy, by itself despatching a certain amount of current business. From 1711-1718, the respective rights of the Chancery and the Senate remained

undefined. The other public bodies, not knowing to which their reports, or requests, should be addressed, generally settled the matter by following a policy of total abstention. It was only by degrees,—by means of Ukases published from year to year, and, sometimes, from month to month,—that the rights of the Senate were augmented and defined. These rights, before the creation of the Administrative Departments, extended over the whole field of Government action, that is to say, over the administration, properly so called, justice, police, army, finances, trade, and foreign politics. The Senate had the care of the supplies for troops on active service, of the sale of all State merchandise, of the canals, of the cleaning of the St. Petersburg streets. Until and even after, the establishment of the Holy Synod, it intervened in ecclesiastical matters. In 1720, it carried on negotiations with Poland, with the object of strengthening Russian influence in that country; and it was the final judge in civil and criminal cases.¹ In 1724, Peter ordered the Ukases published by the Senate to be printed concurrently with his own, and thus set his seal upon a legislative power which he had for some years practically recognised. He treated the principle of the division of power with complete indifference, and indeed the only European characteristic of his Senate was its name. > He excused himself in his own eyes, by the reflection that the whole arrangement was purely provisional, and intended to be followed by one of a more regular nature.

Meanwhile, the Senators had 'everything in their hands.' This was the Tsar's own expression. But he expected a faithful discharge of the duties and responsibilities conferred upon them. He had given them much,—he expected a great deal in return. The unlucky representatives of his sovereign authority were pelted with reproaches, reprimands, and threats. He wrote, 'You must have done that in joke, or because you had received *vziatki* (bribes);—but I will make you come here (into Ingria), and you will be questioned in a very different fashion!' ² These reproaches were frequently, and unhappily, only too well justified. The Dutch Resident, De Bie, writes in November 1714, 'The great drawback is that all business is made over to the Senate, which never decides anything.'

¹ Petrovski, *The Senate under Peter the Great* (Moscow, 1875), pp. 224-238.

² Ukase to the Senate Sept 1711 (Archives of the Ministry of Justice).

Peter judged it necessary, from the very outset, to complete his creation by the addition of a controlling body. He began by causing certain officers of his staff to be present at the sittings, with orders to watch the deliberations. Then he invented the (*Fiscals*); but the name only, this time, was borrowed from Sweden, the thing itself was essentially local. The inquisitorial policy of the Tsar turned the Swedish *Comptrollers* into *spies*, in the worst sense of the word. Until 1714, any *Fiscal* could give information, which might be proved false and calumnious, without incurring the slightest responsibility, and the informer shared the fines he caused to be inflicted, with the Tsar's Treasury. Stephen Iavorski had to thunder a bold reproof in the Cathedral of the Assumption, in 1712, before this odious abuse of power was tardily diminished. By a Ukase published 17th March 1714, *intentional* error on the part of these agents was rendered punishable.

An (*Ober-Fiscal*, or Chief Comptroller, was attached to the Senate. The appointment of this official, replaced in 1722 ✓ by a '*General-Procouror*,' was a real progress, for the various authorities which had long been independently exercised,—the Tsar, the Senate and the various branches of the Executive Power,—were thus brought into connection. The *General-Procouror* held intercourse with these last through *Procourors* placed under his orders, and himself acted as intermediary between the Tsar and the Senate. Peter modelled this office, doubtless, on that of the (*Swedish Ombutsmán*), delegated by the Government to the judicial body. But his *General-Procouror*, having no seat in the Chief Assembly, bore a yet closer resemblance to the French *Procureur-Général* of that period, attached to the French Parliament. Like him, he possessed a right of active intervention in the exercise of those powers he was called upon to watch. He might even take the initiative; he had legislative functions; he had a Deputy who bore the name of *Ober-Procouror*. Iagoujinski was the first person to hold this post. These *Procourors*, attached, as controlling agents, to the various branches of power, advantageously replaced the *Fiscals*, whose functions had been exercised independently, and who bore an objectionable resemblance to Secret Police.

Until the year 1718, the Russian Senate remained a

mongrel and ill-balanced institution. It could not preside, like the Swedish Senate, over the working of the Administrative Bodies, because no such Bodies existed. It did not consist, like the Swedish Senate, of the Heads of 'Colleges' gathered in Council, because there were no such Colleges in existence.

Peter early realised the advantages of the collegial form, and carried his admiration to a somewhat exaggerated point. Leibnitz had praised it, telling him its structure 'resembled that of a clock.' Peter would gladly have turned clock-maker, but he had no wheels. Those of the old *prikazes* were all worn out. We do not know how and when the idea of replacing them by these Departments or 'Colleges' grew and developed in his mind. It was the outcome, probably, of a series of suggestions. During the Tsar's stay in England, in 1698, Francis Lee submitted to him, at his own request, a plan of government by seven *Committees* or *Colleges*.¹ In 1702, Patkul suggested, in a memorandum, the organisation of a 'Geheimes Kriegs Collegium';² in 1711, Blücher, a Saxon engineer, recommended the establishment of a 'College of Mines,' but the Reformer was still inclined, at that period, to a thoughtless destruction of all centralising institutions. It was not till 1712 that an anonymous memorandum on the utility of a 'College of Commerce' turned his mobile mind in an opposite direction. The Sovereign, with his usual prompt decision, answered the memorandum in most unexpected fashion. By his Ukase, dated 12th February 1712, he decreed the creation of the 'College of Commerce.' The decision in this case did not, it must be acknowledged, go beyond an expressed intention; no more was heard of it till 1715. At that period, the new institution, which had first been attempted at Moscow, made a sudden reappearance at St. Petersburg. It was already provided with a director, bearing the name of Apraxin, and he was about the sum-total of its possessions. But Peter's note-books prove that the idea occupied him, and had grown familiar to his mind. It was still confused enough, floating between an Office (*Prikaz*) of Mines, a Tribunal attached to the Senate, which was to be a 'College

¹ *Proposals given to Peter the Great* (London, 1752).

² *Writings and Correspondence of Peter the Great*, vol. ii. pp. 39-50.

³ Milioukof, p. 567.

of Justice,' and a 'College of Commerce.' But a little later, an autograph note by the Tsar sketches out a complete organisation to consist of six 'Colleges' on the Swedish model.¹ Henry Fick, who was then in the Imperial service, probably had something to do with this plan, and the first detailed project may have been drawn up by him.²

He certainly went into Sweden, in December 1715, to study the subject on the spot, but two more years passed before anything was done. Peter was travelling. Towards the end of 1715, he received, through Boetticher, his Resident at Hamburg, some Reflections '*über des Russischen Reiches Staats-Æconomie*,' by Baron Christian Luberas, whose son was in the Russian service,—and Luberas was forthwith employed to draw up a definite plan.

Here, as elsewhere, no general idea inspired the projected reform, and the partial notions out of which it proceeded, were all of foreign origin. The Reformer had no very clear idea, at starting, of whither his steps were to tend, and his horizons broadened as he proceeded on his way. Problems presented themselves to his notice; he employed foreigners to seek for a solution, and they drew up plans; Peter, with his natural aptitude, seized on their principal features, and then called on his Russian collaborators to adapt them to the local needs of his Empire. Thereupon, and, generally, somewhat prematurely, he issued a Ukase. The faults of the conception became evident in its practical working, and Peter's readiness to acknowledge these, was both sincere and wise. He undid what he had begun, and started afresh.

And thus, in spite of many Ukases, the Colleges, in 1717, were still in an unfinished condition. The Tsar confined himself, that year, to deciding on the number and the nature of these bodies, and appointing their presidents. Then the work was stopped by one of his prolonged absences. When Golikof, and Peter's own journal, mention these Colleges as being in active work at this period, they refer to the *Chanceries* of War, of the Admiralty and of Foreign Affairs, which were already currently designated by that name.³ But the *Kamer-Kollegia*, or Treasury, was not

¹ Sbornik, vol. xi. pp. 285, 286.

² Published by Piekarski, in his *History of the Academy of Sciences*, vol. i. p. 23.

³ Milioukof, p. 589.

regularly established till 1722, and the organisation of the other Colleges was barely sketched out in 1720 and 1721. Peter himself had not much to do with this preliminary work. It was not until 1722, that he took some personal part, with reference to the regulations for the College of the Admiralty, which he desired to draw up himself. It then became evident that he was in complete ignorance of what had already been done, and that his ideas on the subject were of the most rudimentary and childish nature. On the 11th of May 1722, he published a Ukase, commanding that the regulations for all the other Colleges should be copied on those of the Admiralty. The only change to be introduced was that of '*altering the names should it appear necessary*.'¹ Now the regulations for all these other Colleges had already been drawn up, and the 'College of Patrimonial Property' (*Vottchimmaia Kollegia*), the only one which literally followed the Sovereign's orders, made itself a laughing stock.

During Peter's life, the results of this reform were only partly evident. There was one immediate benefit; I mean the restoration of the unity of the Treasury, which, since the creation of the Governments, had disappeared in the ruins of administrative centralisation. Close upon this came the re-establishment of a properly-balanced Budget, which, since 1704, had also disappeared. But this last benefit was at once imperilled by a swift return, in practical matters, to those national traditions to which the adoption of Western methods was most unpalatable. The principle of generalisation was admitted, but, in practice, all receipts and expenses were specialised, and certain sources of revenue were effected to certain particular outlays. This condition of disorder extended to administrative matters. The Colleges were subordinated to the Senate, but an exception was made in favour of three, those of War, the Navy, and Foreign Affairs, which were permitted the privilege of corresponding directly with the Sovereign, and thus given rank above that of the Chief Assembly. Decentralisation reappeared, and brought insubordination and chaos in its train.

And this was not all. To the Colleges were added 'Financial Provinces' on the Swedish system. This, in itself, was a good thing, but these Provinces were called

¹ *Collected Laws*, No. 4008.

upon to perform the same work as the established Governments, which already formed regular financial and administrative districts. The Colleges themselves, in many respects, held the same functions as the Senate. There was too much machinery now, and not enough men to work it. The Tsar was reduced to sending his Swedish prisoners to fill up his innumerable offices!¹ The whole thing had been overdone, and many palaces, like the houses in the new Capital, were likely to be left untenanted. Trouble was experienced, even in finding a sufficient number of respectable-looking Senators. One of the first, Prince Michael Vladimirovitch Dolgorouki, could not write his name.² None of them had any experience of business, any idea of their real duty, any desire to perform it, nor, for the most part, any personal integrity whatever. The time of the Colleges was wasted, so one of Peter's Ukases declares, in gossip and abuse 'like women selling at street stalls.' In 1715, Prince Volkonski, a Senator, and one of the Directors of the Mint, named Apouhtin, were convicted of fraud, knouted, and their tongues were pierced with red-hot irons.³ Such punishments did not, as a general rule, result in the removal of the culprit from the public service—the difficulty of replacing him was far too serious. In 1723, Skorniakof-Pissaref lost his office, his titles and his goods, and was degraded to the rank of a private soldier, but he was at once given a commission to superintend the Ladoga Canal Works.

Peter contrived to place his army and his Administration on a European footing, but he found it easier to secure soldiers than administrators. The Reformer borrowed the Collegial form from Europe, but he did not succeed in assimilating its living spirit, and principle,—of common toil and divided responsibility. He never endeavoured, indeed, to secure what a recent Russian writer has described as 'too exotic a fruit to flourish in our country.'⁴ All Peter attained was the establishment of a Bureaucracy.

¹ *Collected Laws*, No. 3101.

² Petrovski, p. 50.

³ De Bie's Despatch to the States-General April, 26, 1715 (Dutch Archives).

⁴ Milioukof, p. 565.

II

The blemishes in the great Tsar's work are largely accounted for by the nature of the moral foundation on which he built it. This is as evident in police, as in administrative, matters. His great object, in this latter department, was the repression of brigandage, a plague-spot which the savage habits of the period, the national inclination to the nomadic form of existence, and the political troubles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, had maintained and deepened. In vain did the Sovereign strive to burn it out with hot irons; the hand of every class in society was against him. In 1695, a Prince Ouhtomski and two members,—brothers,—of the Shérémétief family, were taken red-handed, sacking a house in Moscow, and murdering the inhabitants.¹ The evil had been increased by the manner in which Peter's predecessors had hesitated between two methods of cure—excessive severity, and extreme clemency. They had even condescended to offers of pardon, and entreaties to desist. Matters had reached a point at which all further hesitation was impossible,—and my readers will imagine to which side Péter inclined. He issued orders that any robber, who was not hanged, was to have his nose cut off 'to the bone,' and another edict commanded that all such malefactors should, without any exception whatsoever, be hanged on the spot. This remedy was disastrous in its effects. According to Possoshkof, and even on Peter's own admission, brigandage steadily increased. This was the result of the extreme severity, and generally unreasonable nature, of the existing régime. The brigands and the Cossack mutineers, were, most of them, insurgents against the Tsar's rule. The malefactors had their 'artels,' just as, elsewhere, there have been revolutionary clubs. The police regulations at St. Petersburg were numerous, minute, and altogether excessive. In a country where mendicity had been, for centuries, one of the ordinary elements of social life, alms-giving was punished, and the beggar was threatened with the knout and with hard labour. During 1719, five or six persons were daily flogged on this account.² This, in itself, proves how ineffectual the measure was. And those taken by the police to put a stop

¹ Jeliaboujski, pp. 19, 42.

² Kostomarof, *History of Russia*, vol. ii. p. 629.

to another national plague-spot—the incessant fires—were equally useless. During one day, in 1712, 9 monasteries, 86 churches, 35 charitable institutions, 32 public buildings and 4000 private houses, were burnt in Moscow, and 136 human victims fell a prey to the devouring element.¹

It was a hard thing for Russian society to cast off the conditions of savagery, and the justice of the country did but little to help the administration and the police to forward the work of evolution.

III

With regard to judicial matters, Peter found himself face to face with an inveterate idea, only quite recently eradicated from the Russian mind, that all functions, whether administrative or judicial, constituted not a duty, but a profitable privilege, for their holder. This was the affirmation and perpetuation of the ancient system of the *Kormlenië* (that which feeds). The only object of the office was held to be the support of the official.² 'In Russia,' wrote Krijanitch, a Servian, and contemporary of Locke, 'justice is a saleable commodity.' Possoshkof repeats the assertion in another form, and all foreigners, Herberstein, Fletcher, Olearius, and Maskiewicz, refer to the evil. Peter could not do away with it. In 1724, he was still making laws against dishonest judges.

The Dukes of Moscow had won their supremacy, not so much by the sword, as by gifts bestowed on Tartar officials. Russia had been brought up in this school, and bore its mark. Bribery was in the blood. Peter did not turn his attention to this portion of his work till somewhat late in his career. With the exception of a Ukase against bribes, published in 1714, and merely amplified by that of 1724, and some measures taken, in 1716, to remedy the slowness of criminal procedure, and clear the prisons, he made no attempt at any general reform, till 1718. His attention being then attracted in that direction, he endeavoured, as usual, to do everything at once, and put matters on a European footing in a moment. He turned once more to Swedish models, and caused a mass of documents to be copied at Stockholm, for his information. He deprived the *Voievodes* of their

¹ Solovief, vol. xvi. p. 254.

² See Nil Popof, *Tatishcheff and his Times*, p. 25.

judicial powers, established inferior courts of two classes in the provinces, and instituted Courts of Appeal in the capital, and in the more important towns.

Here, as elsewhere, the Reformer made a considerable effort, and showed an admirable sense of his own duty. A complainant applied to him, he refused to hear him, or to receive his written request. The man said, 'My complaint is against you.' The Sovereign received it, submitted the matter to the Senate, and paid, without a murmur, the damages to which he was condemned.¹ Some of his ideas were excellent,—such as the Ukase of 1716, forbidding the torture of women about to become mothers (excepting, we are forced to admit, in the case of inquiries 'affecting the safety of the State'), and the abolition of the barbarous custom of the *Pravièje*, in 1718. But the general result was far from satisfactory. After Shafirof's trial in 1723, there appeared on the judge's table in every court in the Empire, a strange three-sided erection of gilded wood, crowned with a double eagle, which has remained there till this day. On this, Peter caused to be inscribed the text of three edicts, simultaneously published at that period, which are really nothing but a violent diatribe against the behaviour of the judges,—against magistrates, whose sole object was to hide themselves under the mantle of justice, and so to violate its laws by twisting their meaning in a way 'unknown in other countries,'—against those who professed not to know or understand the laws they were charged to administer,—and those who, like Shafirof, ventured to censure, and openly disobey, the laws they represented.

There were two obstacles to the realisation of any immediate progress in judicial matters. The first, and the greatest, was the absolute impossibility of giving any idea of law its proper value, in the midst of surroundings which were a negation of all law. One of Peter's greatest merits certainly was, that he freed this idea from the clouds of savagery and brutality which darkened it, in his subjects' eyes. He was the first person to draw attention to a principle, in certain respects independent of, and superior to, the Sovereign's own will. Once the law was established, every soul, beginning with the Tsar himself, owed it obedience. Peter set the example. But, unhappily,

¹ Popof, *Tat'shtchef and his Times*, p. 17.

he had hardly won this victory over a condition of barbarism, before he compromised its benefits, and diminished its scope, by the exercise and abuse of a power he himself forgot to control. He did indeed bow before the law, but the law was only his personal will, expressed in a Ukase—it was often arbitrary, and always changeable. A great poet, whose desire to do all honour to the glory of the national hero has transformed him into a historian, has claimed to discover a characteristic difference between Peter's institutions and his edicts. The first, he believes, emanated from a far-reaching and wise intelligence. The second were the dictates of caprice, often a cruel one, and were 'written, as it were, with the knout.' The first, designed to last eternally, or, at all events, for a very prolonged period; the second, the momentary whim, as one might think, 'of an impatient and despotic provincial proprietor.'¹ This remark does not strike us as being absolutely correct, when we glance at the history of Peter's institutions, which he himself made, and unmade, and remade, over and over again. None of his legislative acts bear any sign of eternal duration. There is no doubt that he always desired to do the best he could. The care invariably taken to explain, and with some prolixity, the motive of each decision, and in what points it will be superior to the previous state of things, is a very noticeable feature. Traces of this didactic method appear, even at the present day, in Russian legislation. But the 'best' is only what, at a given moment, appears best to him. All through his legislation, it should be noted, there is a radical separation between his idea of the law, and any conception of legal morality. The law, in the Tsar's eyes, was not *what was just*, but *what ought, or ought not, to be done*—for reasons very frequently quite removed from moral ethics. The guilty man, who ought to be punished, was not the man who did a bad action, but simply the man who *acted in contravention to the text of the Tsar's ukase*. The very manner in which the penalties of the law were applied throws a curious light on this subject. In January 1724, a French artisan, of the name of Guillaume Belin, was condemned to the galleys for murder. His sentence was commuted, and he was sent to the naval dockyards to ply his trade—that of a locksmith—and teach it to the native workmen. The whole

¹ Poushkin, *Works*, vol. iv. p. 327.

judicial spirit of the period revolved between two poles, despotism and utilitarianism.¹ Occasionally, the punishment to which the culprit was sentenced was replaced by his admission into the Orthodox Church, and Baptism was substituted for the knout!²

I come to the second obstacle. Peter made many laws, but their abundance, and their incessant production, made it impossible to gather them into a Code. The earliest Russian Code, Ivan Vassilévitsh's *Soudiébnik* (1542), contains little more than directions for judicial combats, to take the place of more direct proofs. The *Oulójénie* of Alexis (1650), was for the most part, a manual of practical jurisprudence. In 1695, under the twin rule of Ivan and Peter, the need of a fresh codification made itself felt, and the Administrative Offices (*Prikas*) were ordered, by ukase, to prepare the necessary elements. This work, it may be concluded, was not very zealously proceeded with, for it was made over, in 1700, to the Council of Boyards. This Council addressed a request to the *Prikaz* for the necessary information, and did nothing further. It soon passed out of existence, and Peter himself, for successive years, had many other things to think of. It was not till 1714 that the idea of codification re-occurred to him, and this time, naturally, the work was confided to the Senate. The Senate began as the Council had begun. The *Prikaz*, as in 1700, did nothing at all, and the business came to a standstill.

There was a fair excuse for all this non-accomplishment. How could any Code be drawn up while the publication of laws flowed on unceasingly, so that the conditions of the problem were undergoing constant change? Everything altered from day to day. One wave carried away what the last had cast up. In 1719, the Reformer was fain to have recourse to one of those heroic methods which so specially attracted him. Instead of codifying existing laws, why not use one already in existence? His mind had been haunted, during the preceding year, by the idea of a judicial anthology, in which Danish and Swedish laws were to appear side by side with a selection from indigenous Russian legislation. He was now inclined to take a shorter cut, and simply to adopt

¹ Filippof, *Peter the Great's Reform and the Penal Code* (Moscow, 1895), pp. 156, 249.

² *Ibid.* p. 255.

the Swedish Code, from which he proposed to eliminate all provisions unsuitable to his own country, substituting others borrowed from the *Oulojénie* of 1650. In 1720, the Senate nominated a special Commission for the execution of this programme, and associated certain foreign jurists with its labours. But these only resulted, some time in the following year, in the solemn recognition of the absolute inappropriateness of the Swedish Code to Russian needs. Meanwhile, the tide of Ukases rose yet higher and higher.

In 1724, Peter, in spite of his constitutional stubbornness, seems to have abandoned all idea of fresh attempts in this direction, and a Ukase, dated March 11th, decreed that in default of any other Code, all future laws were to be added to the *Oulojénie* of 1650. He can hardly be personally blamed for this failure. To attain complete success, two things were needful, and both failed him. The true judicial idea had not sufficiently established itself in the mind and conscience of even a small and select number of his subjects, and he had no jurists capable of seconding his efforts. The political and social edifice, thus hastily raised, was to make but a poor show, in this respect, for many a year to come. It reminds us of an old wall roughly whitewashed, with its cracks, and moss, and fungi showing through the thin coat of plaster. The whole fabric, indeed, had something of this quality. The work of ten centuries cannot be performed in twenty years, even though the builder work with fire and sword.

CHAPTER VII

THE ARMY AND THE NAVY

- I. The Army—Precedents—Peter only hurried the movement forward—Strange beginnings—‘The Pleasure Regiments’—Good and bad qualities of the new formations—Spirit and substance—Narva—On the right road—The moral element.
- II. The Navy—Precedents—The hasty and intemperate nature of this new undertaking—The fighting Navy, and the Merchant Navy—Double failure—What remained of the work after the Tsar’s death.

I

PETER did not endow Russia with a good financial system, but he gave her a military organisation, the value of which has been amply proved, and which forms one of the Reformer’s most undoubted claims to glory. Yet, even on this head, his work was not the absolute personal creation it is frequently described as being, and it is open to criticism in various respects. I shall not enter on a discussion for which I do not feel myself competent, but shall confine myself to a short statement of the most striking features of the subject, and the most authoritative opinions on it.

The great Tsar’s predecessors may fairly be said to have had 200,000 armed men, and not a single soldier. The army, picturesque as it was, was anything but military. Knights of the Middle Ages, clad from head to foot in mail, rode beside horsemen mounted on miserable bare-backed jades, armed with sticks, and provisioned with a bag of rye cast over their shoulders. These heterogeneous war-bands were not regularly recruited; they were a mere collection of armed men, belonging to one class only, that of the landed proprietors. There was no preparation, no training in the art of war. Military drill, in times of peace, was utterly unknown. There were no organised commands; the

leadership of the troops belonged, as a right, to the chiefs of the local aristocracy—the Boyards and the *Okolnitchyîé*. There was no commissariat. The men equipped and fed themselves as they chose, and as best they could. And finally, the army, being almost exclusively composed of cavalry, could not fulfil the needs of modern warfare.

But this state of things did not continue unmodified until Peter's accession. Even in the sixteenth century the Tsar Féodor Ivanovitch (1584-1598) had some regular troops, drilled and equipped in European fashion. Two foreign officers in his service, Margeret, a Frenchman, and Von Rosen, a Livonian, commanded a body of 2,500 men, most of them Poles and Livonians, but with a few Scotchmen, Danes, Swedes, Frenchmen, Greeks, and subjects of the Emperor.¹ Peter's immediate predecessors, Alexis and Féodor Aléxiéievitch, went yet further. They left behind them a first attempt at a general reform, on democratic lines, of the command, recruiting, and organisation of the army. A commission established in 1681, under the presidency of Prince Vassili Galitzin, suggested that the principle of individual capacity should be considered in the selection of military chiefs. At the same time, the personal service of landed proprietors was replaced by recruits (*Datotschnyîé*) supplied by them in proportion to the extent of their properties; and, finally, permanent bodies of regular troops, foreign and even native, including some regiments of infantry, came into existence.

Peter's personal work was limited to a somewhat unmethodical, and, in the early days at least, a yet more whimsical development, of these resources. On 30th January 1683, Sergius Bouhvostof, a Court groom attached to the 'pleasure stables,' was enrolled in the military 'pleasure service,' which the young Tsar had taken it into his head to institute. This man was to be the first soldier of the Préobrajenski regiment. Other *koniouhy* were successively enrolled, and these were followed by young men belonging to the noble families opposed to Sophia's rule. In 1684, there were 300 volunteers, and the germs of a military establishment at Préobrajenskoïé. In the following year Peter ventured to beat up recruits openly. The number soon rose to 1000, and a second depôt was created at Siémionof, from which place

¹ Oustrialof, vol. i. p. 179.

a second regiment of the Guard took its name. In 1690 and 1691, the Tsar held the first manœuvres of these troops; these were called the 'Siémionof Campaign.' In 1692, the 'pleasure regiments' were definitely organised, and Peter took the rank of a sergeant in the Préobrajenski. During 1694, in another series of manœuvres, known as the 'Kojouhof Campaign,' they figured as regularly constituted tactical units, and lost the name and quality of 'pleasure regiments.' The time for playing at soldiers had gone by, and Peter was preparing for serious work. That same year a company of bombardiers was formed, in which the Tsar himself figured, under the name of Peter Alexéief.

This was the nucleus of the future army, which, from that period, was to have nothing in common, whether as, to composition, discipline, or instruction, with the old *ral'*, or war-bands of various arms. The only old regiments sharing, to a certain extent, in the new organisation, were Lefort's,—one of comparatively recent formation,—and the Boutyrski regiment, which had been raised in 1642, under Michael Féodorovitch.

The relative superiority of these troops was proved under the walls of Azof, in 1695 (see p. 77), but Peter did nothing to extend their organisation, and make it general, until 1699. All he did was to destroy the *Streltsy*,—thereby wiping out the old army, without putting a new one in its place. It was the Swedish war which finally called forth the great Tsar's creative activity. Then there was an explosion, a tremendous rush, of ideas and new efforts, which seemed to defy time, space, reason, and substance. Many of his notions were original, all his efforts were bold and energetic. To begin with, he gave up the system of enrolment as then practised in most European armies. He adopted a method of recruiting which only differed from the compulsory service of the present day, by being collective instead of individual. This difference was, indeed, a fundamental error. The necessity enforced on society of furnishing a proportionate number of recruits, carried with it the fatal practice of substitution, of buying off individual service, and of hiring by contract. To this Peter added service *for life*, which was in direct contradiction with his own principle of equality—for the whole nation could not possibly serve in an army, the ranks of which were only cleared by death,—which separated

the army from the general population, and made it a class apart, and which inevitably filled the regiments with men who were unfit for active service. His whole conception, though in advance, in certain respects, of the usual European idea, lacked proper balance. And, to begin with, it was a purely material creation. It did not possess the *spirit* which is the real strength of Western military institutions. This was soon to be proved at the siege of Narva. Peter there brought 32,000 regular troops into action, but the Préobrajenski and Siémionovski regiments alone made any stand, and even these, so Possoshkof declares, fired twenty volleys without killing a single man.

This second experience convinced the young sovereign at last of the value of that moral element which he had hitherto completely overlooked, and thus set him on the right path. In future, without neglecting other elements of effective strength, his constant care was to form the spirit of his soldiers; and this is a greater title to glory than all his cannon foundries and powder factories at Ohta, Toulá, and St. Petersburg, than his School of Military Engineering at Moscow, and even than the earliest known attempt at raising a body of horse-artillery, which has been generally ascribed to him. By the end of his reign, his regular army consisted of 40 infantry and 33 dragoon regiments, 57,956 foot soldiers, and 36,333 cavalry, without reckoning his irregular troops, Cossacks, Kalmuks, and so forth. But imposing as these numbers were, the sum-total of his armies is a matter of secondary importance; the great value of his work lies in the wonderful spirit he breathed into his men. The Russian soldier was transformed, by him, out of a simple, half-conscious brute, into a thinking being, ruled, whatever his detractors may say, by other motives than the fear of punishment. An ideal has been set before him, and he follows it. Such active courage, and intelligent daring, cannot be beaten into men with blows. I will point out one feature in refutation of certain opinions on this subject, which strike me as having been too lightly adopted. At the very moment when the war of the Spanish Succession was considered, in the West, to have absolutely proved the superiority of mechanical order in battle formation, Peter was putting forward the principle of the independent organic action of tactical units. This spirit is breathed in all his military instructions and regulations,

which prove his desire to develop and cultivate the personal initiative of his fighting men.¹

His military legislation, carefully studied as it was, and for a wonder, successfully codified, does not always deserve the same praise. Its disciplinary and penal provisions are quite absurd. They are in direct opposition to the principles adopted for the organisation and education of his armed forces. It has been asserted, in his defence, that the severity of his measures, and the barbarity of his methods of repression,—the stake, the gallows, the quartering of culprits, and the cutting-off of their noses and their ears,—was a mere imitation of foreign models, more especially of the French code, with certain merciful modifications of their severity.² But this plea is not convincing, because it overlooks the difference which Peter's military reform permitted to exist, —which it even sanctioned and developed,—between the composition of the Russian army, and those of Western countries. The Russian soldier of Peter's time was not, in principle at all events, a recruit, in the French or German sense. He was not drawn, as too often happened in other countries, from the very dregs of the population; he was rather, in principle at all events, the representative of what was best in his class, and as a matter of fact, he did, generally speaking, represent a decidedly superior element. But this was what Peter himself completely overlooked, and therefore it was that he succeeded in arousing a general desire for flight, as is eloquently proved by his numerous ukases with respect to the *niétshiks* (refractory recruits), who were unable to endure a military service which had become a pitiless and ignominious servitude.³

On the other hand, all the Tsar's energy and knowledge could not triumph over certain causes of inferiority, which, even to a quite recent date, have seemed to threaten the success of the Russian arms—I refer to defects of administration, and the incapacity of persons in high command. This experience throws light, as I think, on another difference,—that which, though frequently denied, certainly exists

¹ Maslovski, *The Russian Armies in the Time of Peter the Great* (Moscow, 1883), p. 47.

² Bobrovski, *Military Law in Western Europe at the Time of the Constitution of Standing Armies* (Moscow, 1882), p. 462.

³ Rosenhcin, *Précis of the History of Russian Military Institutions*, 1878, p. 215.

between the natural and, so to speak, instinctive qualities and virtues of the human race, and those others which can only be produced by long and laborious culture. Peter was powerless, in face of the eternal laws of the intellectual and moral world. Courage and even *honour* are elementary phenomena, and may appear under conditions of savagery. It is quite otherwise with knowledge and *integrity*. Ancient Muscovy was not a warlike country. The Dukes of Moscow won their victories over the Tartars by means of their patient and cunning policy. Modern Russia could not become a nation of heroic warriors again, at one bound. Peter found, just below the surface of the national character, the necessary instincts for this transformation,—a return to the distant traditions of the Norman period. Further he could not go, but, when he gave his country the army of Poltava, he forged a wonderful instrument of material power and moral progress. That army has made the greatness of contemporary Russia.

II

In considering the Navy created during the great reign, whether for mercantile or fighting purposes, I shall venture to be more critical. I am inclined to regard the haste and excess of its production as the result of an atavic instinct, which, when we consider the local circumstances, would appear to have developed into a mania, and become the wild caprice of a despot. Precedents, for such there had been, should have warned Peter not to allow himself to be carried away by his imagination. In the reign of Michael Féodorovitch, certain Holstein merchants begged permission to build vessels at Nijni Novgorod, and to utilise the waters of the Volga for their trade with Persia. In later years, Alexis Mihailovitch himself began building ships at Diédinof, at the confluence of the Moskva and the Oka. All these attempts ended in failure; some of the Dutch ships were lost in the Caspian, others were taken and burnt by Stenka Razin at Astrakhan.¹ The very nature of things, in this country without a seaboard, seems to have protested against the violence done her.

¹ Viéssiélago, *Précis of a History of the Russian Navy*, vol. i. p. 5, etc.

Peter ran a yet greater risk for himself, and for his Empire, when he ventured on the stormy waters of the White Sea in a hastily constructed yacht, built in his improvised shipyards at Archangel. Aided by Dutch ship-builders, he contrived, as early as 1694, to possess three vessels, intended to do double duty,—armed for war, and fitted for commerce,—a type imposed on these first attempts, by the fear of pirates, and which was long continued in the naval architecture of the country. But this squadron was nothing but a toy, and the young Sovereign was so fully conscious of the fact, that, in 1695, he suddenly turned his back on his Northern port, and all the work he had made himself there, just as he might have turned his back on any pleasure party. He came back to the fresh waters of the Iaouza, where his first attempts at navigation had been made. He was bent on preparing the elements of a flotilla, built on the model of a Dutch galley, brought there piecemeal, on sledges,—which flotilla he proposed to transport by land to Voronèje, whence it was to proceed down the Don, and take part in the siege of Azof.¹

The doubtful success of this fresh attempt has already been described. In the following year, the war flotilla took its place amongst the young Tsar's cast-off toys. Peter's chief desire then became, to possess a merchant navy, and, faithful to his usual manner of conception and procedure, he deemed it possible to bring one into existence, by merely embodying his will in a decree, and using authoritative methods. He called his council together at Prébrazjenskoïé, on the 4th of November, and ordered all owners, lay or ecclesiastic, of 100 houses and more, to form themselves into companies, for the construction of merchant vessels. The Archimandrites who held domains under the abbeys, were not to be excused, and the Patriarch was called on to supply two frigates, of fifty guns each! The number of ships to be fitted out was definitely fixed; there were to be ninety, and the State undertook to build eighty more. Their design and equipment was formally regulated, and they were all to be finished within two years,—under pain of death to the laggards! The order was obeyed; everything was ready on the appointed day, but, on 20th April 1700, a fresh Ukase decreed the suppression of the companies

¹ Tsviétaief, *The Creation of the Russian Fleet*, 1696, p. 12.

which had so obediently organised themselves, and built a fleet they evidently could not learn how to use.¹

All this expenditure of time, and energy, and money, only resulted in a naval demonstration, which, it must be acknowledged, had a certain value of its own. In August 1699, a Russian ship sailed across the Black Sea, and cast anchor before Constantinople. The action was purely pacific, and the vessel brought the Tsar's two plenipotentiaries, who were charged to negotiate a definite treaty. But the Turks offered vehement opposition. Everything they could think of was brought into play—diplomatic arguments, entreaties, and even threats. But Peter stood firm, and this demonstrative character has never left the Russian navy. It has always been used with a special view to moral effect, and thus its best service has been done. As for the flotilla which was shut up at Voronèje, because there was not enough water to float it down the Don, it proved of no service when hostilities with Turkey recommenced in 1711. The surrender of Azof to the Turks deprived Peter of all future hope of using it. Part of it was made over to the Porte, and the rest was left to rot.

The Northern fleet, called into existence by the necessities of the Swedish war, was a more serious undertaking. There was something heroic about its beginnings. Two Russian sailors, who had been seized by the Swedes, and forced to pilot them during an attack on Archangel, in June 1701, ran the enemy's ships under the guns of the Fort, where they were stranded and captured. They themselves were wounded, counterfeited death, and contrived to escape. Then came several victorious fights on the Lake of Ladoga, of which the Russians retained possession. In 1703, after the conquest of the Mouth of the Neva, a ship-building yard was established at Olonets, at the confluence of the Mégréga and the Olonka. The next year, the St. Petersburg Admiralty had come into existence, and the young Baltic fleet carried troops and provisions to the sieges of Derpt and Narva. In 1705, it repulsed a Swedish attack on the Island of Kotlin; in 1706, it captured a large Swedish vessel, the 'Espérn,' under the walls of Viborg, and, in 1710, it played a part in the capture of that town. But Sweden was mistress of the Gulf of Finland, and blockaded all the Baltic shores.

¹ Viéssielago, vol. i. p. 13, etc.

The mere numerical superiority of her fleet sufficed to ensure her this advantage. Peter had indeed boasted, when he met Augustus at Birzé, that he possessed eighty ships, of sixty and eighty guns each—one of which, built on his own designs, was to be called the ‘Divine Foresight.’ The prow of this ship was to be adorned with a figure of St. Peter, surmounting an allegorical representation, also of the young Tsar’s design, of a boat manned by children.¹ The plans and drawings had, doubtless, been distributed, but the squadron with which he made his victorious attack on Helsingfors and Borge, ten years later, only reckoned seven ships of the line and four frigates, three of which ships, and two frigates, had been bought abroad.

This same squadron, escorting a flotilla of two hundred galleys and small craft, figures in the first naval victory of any importance of which Russian annals can boast. This took place at Hango-Udde, where the Swedish Admiral Erensköld handed his sword to *Peter Mihailof*, on the 25th of July 1714. The same squadron ravaged the coast of Sweden in 1719, and largely contributed, by the assistance it rendered to the descent of Admiral Lasoy on the Swedish shore in 1721, to the conclusion of the Peace of Nystadt. But the success of these operations, which, for the most part, were *demonstrations*, was secured by the number and excellence of the land forces on board the ships. Thus, in 1719, Apraxin had 27,000 infantry under his command. The battles in which the fleet took part were invariably fought close in shore. They were not real sea fights, and success was ensured, in every case, by the territorial element, which predominated.²

To sum the matter up, Peter, whether we look at it from the fighting or the commercial point of view, passionately and unsuccessfully endeavoured to make his Russians a nation of sailors. The inhabitants of a huge continent, washed, on one side, by most inhospitable seas, can hardly be blamed for not having fallen in with his fancy. Russia, even to this present day, is, commercially speaking, largely dependent on foreign navies. The fighting navy of the Don, with its imitations of Dutch, English, and Venetian galleys, was an expensive and unfortunate experiment. The neces-

¹ Solovief, vol. xiv. p. 331.

² Mychlaievski, *The Finland War*, 1712-1714 (1896).

sity for reducing the draught of the new vessels made it impossible to reproduce the elementary nautical qualities of the foreign models. Thanks to their less unfavourable local conditions, and to the experience acquired by the Sovereign, his northern dockyards were more successful, and even caused an anxiety in England, which subsequent events proved to be somewhat premature.¹ Here, as elsewhere, the exaggeration and precipitation, which were the cardinal faults of all the great Tsar's efforts, diminished their success. His timbers were too green, his rigging was of inferior quality, his sailors were ill-taught. Leaks and broken masts, unskilful and inferior crews, hurriedly recruited, and frequently decimated by sickness, constantly appear in the annals of these squadrons. The number of vessels of every kind—ships of the line, frigates and galleys—built during Peter's reign, has been reckoned at something near a thousand. In 1734, nine years after his death, when their co-operation was needed for the projected blockade of Stettin, there were not fifteen fit to put to sea, and not an officer could be found to command any one of them.²

Peter went too fast, and, above all, he tried to go too far. It would have been a good thing to give Russia a fleet; it was not a reasonable thing to endeavour to turn Russia into a second Holland. He established ship-building yards at five-and-twenty points, many of them in the very centre of *terra firma*, and abandoned them, one after the other.³ He replaced the Department of Naval Construction at Vladimir by the Department of the Admiralty at Moscow, and each of these places was more than three hundred and seventy-five miles from the sea. He thus gave his creation an artificial character, which it has never lost. His naval enterprises, which he carried to St. Petersburg in 1712, with the 'Chancery of the War Fleet,' and finally concentrated there, in 1719, at the 'College of the Admiralty,' would seem to have been principally destined as an amusement and a delusion to himself. They certainly supplied the opposition with which his whole work was to wrestle, and to which I am now about to refer, in concluding this work, with a certain amount of cogent argument, if not, indeed, with any actual justification.

¹ Sbornik, vol. lxi. p. 563.

² Viéssielago, vol. i. pp. 54-70.

³ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER VIII

THE OPPOSITION—THE TSAREVITCH ALEXIS

- I. Collective and isolated resistance—Plots and attacks—Nature of the opposition personified by Alexis.
- II. The education of the Tsarevitch—His first struggle with the parental authority—Alexis will not be a soldier—He is left at Moscow—Mutual sympathy—The clergy and the aristocracy—Idea of a change of ruler—His father intervenes again—Alexis must *serve*—A bad recruit—The Tsarevitch too ill to be present at the Battle of Poltava—He is sent abroad to study and take a wife—Marriage—The Princess Charlotte—Honeymoon—An early disturbance of conjugal harmony—Alexis at the head of a party—Charlotte's death—Catherine bears a son—Disinheritance—Prince or monk—First and second requisition.
- III. A legend—Charlotte alive—Her adventures—An explanation.
- IV. Final requisition—Peter sends for his son—The Tsarevitch's flight—The pursuit—The Tsar's bloodhounds—Vienna—Ehrenberg—Naples—Euphrosine appears—The treachery of the mistress—Betrayal of Alexis—The return.
- V. Abdication—The Moscow inquiry—Alexis gives up his friends—Executions—Paternal forgiveness—Plans for the future—Marriage with Euphrosine—Confidence and happiness.
- VI. St. Petersburg—Arrival of the mistress—Cross-examination—A witness for the prosecution—A fresh inquiry—The prince is arrested—Brought into court—Torture—Confession and recantation—The High Court of Justice—The sentence.
- VII. Death—Various versions—Probabilities—Material reality and moral responsibility—European opinion—The judgment of posterity—Voltaire—Before the bar of History.

I

THE great Reformer's work, and the difficulties with which he had to contend, have not been fairly judged even by his own peers. 'He worked on his people,' said the great Frederick, not, perhaps, without a touch of jealousy, 'just as aquafortis bites into the steel.' This comparison is hardly just. The Russian nation did not preserve a passive attitude under the rough and sudden attack made on its habits,

its sense of decorum, and its inner feelings,—an attack which more resembled blows dealt with hammer and axe, than the slow action of corrosive fluid on the metal plate. Peter, in the wildest moments of his rage and desire to punish, often answered violence with violence. This is proved by the minutes of the *Préobrajenskoïé Prikaz*. 'What Tsar is this?' cried a prisoner named Vanka Borliout, who was put to the question, in 1698, 'he is a Turk; he eats meat on Wednesdays and Fridays, and eats frogs! He has exiled his wife, and lives with a foreigner!' 'What Tsar is this?' Here, as afterwards, the exclamation, with its note of mingled astonishment and indignation, was the cry of a wounded conscience. And then followed the argument, 'It is not possible that this man, to whom none of those things which, for centuries past, have made the life and faith of Holy Russia, appear sacred, can be born of a Russian man and woman! He must be the son of some German,—the son of Lefort and of a German woman substituted in the cradle for the child of Alexis and Nathalia! The real Peter Aléxiéievitch remained abroad in 1697, the *Niemtsy* kept him, and sent an impostor to take his place. Or perhaps, indeed, this may be Antichrist!' ¹ In 1701, a writer named Talitski was condemned to death for having lent his pen to the support of this latter supposition. And, in later years, Stephen Iavorski wrote a book, full of quotations from the Apocalypse, to demonstrate the falseness of the idea.² In 1718, a foreigner, travelling through a village on the road to St. Petersburg, noticed a crowd of three or four hundred men. He inquired of a pope as to the meaning of what he saw, and was told, 'Our fathers and our brothers have no beards; our altars are left unserved; our most sacred laws are violated; and we are groaning under a foreign tyranny.' What he saw was the beginning of an insurrection.³

The example made of the *Streltsy* had, indeed, discouraged any attempt at concerted revolt, but individual cases of mutiny, and even of violent resistance, were still frequent, and occasionally took a very simple and touching form. One poor gentleman brought a written protest, addressed to God Almighty, into the church, and laid it before the holy images,

¹ Kostomarov in *Russian Antiquities*, 1875, vol. xii.

² Siémievski, *Słowo i Działo*, p. 107, etc.

³ La Vie's despatch from St. Petersburg, Jan. 10. 1718 (French Foreign Office).

in the presence of the Tsar.¹ But, in most cases, the fanatical followers of the Domostroï, wounded in their tenderest point, raised angry hands, and strove to render blow for blow. Attempts on the person of the Sovereign occurred almost every year. In 1718, La Vie refers to the *twenty-ninth* which had taken place since the beginning of the reign. 'There is no doubt,' wrote Campredon, in 1721, 'that if the Tsar were to die, this State would go back to its ancient form of government, for which *all his subjects* secretly sigh.'

The opposition was not really so general; it grew more and more timid and weak, as the new order of things gained consistency and strength. It failed to interfere seriously with its development, but it never gave in, to the very end. The elements of this opposition, the motives which swayed it, its special means of action, its spirit and its character, are all evidently summed up in the gloomy incidents of which Peter's eldest son was the pitiful hero. And as I, too, must shortly sum up my own work, I shall give those incidents the principal place in the study for the purpose of which this closing chapter is written.

My task has been facilitated, in some ways, and complicated in others, by the multiplicity of former efforts devoted to the same subject. History, romance, drama, and poetry, in all countries, and every language, have essayed to conjure up the tragic picture of the unhappy Tsarevitch. A brilliant French writer has endowed the somewhat rough-hewn work of Russian historians with the personal charm of his own brilliant style.² I desire to avoid all useless repetition. But, as it seems to me, the true features of these events, and of the persons who played their part in them, have not, as yet, been brought out with the desirable clearness, and the greatest attainable amount of veracity. I do not claim that I shall succeed, as I would fain have succeeded; but my readers will forgive me if I make the attempt.

II

Alexis was born on February 19th, 1690. His portraits help us to understand his story, and the terrible prosecution with which it closed. He was neither ugly nor

¹ Russian State Papers, 1878, vol. ii. p. 353.

² Vicomte Melchior de Vogué, *Le Fils de Pierre le Grand* (Paris, 1884).

handsome; his forehead was full; his eyes were round and uneasy, and his whole appearance puny and obstinate. Neither physically nor morally, did he resemble his father; yet he was anything but the ill-favoured creature he is so frequently represented to have been. He strikes me as a man whose health, never strong, was early ruined by excess of every kind, but he had no actual infirmity. His intelligence was naturally clear; he was fond of reading, had the Slavonic facility for foreign languages, and the Slavonic love of knowledge,—of a certain kind, at all events. Like his Uncle Féodor, he preferred theological works. This marked the old Russian spirit, and also the effect of the *methodus instructionis* drawn up for the young prince by one of his tutors, the Baron Von Huissen, who seems to have been a very devout person. Certain extracts from Baronius, which figure in the records of Peter's prosecution of his son, as telling against the culprit, strike me as indicating quite different tendencies from those suspected by his stern father. They seem to me the evidence of a generous and tender-hearted soul. Alexis found pleasure in the thought that Theodosius and Valentinian habitually liberated prisoners on the occasion of the Easter Festivities, forbade capital executions during Lent, and ordered that firewood and bedding should never be taken from the poor. He was glad too, it must be admitted, to remember that one of these Sovereigns had observed the Fasts with considerable severity, and that the other had been killed, because he had attempted to interfere with the rights of the Church. Certain points about this son and grandson of semi-Asiatic despots, mark him, in my eyes, as what we should call, nowadays, a liberal-minded man, though others prove him a fanatic, of the purest water. But he was neither uncultivated nor dull-minded. Sometimes he was actually witty. When he was asked, in the course of cross-examination, how he had dared to foretell that the Tsar might one day lose St. Petersburg, he replied, 'Well! he has lost Azof!' He was violent, coarse, and brutal, but it must be remembered that, when still very young, he was taught to drink to excess, and that he was frequently intoxicated. He pulled his second tutor, Viazieski, about by his hair, and he even dragged at the beard of his Confessor, the Proto-pope Ignatief. But these fits of rage seem innocent compared

with those in which he saw his father daily indulge. Violence, coarseness, and brutality were the salient characteristics of the society in which he lived.

I do not even notice any deliberate intention, on his part, of hostility to the reforming movement; I find him taking an interest in the visit paid to foreign countries by the son of one of his servants, and in the studies he is pursuing,—insisting that the boy should be taught Latin, German, and even French. But what alarmed and estranged him from the revolution by means of which Peter desired to hurry on this movement, was the excess of effort, the too great violence of the shock, the too great suddenness of the change, and, in this respect, he did not stand alone. The repugnance which put him out of tune with his father, was shared by a good half of Russia.

He remained with his mother till he was nine years old. The earliest effects of the Reform had not been fortunate for her, and of this the child had doubtless been made aware. In 1699, the unhappy Eudoxia was shut up in the Convent of Souzdal; the separation was probably a cruel pang and a cause of early bitterness to her son. The mother's place was taken by tutors. The father, absent for the most part, and absorbed by the anxieties of war, did not, for some time, take any active interest in his son's education. When he did, the first conflict at once arose. The Tsar, who had been beaten at Narva, and who was to conquer at Poltava, desired, first and foremost, that his son should be a soldier. Alexis had not the smallest taste for the warlike profession. In vain did Peter dilate, in high-sounding language, on the duties incumbent on a Sovereign. The Tsarevitch willingly admitted his duty to fight in the front rank, wherever his subjects fought; but why were they fighting now? It would be such a simple matter to stay in their own country and leave the Swedes in theirs! The pupil was not docile, the master was not patient. After several ineffectual attempts, on Peter's part, to inspire his son with a taste for the rough profession over which they wrangled, Alexis was left to himself at Moscow, and treated as a perfectly useless individual. Naturally his house became the rallying-point of all the numerous malcontents in the neighbourhood of the Kreml,—all those persons who were worried and irritated by the incessant disturbance, and never-ceasing activity, and

merciless expenditure of strength, so characteristic of the new *régime*. The youth and the old city suited each other. He loved it, and it returned his affection. Especially he loved its most lovable and attractive feature,—those innumerable sanctuaries, cathedrals and chapels, adorned with gold and precious stones, full of mysterious legends, redolent of mystery, and simple poetry. 'Do you believe,' he was asked at a later date, 'that your betrothed will consent to change her religion?' Smiling confidently, he replied, 'I will do nothing to force her; I will only take her to our Moscow churches—I am sure she will readily pray there with me.'¹

And now the revolution dared to lay a sacrilegious hand on the beauty and the majesty of those holy places, to deprive the capital of its Patriarch, and strip the monasteries. Alexis discussed the subject with his confessor. Kneeling in his bedroom at Préobrajenskoïé, before he made his first communion, he had sworn eternal obedience to this priest, promising he should always be 'his guardian angel, the judge of all his actions, the mouthpiece of Christ.' And the thrilling voice of this man of God echoed, excited, and inflamed, the Prince's inner feelings. It spoke of the indignation of the clergy, the profound dejection of the people, and the hopes which had risen, in those bleeding hearts, of a change of ruler—to one who should follow the right, and repair the errors of the past. It called up memories of his mother, that first and most piteous victim of the errors and excesses from which the whole community was suffering.

A change of ruler? Did the Church herself see no other hope of salvation? The mind of the youth, startled at first, soon grew accustomed to the thought. The words of the Muscovite aristocracy, following on the first eager ones spoken by the priest, increased this familiarity. The nobles were furious too, and out of patience; especially they were outraged by the sight of the foreign collaborators with whom Peter's intercourse was daily growing more exclusive. Did not Menshikof seem to usurp the Tsarevitch's own proper place beside the Tsar? A change of ruler? That meant a father's overthrow. Yes! but it also meant the deliverance of a mother, and her liberation from the most unmerited disgrace. Alexis saw his father but rarely nowadays, and

¹ Solovief, *Readings* (Tchténia), 1861, Book iii.

when he did appear it was always in the character of a severe and angry master. How had he caused him to employ his time? What had he taught him? He had never dropped a kindly word,—nothing but reproaches, threats and sometimes blows, occasionally most unjust,—as in 1707, when the boy ventured to pay a visit to the unhappy prisoner shut up in her nunnery at Souzdal.¹

In 1708, Peter was suddenly seized with a fresh desire to set his heir to work, 'to make him serve,' as he himself described it. He first sent him to Smolensk, on Army Commissariat duty, and then to Moscow, with orders to fortify the town against a possible Swedish attack. The experiment failed; the father was furious, and the son wrote letters to the most influential people in his circle, to beg their friendly intervention. He applied, amongst others, to the new favourite, who was to become his step-mother, but whom, in the meantime, her future step-son addressed as *Catherine Aléxiéievna*. The following year, while the Tsarevitch was bringing up reinforcements sent for by the Tsar, the young prince caught cold and was unable to be present at the Battle of Poltava. He was too sickly, evidently, to be worth anything as an apprentice in the art of war. If he was to be made into a satisfactory heir, some other course must be pursued. Peter resolved to send his son into Germany, to complete his studies. There was a chance that he might thus gain a taste for that civilisation to the elements of which he was so complete a stranger. And besides, he was to choose a wife whose influence might help to change the direction of his mental tendencies.

Alexis was delighted with an arrangement, the earliest effect of which was to set a greater distance between himself and his father. He allowed himself to be sent to Dresden, and there applied himself, or pretended to apply himself, to the study of Geometry and Fortification. But he still kept up an active correspondence with Ignatief,—who sent him an extra Confessor, disguised as a lacquey,—and with his other Moscow friends, who kept him informed as to their long-standing grievances and hopes. He allowed himself a certain amount of pleasure, too, and, besides thinking of his soul's salvation, he took care to replace the lady-loves he had left behind him in the old Capital. Ex-

¹ Oustrialof, vol. vi. p. 18.

trême devotion was very compatible, in the Byzantine mind, with a certain amount of licentiousness. But Peter surrounded his son with a whole gang of confidential agents, who were commissioned, not, indeed, to protect his virtue, but to get him married, at the earliest possible moment. The young prince suddenly gave in to their entreaties, and pitched his choice on Princess Charlotte of Wolfenbüttel, whose sister had married the future Emperor, Charles VI.,—a very suitable marriage. The ceremony took place at Torgau, on the 14th of August 1711, in the house of the Queen of Poland and Electress of Saxony, by whom Charlotte had been brought up.

Peter's idea was a good one, the success of which, as too often happened in his case, was compromised by the over hasty method of its execution. Charlotte, though not very pretty, though her face was pitted with small-pox, though her figure was long-waisted and flat, was, in spite of these physical imperfections, a very charming woman. But she was not, by any means, the life-companion Peter had dreamt of for his son. It goes to our hearts to see this poor, delicate, graceful creature, caught like a bird in a net, overshadowed by the gloomy events of the coming drama, utterly unable to defend herself, or even to understand what was happening to her. Suffering and death were her inevitable fate.

The early days of the marriage promised fairly. Alexis appeared well pleased with his bride. He replied sharply to Menshikof's ill-natured remarks about her; she was grateful to him, and showed her gratitude. She was a gentle, dreamy-natured woman, and love was her great desire. An expedition to the island of Rügen, in which the Tsarevitch was to take part, filled her with alarm. She would be, she wrote, 'unspeakably wretched if she were to lose her beloved husband.' The idea of accompanying him to St. Petersburg terrified her at first, but, immediately afterwards, she declared herself 'ready to go to the other end of the world, so as to stay with him.'¹ It was Peter, again, who began to spoil matters by his unflagging efforts, during the following years, to destroy his work. The idea of making his heir 'serve' was upon him again. Between 1711 and 1713, Alexis was perpetually travelling about,—between Thorn, where he was again despatched on business connected with

¹ Guerrier, *Die Kronprinzessin Charlotte*, 1875, pp. 25, 86, 90.

Army Supply, Pomerania, where he was sent to carry secret orders for Menshikof, and the shores of the Lake of Ladoga, where he was employed about shipbuilding matters. At the same time, the household, thus broken up, was cruelly pinched,—never well-off, pecuniarily speaking, and frequently without visible resources. In April 1712, the Princess was forced to appeal to Menshikof, who had insulted her, to lend her 5000 roubles, and in 1713, fearing she might die of starvation, she took refuge with her own relations.¹

Conjugal happiness did not withstand these trials. Charlotte's letters to her own family soon began to betray the fact that her mind was disordered, and her soul distressed. In November 1712, she was in despair. Her position, she wrote, was 'terrible.' She was married to a man, who had 'never loved' her. Then there was a ray of sunshine, and everything seemed changed. The Tsarevitch loved her 'passionately,' and she loved him 'to madness.' But this was a mere passing gleam. Another letter, written soon after, describes her as being 'more wretched than any one can imagine,' adding that she had endeavoured, up to the present, to cast a veil over her husband's character, but that the mask had fallen at last.

The danger of trusting anything to the chances of the Russian post may have had something to do with the apparent contradictions visible in these confidential communications. It is certain, at all events, that no durable reconciliation, nor any serious intimacy, can ever have existed between two young people so absolutely unsuited to each other. Graver difficulties of a moral nature were added to the material fact of an almost incessant physical separation. Charlotte was a confirmed Lutheran,—all the eloquence of the Moscow churches had been wasted on her. Then she had brought a small German court in her train, and this formed her habitual circle. Alexis was as fanatical as ever in his religious views, and grew more and more wrapped up in the narrow particularism of Moscovian orthodoxy. All Peter's authority and violence had done, was to make his son's resistance to the spirit of the new *régime* more and more stubborn. An open struggle had begun between the father and the son, and on each side the natural disposition grew more clearly marked,—Peter's eager and active originating

¹ Solovief, vol. xvii. p. 148.

power, his deliberate and despotic coercion, in the interests of revolution,—Alexis' stubborn and passive immobility, and equally deliberate sullen opposition. In 1713, the Tsarevitch fired a pistol into his own right hand, to avoid an examination into his talents as a draughtsman!

His attitude was strengthened by the fact that a more general opposition was beginning to take shape. Without any intention on his part, without, indeed, being well aware of it, he had become the head of a party. Amongst the clergy, even Stephen Iavorski had a sympathetic feeling for him, evidenced by the famous sermon preached on the 12th of March 1712, and the representatives of the old aristocratic families, such as the Dolgoroukis and the Galitzins, looked towards him with anxious eyes. Now everything that drew him nearer them, removed him yet farther, not only from his parent, but from his wife. She, the heretic and the foreigner, had no place in the future they dreamed for him and for themselves. She, too, personified the hated *régime*.

In 1714, Alexis obtained permission to take the cure at Carlsbad. He left his wife without regret, though she was on the brink of her confinement, and she saw him depart without any sense of sorrow. She herself now suffered from his natural brutality, all the more that the members of his circle had encouraged him in that coarse debauchery which formed part of the national tradition, the perpetuation of which they claimed to share with him. He frequented women of bad character, and drank to excess. 'He is almost always drunk,' writes the Princess. She was even alarmed as to the danger with which the intemperate language, resulting from his drinking excesses, threatened him. Under the influence of wine, he would give his dreams expression, 'When what is to happen does happen, his father's and his stepmother's friends are to make acquaintance with the stake . . . the fleet is to be burnt, and St. Petersburg will sink down into its own marshes!'

On his return from Carlsbad, he seized the very moment when she had borne him a daughter, to outrage her in the most cruel manner. Euphrosine, the celebrated courtesan, who was to play such a ruinous part in his existence, appeared beside him, with every attribute of a publicly acknowledged mistress. In the following year his wife once more had hopes of becoming a mother. He

watched over her, with a certain amount of care, during a period of very trying health, but, worn out by sorrow, she died in childbed on the 22nd of October 1715. Her resignation, in her last moments, was truly admirable. *Alexis fainted three times in succession* beside her bed! Was this sorrow or remorse? Perhaps it was the mere consciousness of the manner in which her death increased the gravity of his own position. He acknowledged, later, that at that moment the feeling that a fresh danger threatened him had crossed his mind. The dead woman's child was a boy; a second heir was thus provided for the Empire, and the consequences of this event, which the rebel son may have dimly foreseen, were soon to be apparent.

Six days later, his anxiety was confirmed by a letter from his father, cunningly antedated so as to appear as if it had been written on the 11th of October. All the elements of the drama of which he was to be the principal hero, and the victim, had been brought together, and the curtain was about to rise.

The letter was a summons, 'a last summons,' as the Sovereign wrote, and he pointed out that it was not his habit to make use of empty threats. 'Thou wilt do nothing, and thou wilt learn nothing; when thou comest to power, thou wilt have to be fed like a little bird. . . . I do not spare my own life, nor that of any of my subjects; I will make no exception in thy case. Thou wilt mend thy ways, and thou wilt make thyself useful to the State, otherwise thou shalt be disinherited.'

The word had been spoken, and the very day after the delivery of the letter, the lines of the dilemma it referred to were deepened by another incident; Catherine, in her turn, bore a son.

What feeling swayed Peter at that moment? This, from the point of view of historical responsibility, is the great problem that hangs over his son's lamentable trial. The apologists of the great Tsar have claimed that he was inspired by State reasons. Peter's anxiety, and his legitimate anxiety, was to ensure the future of his work, and protect his own inheritance from the incapable and unworthy heir who threatened it. But considerations to which I have already had occasion to refer (see p. 460), and others which will become apparent as my story proceeds, disincline me to adopt

this solution. The extreme energy and consistency of the Sovereign's exercise of his paternal authority, in the first place, and the weakness and inconsistency of his final settlement of the dynastic question, in the second, lead me to the conclusion that these two matters cannot have been closely connected in his mind. I believe, on the whole, that, in the first, his action was purely despotic,—he was determined to be obeyed. He may, too, have been influenced by the natural consequences of his second marriage. Independently of any direct pressure on Catherine's part, the child of that beloved wife was surely dearer to him, than the son of his repudiated consort. Alexis must have been a living reproach to his father, and that father's customary manner of treating men and things which caused him discomfort is well known. I shall have to return to this question.

Alexis, advised by his most intimate confidants, Viazemski, Kikin, and Ignatief, made a bold answer to the mighty blow dealt at him. He acknowledged himself unfit to bear the heavy burden of the Crown, declared himself ill, and weakened in body and mind, and offered, now that he saw he had a brother to replace him, to spontaneously resign his rights. All he asked was to be allowed to retreat into the country, and to be given means to live there quietly. Peter, who had not expected to be taken literally, was somewhat suspicious of this prompt submission. He took time to reflect, and then, on the 19th January 1716, he returned to the charge. He had endeavoured, in former days, to convince his son of the necessity of taking up a more manly attitude, by appeals to the memory of Louis XIV., and even to the heroes of Greek history. This time he invoked the memory of King David. The Psalmist King had proclaimed the truth that 'all men are liars.' A retreat into the country would, in the case of the Tsarevitch, be both an impropriety and a deceit. The subject must be reconsidered. An heir who never expected to reign, and still remained a prince, would be neither fish nor flesh. Alexis must choose between the throne and a more safely-guarded retreat. He must either prove himself worthy to reign or become a monk; there was to be no alternative. The choice lay in his hand. If he failed to make one, he was to be treated 'as a malefactor.'

The cloister! 'the deep dungeon, the tomb-like retreat

which kills in silence,' as a certain poet-historian has described it! Alexis shivered at the thought. He consulted again with his friends. 'Pooh!' replied Kikin, 'you will come back, the *klobook* (monk's cap) is not fastened on with nails!' Three lines expressed the son's reply; he would be a monk, but, while he addressed this message to his father, he took care to give its real meaning in two letters confided to Euphrosine, for Kikin and Ignatief, two of the foremost members of the retrograde party. These letters contained the words, 'I am going into a monastery, *driven there by force.*'

Peter was once more taken at a disadvantage. He was just about to go abroad, and left things as they were. He evidently felt he had gone too far. He had expected to frighten his son, and make him sue for mercy. He knew only too well the part in the national history played by monks, even less closely related to the throne. Unhappily for Alexis, his friends soon gave him other and less wise counsels, and he, obedient to their advice, took the offensive, lost all the benefits of his apparent resignation, gave back his father all the advantage he had won over him, and finally cast himself into the gulf.

But before I follow him down that fatal slope, I must say a few words about a very strange, and, at one time, a very generally credited legend, which increases the complications, and adds to the dark riddles, and romantic features, of this gloomy tragedy.

III

The Princess Charlotte is said to have survived her husband. According to the accepted story, worn out by his ill-treatment,—he had actually kicked her, when she was near her confinement—she had passed herself off as dead, and aided by one of her ladies, Countess Warbeck, she first of all escaped to France, and then sailed to Louisiana, where she married a French officer, the Chevalier d'Auban, to whom she bore a daughter. After ten years of marriage, she reappeared in Paris, whither her husband had come to consult doctors, and undergo an operation. She was recognised in the Tuileries Gardens by a gentleman, the future Marshal de Saxe, who had seen her at St. Petersburg. He was

anxious to mention their meeting to the King, but she made him promise to keep silence for three months, and, at the end of that period, she had disappeared. She had departed to the island of Bourbon, where her husband had taken up duty. The King, informed of this fact, transmitted the news to the Empress Maria Theresa, who was Princess Charlotte's own niece, and who offered to receive her, if she would consent to separate from the gentleman whose name she bore. She refused. She did not return to France till after the Chevalier's death in 1760, and then lived a most retired life, in a country house at Vitry, which she bought from President Feydeau, for 112,000 francs. These details, it will be observed, are very exact. She received a pension of 45,000 *livres* from the Empress, her niece, and gave away three-parts of it in alms. Her story was fairly well known in Paris, so much so that when Voltaire was occupied on his 'History of Russia, under Peter the Great,' he applied to the Duc de Choiseul for information on the subject. The Duke answered, that, like everybody else, he was acquainted with the story, but that he could not vouch for its authenticity.¹

The supposed Princess died in 1771, and the Paris newspapers gave the strange posthumous biography, the principal features of which I have just described, in the fullest detail. Catherine II., who then ruled Russia, was much disturbed, and answered by an argument containing six heads. 'Every one knows,' she affirmed, 'that the Princess died of consumption in 1715, and that she never suffered any ill-treatment whatsoever.' 'Every one knows,' retorted one of the journalists concerned, 'that Peter III. died of apoplexy!' The Austrian Ambassador—and this is an historical fact—was present at the lonely burial at Vitry, and the Abbé Sauvestre, Court Almoner, officiated, by order of the King. But Voltaire appears to have been enlightened, at an early date, with regard to this enigmatic personage. In a letter to Madame Fontaine, dated September 1760, he laughs at the credulity of the Parisians, and in another written a little later, to Madame Bassewitz, he asserts that the Chevalier

¹ This answer is included in one of the Memoirs, written by Voltaire, with a view to this work. These documents, the loss of which Oustrialof has wrongly deplored,—for they are in the Philosopher's Library, which is known to have been removed to St. Petersburg,—prove that he laboured very conscientiously, though certain notes and remarks are singular enough, such as the following :—
'Camshatka, grand pays où ni pain ni vin . . . Comment messe?'

d'Auban married a Polish adventuress. In 1781, an inhabitant of the French capital had the curiosity to go to Vitry, and there consult the Parish Registers; the name of the dead woman was given as *Dortie-Marie-Elizabeth-Danielson*.¹

I possess no more information on the subject.

IV

On the 28th of August 1716, after a silence which had lasted six months, Peter, who had left St. Petersburg very early in the year, sent a fresh summons to his son. 'If he desired to remain in the world, he was to prove his princely quality by coming to join his father, and making the Campaign with him. If he preferred to become a monk, the moment had arrived for giving effect to his declared intention; he must choose a Monastery, and specify the day on which he proposed to be received.' According to some writers, the Tsar had already forestalled his son's decision, by choosing an Abbey at Tver, and causing a cell to be prepared for his reception, the arrangements of which strongly resembled those of a prison.² Were the young Prince's friends aware of this fact? Such knowledge would excuse their action. In any case, the decision, taken on their unanimous advice, by the unhappy Alexis, was promptly made. He informed Menshikof that he was starting to join his father, asked for 1000 ducats to pay his journey, and for leave to take Euphrosine with him; obtained another 2000 roubles from the Senate, and set forth towards Riga, on 26th of September 1716. But, at the last moment, he confided his secret intentions to Afanassief, his valet-de-chambre, whom he left behind him at St. Petersburg. He had no idea of joining the Tsar; he was going to Vienna, to place himself under the protection of the Emperor. Kikin had arrived there several months previously, to feel the way,

¹ *Journal de Paris*, Feb. 15, 1771. Consult also, with reference to this incident, the Chevalier Bossu's *Nouveaux Voyages dans l'Amérique Septentrionale*, Paris, 1877 (the first work which alludes to it); *Continuation de l'Histoire Moderne de l'Abbé de Marcy*, by Richer; *Extrait du Mémorial de M. Duclos, historiographe de France*, inserted in *Interesting and Little-known Historical Documents*, Brussels-Paris, 1781; Levesque, *History of Peter the Great*, vol. ii.; *Russian Antiquities*, 1874, p. 360. A clever tale was written on the subject, and a vaudeville founded on the incident was performed at the Théâtre des Variétés in Paris.

² *Messenger Russe*, 1860, No. 13.

and had sent back reassuring tidings; the Emperor would not give up his brother-in-law, and would allow him 3000 florins monthly for his support.

At Libau, the fugitive met his aunt, Maria Aléxiéievna, and at once took her into his confidence. She was alarmed, 'Where dost thou think to hide thyself? He will find thee everywhere!' She did not encourage him, for though ill-disposed towards Peter, on account of his second marriage, she was filled with a terrifying sense of his omnipotence. Alexis did his best to reassure her, found courage himself in the hopes held out by Kikin, and continued on his way.

It was a considerable time before Peter knew what had become of his son. At the first news of his disappearance, he loosed his cleverest bloodhounds in pursuit,—Viesselovski, his Resident at Vienna, Roumiantsof, and Tolstoï. It was a regular coursing match. 'We are on the track, we shall soon catch the brute.' Such terms as these were constantly used by the pursuers. The hunt went on for nearly a year.

On the evening of the 10th of November 1716, the Tsarevitch suddenly appeared at Vienna, in the presence of Count Schönborn, and 'with many gesticulations, casting terrified glances right and left, and rushing from one end of the room to the other,' he claimed the Emperor's help, to save his life. He accused his tutors of having brought him up ill, declared Menshikof had ruined his health by teaching him to drink, said his father desired to kill him by dint of overwork, and ended by asking for beer. The Emperor and his councillors, sorely perplexed, made up their minds to endeavour to arrange the differences between father and son, and in the meantime to conceal the whereabouts of the latter. An old keep in the valley of the Lech, known as the Castle of Ehrenberg, which was destroyed, in the year 1800, by Massena's soldiers, occurred to them as being a safe hiding-place, and thither Alexis allowed himself to be conducted, and shut up as a State prisoner, in the most profound incognito.

It was not until the month of March, in the following year, that he was discovered. It then became known that Roumiantsof and several officers were prowling round the little fortress, and it was reported that his orders were, to obtain possession of the fugitive's person at any cost. The Austrian Government decided to send him to Naples, which, as my

readers are aware, had been ceded to the Imperial house by the Treaty of Utrecht. He was invited to dispense with his Muscovite servants, whose drunken habits compromised his safety. He insisted on keeping one page, and this was permitted for reasons thus explained in a letter from Count Schönborn to Prince Eugene of Savoy: 'Our little page . . . has been at last acknowledged as a female. . . . She is declared to be a mistress, and indispensably necessary.'¹

This page, as my readers will have guessed, was Euphrosine. Testimony as to her origin is most conflicting. She may have been a Finnish peasant, one of Viazieski's serfs, or, like Catherine, the captive of a victorious general. Roumiantsof describes her as tall, stout, with thick lips and red hair. Viesselovski declares she was short of stature. In any case, she was a child of the people, and of a very low class. How did she acquire that absolute mastery over the heart of Alexis, which, so often, lies at the root of human tragedy? This is an eternal mystery. The unhappy prince seems to have inherited that peculiar form of sensuality, coarse to the last degree, and yet not untouched by sentimentality, which appears in most of the great Tsar's love affairs, without a symptom either of his intelligence or of his strong will. At Naples, Euphrosine was to decide his fate.

Roumiantsof first of all followed him to that place, then, returning to Vienna, he joined Tolstoi in an official demand for the surrender of the Tsarevitch's person. The matter was growing serious. The Tsar seemed resolved to proceed to extreme measures, and the army he then had in Poland was very well able to convert the threats, evident in the haughty language held by his agents, into grim reality. Silesia was within his grasp, not to mention Bohemia, where he was certain to be heartily welcomed by the Slavonic population of the country. Charles VI. tried to temporise. He wrote to King George of England, to interest him in the cause of the persecuted son, and endeavoured to delay matters till the end of the campaign then in progress, which did not promise well for the Tsar's arms. Meanwhile, he persuaded the two Russians to try

¹ Oustrialof, vol. vi. p. 95. All the following details have been drawn, except where the contrary is indicated, from the documents published by the above historian, and from the sixth volume of his work, which is entirely devoted to the Tsarevitch and his trial.

what they themselves could do at Naples. Perhaps the Tsarevitch might be induced to put himself into their hands willingly. To Naples they went, and then began a struggle, in which Count Daun, the Viceroy, played a far from noble part. Orders had been sent him from Vienna to facilitate an interview between the Russian Sovereign's agents and the young Prince, and even, if necessary, to force the young man to grant one. He simply opened the gates of the Castle of St. Elmo, where the fugitive had been shut up, to the Tsar's messengers. He suspected his master's great desire to get rid of his protégé, and he was not mistaken. Tolstoï and Roumiantsof soon drove him to assume the extreme consequences of this supposition.

Alexis underwent a regular siege. He was first shown a letter from his father, half threatening and half merciful, which promised him pardon for all his faults, in return for his swift submission. If this was refused, the Tsar would declare war on Austria, and take back his son by main force. Alexis held firm. Then Count Daun's secretary, Weinhart, who had been bought over with a few ducats, dropped a confidential word in his ear. The Emperor had decided to leave him to his fate. Next, Tolstoï, in the course of conversation, said something of Peter's expected arrival in Italy, and Alexis, already terrified, began to tremble. Finally, Daun himself went beyond his instructions, and put forward a threat which had the most immediate effect. If the Tsarevitch desired to remain at St. Elmo, he must make up his mind to part with Euphrosine. Then the serf-girl herself appeared upon the scene. She had been won over by promises or gifts, and made common cause—as she boasted at a later period—with the father against the son. Her tears and supplications strengthened the assault, and Alexis gave in at discretion.

Two conditions, only, he attached to his obedience. He was to be allowed to live quietly on his country property, and there was to be no more talk of parting him from his mistress. Tolstoï and Roumiantsof both agreed, and even undertook to obtain the Tsar's consent to his son's marriage with the girl. He wrote his father a very humble letter, full of repentance for the past, and entreaties that his two final requests might be granted. Then after an excursion to Bari, where he greatly desired to adore the relics of St. Nicholas,

he allowed himself to be carried off. He soon recovered confidence and cheerfulness, and was delighted with a letter from his father, received on the road. The Tsar was willing to allow him to marry Euphrosine, and only stipulated that the ceremony should take place in some out-of-the-way corner of Russia, 'so as to avoid still greater shame.' The mistress was in an interesting condition, and he had been obliged to leave her behind him in Italy; but she was to rejoin him after her confinement, and he had charged one of her own brothers to watch over his treasure. To this individual he writes as follows:—'Ivan Fedorovitch, I salute thee! I beseech thee to watch over thy sister and my wife (this is not yet accomplished, but I have the order) [*sic*], so that she may have no sorrow, for so far nothing has interfered' (to prevent the marriage) 'save her condition, and, with God's help, all will go well.' This letter contains a postscript, addressed to one of the servants who waited on the lady of his affections. It betrays all the anxiety, and all the inherent coarseness, of her lover. 'Alexander Mihaïlovitch . . .' (here come two coarse expressions), 'do all that in thee lies to amuse Euphrosine, so that she may not be unhappy, for everything is going well,' adding an intimation that, because of the lady's condition, 'things cannot be quickly accomplished.'

Euphrosine's amusement does not appear to have been a difficult matter. During her journey along the road whereon the man she had betrayed was travelling to torture and to death, her chief thought was to amuse herself by spending the money—the price of his blood—she had just earned. At Venice she bought thirteen ells of cloth-of-gold, for one hundred and sixty-seven ducats, besides a cross and earrings and a ruby ring. She went to listen to a concert, and was sorry to find neither opera nor play-acting in the town. Did she give a thought to the future—to that dream of love and happiness, free from all care, in a retirement shared with *Aphrosinioushka*, which was the theme of all Alexis' letters? No sign of it appears in the commonplace answers she dictated to a secretary, to which she would add a few lines in her own large, ill-formed handwriting, requesting her lover to send her some national dainty—*caviare*, or *casha*.

One chance of salvation for the unhappy Alexis yet remained. The events which had occurred at Naples had disturbed the Emperor's feelings, and caused him pricks of

conscience. He feared some violence had been done the Tsarevitch, and resolved to see his brother-in-law, on his way through his dominions, and make personal inquiry of him. Suddenly he became aware that the Russian Prince was already at Brünn in Moravia. Tolstoï and Roumiantsof had hurried him through Vienna in the night. They were determined to carry off their spoil. Charles VI. did his duty nobly. The Governor of the Province, Count Colloredo, was given orders to stop the travellers, to see the Tsarevitch *without witnesses*, to find out whether he was returning to Russia *of his own free will*, and, in case of a negative reply, to provide him with means to stay in Austria, and take all necessary measures to ensure his safety. This order, alas! was not carried into effect. A scene took place at the inn, where Alexis was lodged with his escort, which proves the immense increase of moral power already acquired by Russia, under Peter's rule and teaching. Right in the middle of the Emperor's country these agents of the Tsar barred the progress of the Emperor's representative. They threatened, if that were necessary, to oppose access to the Tsarevitch, sword in hand. Colloredo sent for fresh instructions, and this time—alas! again—the Imperial Council pronounced for abstention. Thus Alexis' fate was sealed, and, on the 31st of January 1718, Peter had the gloomy satisfaction of knowing his son was back in Moscow.

V

No one in Europe suspected the nature of the fate to which the unhappy boy was destined, and the weakness of the Imperial Councillors finds a partial justification in this fact. The *Gazette de Hollande* was actually announcing the Prince's approaching marriage with his cousin, Anna Ivanovna. In Russia, on the contrary, the emotion was general and deep. The most contradictory stories had been circulated during the long absence of the Tsarevitch. He had been believed to be betrothed to a German Princess,—imprisoned in a cloister,—put to death by his father's order,—concealed, under a borrowed name, in the ranks of the Imperial army. When the real truth came out, it spread terror amongst his open and his secret partisans. There was no likelihood that Peter would be content with having

regained possession of his son ; there would certainly be an inquiry, a search for accomplices, and sittings in the Question Chambers at *Préobrajenskoïe*. Kikin, the most directly compromised of all the Tsarevitch's friends, endeavoured to induce Afanassief, the Prince's valet-de-chambre, to go to meet, and warn, his master ; but the man, fearing he might arouse suspicion, refused to budge. None of the persons most closely interested ever reckoned, for a moment, on the pardon granted the culprit by the Tsar ; and Peter soon justified the general opinion.

On the 3rd of February 1718, the higher clergy and all the lay dignitaries were convoked in solemn meeting at the Kreml. Alexander was brought into their presence as an accused prisoner,—without his sword. When Peter saw him, he burst into a fury, and overwhelmed him with abuse and reproaches. The Tsarevitch fell on his knees, wept floods of tears, stammered excuses, and once more entreated the forgiveness on promise of which he had allowed himself to be led home, like a sheep to the slaughter. Pardoned he should be, but he had made conditions, and now the Tsar was going to impose his. The guilty and unworthy Prince was solemnly and formally to resign the Crown, and to denounce all those who had shared in his wrong-doing,—who had advised, or assisted him, in his wicked flight. The popular fear had come true. This meant a criminal inquiry, with all its hideous following of torture and execution. In the Cathedral of the Assumption, before the Gospels, and on the very spot where he should, one day, have assumed the Imperial diadem, Alexis abdicated his rights to the throne, and recognised his younger brother, Peter, Catherine's son, to be the rightful heir. Then, in one of the low-roofed chambers of the Kreml, where his father shut himself up with him alone, he gave up the names,—all those he could call to mind, all those which corresponded, in his terrified memory, with the recollection of any encouragement, with any sign of sympathy, even with any affectionate word, dropped in the midst of that mental crisis which had driven him into flight.

He was warned that one single omission, or reticence, would cost him the benefit of his confession.

Kikin's was the first name given, then came *Viaziemski*, *Vassili Dolgorouki*, *Afanassief*, and many others. Even the Tsarevna Maria herself was mentioned, on account of that

meeting at Libau, and in spite of the reserve she had then manifested. At each fresh name, Peter yelled with fury. Until 1714, Kikin had been one of the most intimate members of his circle,—Weber had, on more than one occasion, seen the Tsar holding him in his arms, '*for over a quarter of an hour.*'¹ Dolgorouki was the only member of the old aristocracy in whom the Sovereign had placed great confidence. Both were at once brought to Moscow, with iron collars round their necks, and the inquiry began.

One thing was soon proved, that no understanding as to any fixed aim had ever existed between Alexis and his friends. There was not the shadow of a conspiracy, properly so called. The foreign diplomats' reports to their Governments, almost unanimously expressing a contrary view, must have arisen out of a misunderstanding, or been inspired by a base desire to please the Tsar. Alexis may, indeed, as the Dutch Resident affirmed, have had the aristocracy his father had humiliated, the clergy he had stripped, and the people he had crushed under the triple yoke of serfdom, taxation, and perpetual military service, 'on his side.'² But all these were partisans, not conspirators. And, indeed, as a party, their condition was most elementary, there was no organisation of any kind. De Bie goes so far as to speak of two plots, directed simultaneously, and separately, to the same object—the accession of Alexis to the throne, the proscription of all foreigners, and the conclusion of a peace of some kind with Sweden. All this is pure imagination. The Préobrajenskoïé torture-chambers brought nothing of the kind to light. A certain clerk in the Department of the Artillery, named Dodoukin, was called upon to swear allegiance to the new heir-apparent. He replaced this formula by a violent protest; but he was no conspirator, he was a political martyr.³

Kikin, during a stay of several weeks at Vienna, had entered into relations with certain refugees,—the remnants of some former political parties,—a few old *Streltsy*, who had miraculously escaped the massacres of 1698. Besides this, he had kept up intercourse with some members of the Tsar's

¹ Herrmann, *Peter der Grosse und der Tsarevitch Alexis* (Leipzig, 1880), p. 122.

² De Bie's Despatches, Jan. 8, 1717, Feb. 24, and May 10, 1718 (Dutch Archives); La Vie's Despatch, Feb. 26, 1718 (French Foreign Office).

³ Solovief, vol. xvii. p. 216.

own circle, and was intimate with Poklanovski, one of Peter's favourite *Dienshtchiks*, one of those in whose arms he habitually slept. Alexis, just before his flight, had an interview with Abraham Lapouhin, one of Eudoxia's brothers, who gave him tidings of the unhappy recluse. Far from conspiring with his mother, the poor young Tsarevitch had not even known whether she was still alive. Learning her destitute condition, he gave Lapouhin 500 roubles to convey to her. These facts, and some unseemly remarks dropped by the young Prince in moments of anger, or of drunkenness, were the only points of accusation the inquiry revealed against him. Speaking of his marriage with Charlotte, he had complained of his father's counsellors, who had bound him to a 'she-devil,' and swore to be avenged on them. Speaking of them, he said, 'I spit upon them all! Long live the common people! When my time comes, and my father is no longer here, I will whisper a word to the bishops, they will give it to the popes, and the popes to their parishioners, and they will call me to rule whether I will or not.'

None of this was either very wicked or very serious, and besides, when Alexis left Russia, he was firmly resolved to adhere to the abdication forced on him by his father's last attempts on his independence. His depositions on this point never varied, even when he could have had no further object in lying, or in hiding anything. His plan, which his own weakness prevented from carrying out, was to remain abroad, and await the death of his father, after which, he hoped to get possession of the Regency during his brother's minority.

What, then, was the Tsar's object in putting the whole machinery of justice into motion? Probably he scarcely knew himself. Those long-prepared designs, with which he has been credited, for drawing his unhappy son into a sort of maze which should lead him from mistake into mistake, and weakness to weakness, until his own head was placed in jeopardy, are not confirmed by any clear fact, and are contradicted by everything we know of Peter's character.¹ He was not at all the man likely to enter into such calculations. He was most likely led by events, and suited these to his own passions. He seemed satisfied, in the beginning, with the victims supplied by his son's confessions, and by the inquiries

¹ Pogodin, *Trial of the Tsarevitch Alexis*, in the *Rousskaïa Bîzssîda*, 1860, vol. i. pp. 1-110.

which he extended to the convent at Souzdal. Kikin received twenty-five blows with the knout, on four different occasions, and was finally broken on the wheel. Afanassief, whose only guilt, poor wretch, was that he had listened to his master's confidences, had his head cut off. The fate of Eudoxia and Glebof has already been described. Dolgorouki and Viaziemski, whom Alexis specially charged, escaped, on account, probably, of his insistence, with their lives; their goods were confiscated; they were dismissed from their offices, and exiled. Dositheus, Bishop of Rostof, acknowledged that he had foretold Peter's approaching death, and the accession of his son, to the ex-Tsarina. But he addressed these significant words to the *arhires* gathered together in solemn assembly to pronounce his degradation:—'Look into all your own hearts, *carry your ears into the midst of the people*, and repeat what you hear!' He, too, was broken on the wheel, with one of his priests. The heads of the executed persons were set on pikes, and their entrails were burnt. Poklanovski lost his tongue, his ears, and his nose; Princess Trouékourof, two nuns, and a large number of gentlemen,—one of them a member of the Lapouhin family, recently returned from England,—were knouted. That merry gossip, Princess Anastasia Galitzin, who had kept silence after the Abbess of Souzdal had informed her of the relations between Eudoxia and Glebof, escaped the knout, but she was beaten with 'the sticks.' Peter forced his son to be present at the executions, which lasted three long hours, and then carried him away to St. Petersburg.

Alexis believed himself out of the wood, and was more than contented with his own fate. Adversity had hardened his heart. He had no feeling left for any one but his Euphrosine. He wrote to tell her that his father treated him perfectly well, and had invited him to his own table, and expressed his satisfaction at having got rid of the title of heir-apparent.

'We have never thought, as well thou knowest, of anything but living peacefully at *Roshestvienka*. To be with thee, and in peace, until I die, is my sole desire.'¹ This letter may possibly have been written with an eye to the Secret Police, but he was certainly more bent than ever on marrying

¹ Quoted by Kostomarof (*The Tsarevitch Alexis, in Russia, Old and New*, 1875, Jan., Feb.). It does not appear in Oustrialof's work.

his mistress. Before his departure from Moscow, he had cast himself at Catherine's feet, and entreated her to favour his union.

VI

Euphrosine's arrival at St. Petersburg on the 15th of April 1718, roused general curiosity, swiftly transformed into a stupor of astonishment. Could this possibly be the person with whom the Tsarevitch was so desperately in love?¹ The lady was shut up in the fortress, she underwent a certain amount of examination, and then, suddenly, a story went about that the Tsarevitch had been arrested. Up till that time he had remained at liberty, lived in a house close beside the Palace, and enjoyed a pension of 40,000 roubles.² Had the girl's depositions brought new facts to light? None, so far as we are aware. The Tsarevitch, when at Ehrenberg, had written to his Russian friends, to the Senate and the Bishops, to recall himself to their recollection, and he had also written to beseech the Emperor's protection. He had spoken of a mutiny amongst the Russian troops quartered in Mecklenburg, of disturbances in the neighbourhood of Moscow, and rejoiced over the news, which had appeared in the gazettes. At Naples, he had continued his correspondence and his unseemly remarks. He had declared his intention, when he came to power, of leaving St. Petersburg, spending his winters at Moscow, and his summers at Iaroslav, of getting rid of all the ships, and only keeping enough troops for the defence of the country. When he heard of the illness of the little Prince Peter Petrovitch, he had said to his mistress, 'Thou seest, my father does as he chooses, and God does as He wills!' Finally, when he saw the Emperor had forsaken him, he had thought of placing himself under the protection of the Pope.

All this was mere repetition; and Peter himself was so thoroughly convinced of it, that he did not cause Alexis to be arrested for fully two months. The Prince was examined, doubtless, during the interval, as to the details supplied by his mistress, and his examination may have been combined with those coercive methods his father so currently employed.

¹ De Bie to the States-General, April 29, 1718 (Dutch Archives).

² *Sbornik*, vol. xxxiv. p. 331.

He accompanied the Tsar to Peterhof, in May, and the expedition was certainly no pleasure party. Some time later, one of Count Moussin Poushkin's peasants was condemned to the galleys, for having related that when the Tsarevitch had accompanied the Sovereign to his country residence, he had been taken to a lonely outhouse, whence screams and sobs had been heard to issue.¹ However that may have been, Alexis preserved his liberty, till the 14th of June.

On the eve of that day, Peter convoked a fresh meeting of lay and ecclesiastic dignitaries, to whom he presented a declaration appealing to them to judge between himself and his son, whose partial concealment of the truth had broken the agreement whereby mercy was to have been shown him. The Sovereign had evidently contrived to make Euphrosine's depositions a pretext for reopening the trial which had been nominally brought to a close at Moscow. But why did he seek such a pretext? Perhaps he had become aware of the dangers arising out of the ex-heir's position. He had, at a previous period, declared such a position inadmissible. But perhaps, too, he simply yielded to the horrible charm of the murderous procedure he was tempted to set in fresh motion. Willingly would I believe that he himself had been caught in the wheels! His inquisitorial tastes, his instincts as a despot, and a merciless judge, were all excited. He thirsted for blood.

The clergy, who formed part of the Court to which he had appealed, were sorely put to it. After five days, they got out of the difficulty by appealing, turn-about, to the Old Testament and to the New. The Old Testament contained precedents for the punishment of a guilty son by his father; others, more merciful, appeared in the New Testament. There was the story of the Prodigal Son, and of the woman taken in adultery. The Senate demanded further information. This doubtless was the answer Peter desired. It was Alexis' death-knell. Never again was the terrible machinery of suffering and death to relax its hold upon its prey!

Alexis appeared once more before the Court, with no further result than a confirmation of his former confessions. It was the same dull and monotonous history of intercourse

¹ *Message Russe*, 1861, No. 21.

with the partisans of the old *régime*, and of hopes common to him and to them. On the 19th of June, the Tsarevitch was put to the torture, for the first time. Five-and-twenty blows with the knout extorted a fresh confession. He had desired his father's death. He had confided this to his Confessor, who had replied, 'God forgive thee, we all desire it!' Ignatief's examination confirmed this deposition. But this, after all, was only a guilty thought. It was not enough. Three days later, the Tsarevitch was confronted with three questions, 'Why had he disobeyed his father? How was it he had not been deterred by fear of the chastisement he must have expected? Why had he thought of obtaining his paternal inheritance by illegitimate means?' Alexis, from that moment, lost his footing in the chasm he felt yawning beneath him. He had only one care,—to shield Euphrosine. We are told he was confronted with her, and heard her speak accusing words, which proved her false to his love. No matter, he loved her—he would love her always, till he died. He accused himself, and everybody else, and steadily refused to implicate her. She had known nothing, she had done nothing,—save give him good advice, which, to his misfortune, he had not followed. All the pitiful agony of his soul shows in his answers, inspired by this one great anxiety. 'I was brought up by women, who taught me nothing but hypocrisy, to which, indeed, I was naturally inclined. I did not want to work, as my father desired I should work. Viazemski and Naryshkin, in their turn, only encouraged me to gossip and get drunk with popes and monks. Menshikof was the only person who advised me well. So by degrees, not only everything about my father, but his very person, became odious to me, and my stay in foreign countries, whither my father sent me for my own good, did not suffice to cure me. It was my own wicked nature which prevented me from fearing his just wrath. Since my childhood, I have been far from the right path, and as I would not follow my father, I was obliged to seek my way elsewhere.'

Tolstoï, who was acting as Examining Judge, was not satisfied with these recantations. He wanted something more precise, some peg on which a trial might be hung. At last he succeeded in making the unhappy Prince acknowledge 'that he would have accepted the Emperor's help to

conquer the Crown by main force.' But when asked whether this help had been offered him, he answered 'No.' And so the inquiry came back to its original point of departure. Guilty intention there may have been, and criminal thoughts, but not a single act. Something had to be done. On the 24th of June, there was a fresh visit to the torture-chamber, and fifteen blows with the knout, which brought forth nothing. The accused had felt great confidence in the turbulent Bishop, Stephen Iavorski, but he had never held any conversation with him. He had been informed by other persons of the bishop's sympathy with his cause. It was hopeless. Nothing more was to be gained either by the knout, or the strappado. Some end must be made.

What was that end to be? There could be no doubt. The idea of having worked in vain was not admissible. No Tsarevitch, who had been given over to the hands of the torturer, could be permitted to come clear out of his trial, and leave his prison, so that all the outer world might read the odious proofs of the paternal iniquity, written on his back by the bloody thongs. But would Peter dare it?

During his struggle with the people of Novgorod, Vassili Bousslaïévitch, the legendary hero of the tenth century, lifted his sword against his own father. His mother, to restrain him, came behind him, and laid hold of the skirts of his garment. The hero thus addressed her,—'You are a cunning old woman; you knew what to do to overcome my mighty strength! Had you approached me in front, my mother, I would not have spared you; I would have killed you like any Novgorod *Moujik*.' Peter belonged to this wild race. He was the last representative of that cycle of terrible warriors, and no one stood behind, to stay his arm. In spite of the emptiness of the testimony collected against him, Alexis had grown to be the very personification, in the Reformer's eyes, of that hostile party with which he had been wrestling, for the last twenty years. It was no son, it was an adversary, a rebel, a 'Novgorod *Moujik*,' who stood before the Tsar. And then, from Moscow to St. Petersburg, the inquiry had already spilt a sea of blood round the chief culprit. Twenty-six women, and men innumerable, had writhed under the lash, and laid their panting flesh on red-hot bars. The miserable servants, who had followed Alexis abroad,—in utter unconsciousness that they were doing

anything except their duty,—had been knouted, given the strappado, and sent to Siberia, because, so the sentence runs, ‘it would not have been proper for them to have been left in St. Petersburg.’ For many months a redoubled reign of terror had existed in the Capital. ‘There have been so many accusations in this town,’ writes La Vie, in January 1718, ‘that it seems like a place of disaster; we all live in a sort of public infection, every one is either an accuser, or an accused person.’ Peter had caught the infection. The blood he had already shed had risen to his head.

A High Court of Justice, composed of the Senate, the Ministers, the great officers of the Crown, and the Staff of the Guard (the Clergy, which seemed inclined to excuse itself, had been dispensed with), was convoked to pronounce the sentence. There were 127 judges; every one knew what verdict he was expected to give, and not one dared refuse his vote to what he guessed to be the sovereign will. One single individual, a lieutenant in the Guard, refused his signature—but he did not know how to write. So the trial drew to its inevitable close—the death-sentence.

Yet the tragedy was not played out. There was to be a final episode, the gloomiest of all, one of the darkest riddles in all history. The verdict was not carried into effect. Alexis died before his father had made up his mind whether he would show him mercy, or allow the law to take its course. How did he die?

VII

Here is the official version: ‘The Tsarevitch, when the verdict was read to him, was seized with a sort of apoplexy. When he recovered his senses, he asked to see his father, confessed his faults in his presence, received his pardon, and, in a few moments, breathed his last.’ Peter, according to documents emanating from the same source, was disposed to be merciful, but, ‘in the midst of this uncertainty and distressing agitation, it pleased God Almighty, whose holy judgments are always just, to deliver the person of the Sovereign and his Empire from all fear and all danger, by means of His all-divine goodness.’ The Prince’s corpse was exposed for eight days,

and every one was allowed to see it, so that all might perceive that he had died a natural death.¹

Some doubt, we thus see, did exist, as to whether the Prince's death was natural. All other contemporary versions of the event betray something far beyond mere doubt, they categorically affirm the contrary. Their only disagreement is as to the nature of his violent end. The Imperial Resident, Pleyer, declares the Tsarevitch was beheaded in his prison, and Scherer goes so far as to mention the name of the executioner, General Weyde. A girl of the name of Krahmer, the daughter of a townsman of Narva, is said to have been employed to sew the severed head to the dead body, and thus hide all traces of the assassination, which fact did not prevent her becoming, in later years, Mistress of the Robes to the murdered man's daughter, the Grand Duchess Nathalie. All Staehlin knew was that she had been employed to dress the Prince's corpse, but he could give no other explanation of her intervention.² Henry Bruce tells the story of a potion intended for the Prince, which General Weyde went himself to procure from a druggist named Behr, who, when he read the prescription, turned deadly pale.³ The poison hypothesis also appears in a collection of anecdotes published in England,⁴ according to which a paper, given to the Tsarevitch, on which the judgment was written, was impregnated with some deadly compound. A letter from Alexis Roumiantsof, of which numerous manuscript copies have been circulated, appears conclusive. In it the writer relates to one of his friends, Dimitri Titof, that the Tsarevitch had perished by his father's order; that he had been stifled with cushions; and that the will of the Sovereign had been accomplished by Boutourlin, Tolstoi, Oushakof, and himself. But the authenticity of this document has been contested, by Oustrialof amongst others, and is certainly doubtful. De Bie and Villebois hold that the Prince's veins were opened with a lancet, but they only speak from hearsay. The most detailed accounts are those given by Lefort, then

¹ Memoir presented to the States General on the 6th of August 1718, by Kourakin (Archives of the Hague): '*The true relation of all that passed with regard to the sentence of the Prince Alexis and the circumstances of his death.*' 1718 (published officially).

² *Anecdotes*, p. 322.

³ *Memoirs*, p. 186. The authenticity of these memoirs is contested.

⁴ *A Select Collection of Singular Histories*. London, 1774. Vol. ii. p. 123.

in the Tsar's service, and later highly placed in the Saxon Legation, and by Count Rabutin, who subsequently replaced Pleyer, as the Emperor's Resident. These only differ on very secondary points. 'On the day of the Prince's death,' says Lefort, 'the Tsar, accompanied by Tolstoï, went to the fortress, and into one of the vaulted dungeons, furnished with gallows, and all the other necessary preparations for applying the knout. The unhappy wretch was brought in, and having been fastened up, he was given numerous blows with the knout, and,—though I am not sure of this,—I have been assured, that his father struck the first blows. The same thing was done at ten o'clock in the morning, and, towards four o'clock, he was so ill-treated that he died under the lash.'¹ Rabutin is more definite in his assertions, and he mentions Catherine. Peter struck his son, and, 'as he did not know how to use the knout, he struck so hard that the poor wretch fell swooning to the ground, and the Ministers thought he was dead.' But Alexis had only fainted, and when he recovered, Peter said angrily, as he moved away, 'The Devil will not take him yet!' He evidently intended to recommence the process. But Catherine spared him that trouble. Hearing the Prince was recovering, she took counsel with Tolstoï, and sent the Court physician, Hobby, to the prisoner, to open his veins. Peter, when he was informed of what had occurred, came to look at the corpse, shook his head as if he suspected what had happened, but said nothing.²

This testimony has the merit of its ghastly agreement with a most indubitably reliable document, the Journal of the St. Petersburg garrison, daily posted up, in the very fortress within which the tragedy was played out.³ In it the following details appear: 'On the 14th of June, a special torture-chamber was arranged in the Troubetzkoï Bastion, in a casemate close to the dungeon in which, on that same day, the Tsarevitch had been shut up. On the 19th, two visits were paid to this chamber, the first from noon to one o'clock, and the second from six to nine o'clock in the evening. The following day a third visit was paid, from eight till eleven, and on the 24th, two more, one from

¹ Herrmann, *Geschichte Russlands*, vol. iv. p. 330.

² *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xi. p. 487.

³ Preserved in the library of the 'Académie des Sciences,' at St. Petersburg.

ten o'clock in the morning till noon, and the other from six till ten o'clock at night. On the 26th, there was yet another sitting, in the Tsar's presence, from eight o'clock in the morning till eleven; and that same day, at six o'clock in the evening, the Tsarevitch died.'

Thus on one point, at all events, we have an evident certainty. Even after his condemnation, Alexis was tortured; and in this matter indeed, his tormentors only adhered to the usual errors of the criminal procedure of the period.¹

But, that being so, it is not easy to understand, in the first place, why Peter or Catherine should have had recourse to other methods to hasten their victim's end, for which the knout amply sufficed; and in the second, the hypothesis that the Tsarevitch's death was hastened by an immoderate use of torture, acquires a great deal of likelihood. Thousands of analogous cases are to be found in the judicial annals of the period, and Alexis, as we know, must have been anything but a tough subject. So early as 1714, he had, according to De Bie, suffered from a sort of apoplexy, which had attacked his left side.² To conclude, the sudden nature of the end, and the probable intervention of some element of violence, whether steel, or poison, or excessive torture, seems placed beyond all doubt, by a very significant incident. De Bie's report of the catastrophe, which, like that of Pleyer, was intercepted by the Russian Government, brought very trying disfavour on its author, and even resulted in a somewhat aggressive violation of his domicile, and his diplomatic position. The information he had collected was made the subject of a special inquiry, which principally turned on the following fact. A carpenter of the name of Boless, the son-in-law of a Dutch mid-wife, named Maria van Husse, was employed in the fortress, while the Tsarevitch was imprisoned there. All the Prince's food was cooked in this man's house. The day after Alexis' death, this carpenter's wife told her mother, who repeated the story to the Resident's wife, that, on the previous day, the Tsarevitch's meal had been served, as usual, at twelve o'clock. She herself had seen the dishes, which did not return from his presence intact. This detail

¹ Brückner (*Der Tsarevitch Alexis*, p. 221) points out that there is no express mention of the Tsarevitch's presence at the sitting of the Torture Chamber on the 26th of June, but I do not think that any one, reading the document, can have the slightest doubt on the subject.

² Intercepted despatch, dated 5th May 1712. Moscow Archives.

had not struck her as possessing any importance. That given it by the inquiry was very great, and most expressive. But the two poor women maintained their general assertion, in spite of some trifling contradictions, during an examination probably accompanied by torture, and they ultimately recovered their liberty.¹ If then, only a few hours before his death, Alexis was able to take food, his death must certainly have been a violent one.

I pass over the endless legends which have given their own colour to the terrible story. The peasants long preserved their belief in the survival of the Tsarevitch, whom they supposed to have miraculously escaped from his tormentors. In 1723, a false Alexis appeared at Pskof, and there was another in 1738, at Iaroslaviets. For my part, I am almost inclined to believe that the material reality of the events which brought about the disappearance of the unhappy Prince, has no very great historical importance. Morally speaking, all the responsibility lies on Peter. The trial, which arraigned a man guilty of mere intentions, leaves us in no doubt as to the Tsar's. He was determined to get rid of his son, no matter how, and he will bear that gloomy mark upon his forehead, to all eternity. His behaviour after the event was enough to put a stop to any attempt at apology. The Journal of the St. Petersburg Garrison, and Menshikof's own private journal,² give us details as to the fashion in which the Sovereign spent the first days after that terrible event, which fairly make one shiver. '27th June (the day after the Tsarevitch's death), Mass and Te Deum for the Anniversary of the Battle of Poltava, artillery salutes in his Majesty's presence. . . . At nine o'clock in the evening, the body of the Tsarevitch was removed from the Troubetzkoï Bastion to the Governor's house.'

'28th June.—At ten o'clock in the morning, removal of the body of the Tsarevitch to the Church of the Trinity, in which it was exposed.'

'29th June.—His Majesty's fête-day. Launch at the Admiralty of a newly-built ship, the "Liesna," constructed after His Majesty's plans. His Majesty and all his Ministers

¹ See the result of this inquiry in Oustrialof, vol. vi. p. 289. De Bic, on his side, confirmed his own report (*Exhibition*, dated 8th August 1718, Archives of the Hague).

² Preserved in the Imperial Archives.

were present at the ceremony; *there was great merry-making.*'

Pleyer also speaks, in his despatches, dated 4th and 8th July, of a dinner given, on the same occasion, at the Summer Palace, and followed by an evening entertainment, and a display of fireworks. When the members of the Diplomatic Body inquired as to what mourning they should put on, the Chancellor replied, that none was to be worn, *as the Prince had died guilty.* And the Imperial Resident affirms that though Catherine showed some signs of sorrow during these disgraceful rejoicings, Peter's cheerfulness never abated. Even this final insult was not spared in the lamentable fate to which Eudoxia's son was doomed,—a very abyss of misfortune, which we can readily conceive to have inspired the deepest and most poignant expressions of feeling, in poetry and art. Kostomarof's very curious study is accompanied by a reproduction of the work of a famous Russian painter—*Peter laying Euphrosine's depositions before his son.*

What became of the mistress? In spite of all affirmations to the contrary, she certainly received the price of her treachery. She was present when the Tsarevitch's possessions were inventoried, and herself received a goodly share of them.¹ Pleyer declares that the Tsar and Tsarina showed her a great deal of kindness, and, according to other contemporary testimony, she married an officer of the St. Petersburg Garrison, with whom she spent another thirty years, in peace and plenty.²

Peter's spirits never flagged. On the 1st of August 1718, a month after the catastrophe, in a letter to his wife, written from Revel, he refers to the event with visible contentment, and in a somewhat sportive manner, claiming to have discovered graver accusations against the dead man than any which had yet come to light. Alexis, he declared, had endeavoured to enter into relations with Charles XII.³ At the close of the year, a medal was struck, by the Tsar's orders, which bore an Imperial crown floating in the air, and bathed in rays of sunlight, streaming through the clouds. Below the device this inscription appeared:—'*The horizon has cleared!*'

¹ Oustrialof, vol. vi. p. 571.

² *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xv. p. 235.

³ Solovief, vol. xvii. p. 232.

Yes! Peter had cleared his horizon, with a thunder-clap. He had beheaded the hydra of opposition; he had broken the spirit of his subjects, under a terror yet more mighty than that with which the trial of the *Streltsy* had inspired them, and he had joyfully taken up his course. Although that dreary trial had not put an actual stop either to his usual avocations, or his pleasures, both had been slightly interrupted. Between the 21st of April and the 21st of June, only twenty-one Ukases appeared, and not a single one was published between the 9th and the 25th of May;¹ while such publications, as a general rule, were of daily occurrence. The dose should be doubled now; he could legislate in safety. He had much more chance of being obeyed than in the past!

But he had stirred up public opinion—outside his own country, at all events—and he never succeeded in deceiving it, in spite of his huge expenditure of official apologies, manifestos, ‘faithful and authentic relations,’ and liberally-paid articles in various gazettes. Forty years later, he was sorely to try the conscience of the least scrupulous of European political writers. In a confidential letter to D’Alembert, Voltaire wrote the following words:—‘The Tsar Peter plagues me; I do not know how to take that matter about his son. I cannot think that any prince deserves to be killed for having travelled about, when his father was doing the same thing, and for having lived with a woman of bad character, while his father had the . . .’ He was less explicit in his communication to the Count Shouvalof. He undertook to refute Lamberty’s view, by means of certain favourable documents, substituted for others possessing less of that quality; yet, he declared, he could not take sides against Alexis without laying himself open to the charge of being a ‘basely partial’ historian—and, carried away by his polemic fervour, he wrote the following magnificent plea for the accused:—

‘After four months of a criminal trial, this unhappy prince was forced to write, that if a powerful revolt had been raised, and he had been appealed to, he would have put himself at its head. When was such a declaration ever taken to have any real or valid weight in any trial? When was judgment ever pronounced on a thought, an hypothesis, a supposed

¹ *Collected Laws*, iii. 193; iii. 211.

case, which never came into existence? Where are these rebels? Who took up arms? Who proposed that the Prince should place himself one day at the head of the revolt? To whom did he mention the subject? With whom was he confronted on this important point? Let us not deceive ourselves! When I tell this story, I shall appear before the whole of Europe. You may be very sure, Sir, that there is not a man in Europe who believes the Tsarevitch died a natural death. Men shrug their shoulders when they are told that a prince of three-and-twenty died of an apoplexy, on hearing a sentence which, he might reasonably hope, would not be carried into effect. And any communication to me of documents bearing on this fatal subject has been carefully avoided at St. Petersburg.¹

Long years after his death, then, the unhappy Alexis found the most eloquent of advocates, and Peter, a most formidable accuser. A perusal of the 'History of Russia' does, unfortunately, convince us that Count Shouvalof ultimately found (not in the St. Petersburg Archives, certainly) arguments which shook Voltaire's conviction, and changed his views. But the counsel's address and formal accusation still remain. They will be, to all eternity, the expression of the public conviction with regard to the great trial, and Peter must bear that burden to the end of time.

I willingly acknowledge that he was not the man to totter beneath it.

He killed his son. For that step there is no possible justification. I have rejected, and do still reject, the argument of a political necessity, brought forward by his defenders. One single fact is its sufficient answer. Peter would not have this son to be his heir. To whom, then, did he leave his inheritance? To utter uncertainty. A Court intrigue threw it into Catherine's hands, and for half a century Russia was a prey to adventurers and to chance. It was for this that the great man set his executioners to work.

Yet a great man he was,—and he made Russia a great country. Herein lies his sole excuse.

¹ Voltaire's Works, vol. xii. p. 255.

CHAPTER IX

PETER THE GREAT'S LAST WILL—CONCLUSION

- I. Peter's death.
- II. The great man's apocryphal Will, and his real Will.
- III. General survey.

I

IT was all very well for Peter to hold the posthumous vengeance of history cheap. His treatment of Alexis was swiftly avenged by fate. I do not believe that, when the Sovereign doomed his eldest son to death, he imitated Abraham, and sacrificed his own flesh and blood for the sake of the future of his country, and the salvation of his work. This idea is disproved by the heedlessness, the reasons for which I have already detailed (see page 460), apparent in his subsequent conception, short-sighted, though powerful, of surrounding circumstances, and especially by that condition of self-absorption in which he lived, which made him incapable of taking any interest in, or even comprehending, a future in which he himself would have no part. Yet, once in possession of the heir he had himself chosen, he must naturally have taken delight in the idea of spending the leisure granted him by the cessation of the war, in shaping the body and mind of the child of his affections, according to his own dream. He was most tenderly attached to this younger boy. But on the 16th of April 1619, less than a year after the death of his elder brother, death knocked at the Tsar's door, and little Peter Petrovitch, Catherine's son, was carried off, after a few days' illness. The heir, now, must be the second Peter, the son of Charlotte, and of the murdered Tsarevitch.

At first Peter seemed to rebel against this death-sentence, which appeared an answer to his own,—and all his circle,

Catherine and Menshikof in particular, must have been equally enraged. Yet the Sovereign let two years slip by without taking any step. It was not till the 11th of February 1722, that a Manifesto appealed to the authority of Ivan Vassilévitich, in sanction of the Tsar's claim to regulate the succession according to his own will. This was the principle of the *Pravda voli monarsheï* (the truth of the Sovereign will), the doctrine of which was simultaneously brought forward in a famous document penned by Féofan Prokopovitch. But any practical sanction of this theory was vainly awaited all through the following years. The only sign the Tsar vouched was somewhat vague, and variously interpreted. I refer to Catherine's coronation.

Meanwhile, the ruler's health had begun to alarm those about him. So early as May 1721, Lefort speaks of an asthma, which caused the Sovereign great suffering, and he was also believed to have an internal abscess. 'Besides these ailments,' adds the Diplomat, 'a fresh one supervened at Riga, which would soon have brought matters to a close, and which was really most unseasonable. God only knows its origin, but it was noticed that one of the hero's ill-kempt pages had the good fortune to fall ill at the same time as his master.'¹ The Tsar had been at the point of death for seventeen hours, and though he was barely recovered, it never occurred to him to spare himself. But it was remarked 'that he performed his devotions with much more attention than was usually the case, with many *mea culpa* and genuflexions, and frequent bendings to kiss the ground.'

Peter's temperament was a singularly robust one, but he had always overstrained it. He had lived the life of two, and even of three, men. In 1722, in the course of the Persian campaign, symptoms of kidney trouble appeared, and increased all through the winter of 1723. He would hardly allow anything to be done for him, and absolutely refused to rest. The irritation caused the sick man by the Mons affair, and by the necessity under which he found himself of removing Menshikof from the head of the War Department, on account of his constant peculation, hurried the progress of the mischief. And all this time he went on making the most excessive demands on his own strength. He told his doctors they were ignoramuses, and drove

¹ Sbornik, vol. iii. p. 332.

Blumentrost, a German, and Paulson, an Englishman, who both urged moderation, out of his presence, with blows from his *doubina*. In September 1724, the diagnosis of his complaint grew clearer. He was suffering from the stone, and this was complicated by the results of certain former excesses, from which he had never properly recovered. He had violent pains in the loins. There was 'a good-sized stone,' and, some days after, 'fragments of corrupt matter,' then tumours formed on the thighs, and began to suppurate.¹ Yet all this did not prevent him from going, in the following month, to inspect the works of the Ladoga Canal, where he slept in a tent on bitter cold nights, and plunged on horseback into the half-frozen swamps.² This visit over, he hurried to the forges at Olonets, and thence to the factories at Staraja Roussa, where he worked like an ordinary labourer. Finally, he insisted on returning to St. Petersburg by water in the middle of November. On the way, near the little town of Lahta, he saw a boat aground, and the soldiers on board her in a very perilous position. He at once went to the rescue, and plunged up to his waist in the water. The crew was saved. But, by the time the Tsar reached his capital, he was in a high fever, went to his bed, and never rose from it again. An Italian doctor, named Lazarotti, suggested tapping, but this was put off till the 23rd of January, and the operation, when finally performed by the English surgeon, Horn, revealed the hopeless condition of the patient.

Peter died as he had lived. He was worn out by exertion, but his last act had been to sacrifice his duty as a Sovereign, to his mania for using his own hands. All the heroic excess, all that was most unthinking, and ill-proportioned, in the ubiquity of his effort, was manifested in the closing incident of his career. He lost sight, as always, of the truth, that the heroism of a sailor, and the heroism of the head of a great Empire, are different in their nature. He saved a boat indeed, and the lives of several men, but he left the great ship and the mighty crew he himself commanded, in mortal peril. Who was to replace him at the helm? No one could

¹ Campredon, 30th September 1724. French Foreign Office.—Richter, in his *History of Medicine in Russia*, vol. iii. pp. 84-94, denies that any of the complications in the Tsar's illness had a syphilitic origin; but the only authority he appeals to is Staehlin's anecdotes.

² Biography of Munich: *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. iii. p. 401.

tell. He had foreseen nothing, he had arranged nothing, and, he showed himself incapable, in the face of death, of that great and crowning exertion of his will and conscience, which his subjects had the right to expect of him. A few days previously, they had seen a sailor at his work ; now all they had before them was a mere ordinary death-bed. His end was that of a devout son of the Orthodox Church. It was not the end of a great Tsar. Between the 22nd and the 28th of January, he confessed, and received the sacraments, three times over ; he gave some signs of repentance ; he dictated orders to open the prison doors. When he received the Last Sacraments, with much contrition, he repeated, several times over, 'I hope,—I believe.' But he said not a word as to the terrible problem which stirred the hearts of all those who stood around his dying bed. He was false to the principle affirmed in his Manifesto, to the omnipotence which his whole life had so loudly proclaimed, and so passionately defended, to his most essential duty. He left no will. That kind of terror and moral weakness which had several times appeared, in the tragic circumstances that marked his life, would seem, in his last great trial, to have wiped out his intelligence and his courage. Campredon mentions that he betrayed great cowardice.¹

On the 27th, at two o'clock in the afternoon, he asked for writing materials, but he could only trace these words, 'Give back everything to—' The sentence was never finished, but it is yet another proof of that summary and rudimentary fashion of settling the most delicate and complex questions, which was one of his too frequent characteristics. A little later, he sent for his daughter Anne, and expressed his intention of dictating his last wishes to her. She hurried to his bedside, but he was already speechless. And while he lay dying, Catherine, who was shedding floods of tears beside his pillow, dried her eyes now and again, and slipped into an adjoining chamber, there to discuss, with Menshikof, Tolstoï and Boutourlin, the methods and conditions of the *coup d'état*, by which the possession of power was to be ensured. At six o'clock on the following morning, Peter drew his last breath, and, within a few hours, a *régime* of mingled gynecocracy and military oligarchy was inaugurated in Russia, under the auspices of the *ci-devant* Livonian

¹ Despatch of 30th January 1725. French Foreign Office.

servant-girl. It was to last till the very end of the century, and it was no thanks to Peter that his work, and the very existence of his country, were not utterly destroyed in the course of this long trial. The fortunes of Modern Russia have proved themselves superior to the genius of their creator.

The death of the great man does not, indeed, seem to have roused very lively nor universal regret. On the mass of the public, the impression seems to have been, to a certain extent, that which Napoleon, in later years, thought his own departure likely to produce. Russia, too, appears to have said '*Ouf!*' Count de Rabutin even speaks of 'general rejoicings.'¹ Féofan Prokopovitch pronounced a lofty panegyric, but the popular sentiment was more faithfully expressed in an engraving of a satirical and ludicrous nature, called 'The burial of a cat by the mice.'² Popular feeling is frequently marked by such fits of momentary indifference and ingratitude, and Russia, since those days, has fully paid her debt to the memory of the most deserving and the most glorious of her children. That no more heartfelt tears than Catherine's should have fallen upon that open tomb, is easily conceivable; there was too much blood upon the ground about it!

II

Peter left no Will. I do not overlook the existence of the document which has been so freely circulated, and so copiously criticised, under that title.³ But, apart from the fact of its possessing no immediate practical value (it contains a far-reaching programme for the conquest of Europe by Russia, and no provision whatever for the hereditary transmission of the throne), the document in question is nothing but a hoax. I am not a very fervent supporter of what is known as historical certainty. My faith has too often wavered, when brought into contact with the elements on which such certainty is generally built. But, in this case, the evidence seems to rest on a body of proof which defies all doubt. Let us first take the moral proofs.

¹ *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xi. p. 497.

² Rovinski, *Popular Russian Engravings*, vol. i. pp. 391-401.

³ Quite lately it furnished a brilliant newspaper writer with the thesis of an argument as to the dangers of the Franco-Russian Alliance (*Libre Parole*, 4th September 1896).

Can you imagine a man who died without having endeavoured to foresee, or provide for, the immediate future of so important a succession as Peter's, giving serious thought to what was to become of Europe, and of Russia, a hundred years after his own death? And that not in any vague fashion, as in the vision of a dream,—I should have believed this possible—but in the most precise and methodical manner, marking out every stage to be covered in the journey. And what stages, too, this strange route unfolds! and how extraordinary the point of departure indicated! Russia, we must not forget, had, at the moment of Peter's death, after eighteen years of desperate effort, vanquished Sweden, *with the assistance of a good half of Europe*, of Saxony and Prussia, Denmark and England. She had not even succeeded in lording it over Poland. She had come into collision with Turkey, and met with disaster. And that was all. Fiery as you may take Peter's imagination to have been, can you imagine or understand that he could regard the conquest of Europe as being in any way, logically or mathematically, deducible from this initial fact?

And the Chevalier or *the Chevalière* D'Eon? My readers know it was he, or *she*, who first communicated a copy of this threatening document to the Versailles Cabinet. The publication of the Memoirs of this enigmatic personage by Gaillardet, in 1836, placed the general public in possession of this astounding revelation. Where did Gaillardet find these Memoirs? In 1836, he was five-and-twenty, and had just collaborated with Dumas in writing 'La Tour de Nesle.' Authentic memoirs written by D'Eon do exist in the archives of the Quai d'Orsay. They have nothing in common, I need hardly say, with those which have been ascribed to him, and they do not contain a trace of any Will whatever. On the other hand, the author's condition of mind strikes us as being evidently and absolutely irreconcilable with his knowledge of the existence of any such document. D'Eon is rather opposed, than otherwise, to any arrangement between France and Russia,—not because he looks on Russia as a dangerous factor, but because he considers her an absolutely unimportant one!

I do not know where Gaillardet found the Memoirs he has chosen to saddle on D'Eon, or rather, I should say, I have a more than shrewd suspicion. I know where he

found the famous Will, and here I come to my material proofs.

The first version of this document appears in a book, *The Policy and Progress of the Russian Power*, published in Paris, by Lesur, in the year 1811. The date of this publication is sufficient proof of its character, and I will add a still more striking detail. Sir Robert Wilson, who acted as British agent with the Russian army, during the campaign of the following year, speaks of the numerous copies of this work which had been found amongst the effects of the Duc de Bassano, the French Foreign Minister.¹ In this work the Will was only represented as *a Summary of secret notes preserved among the private archives of the Russian Sovereigns*. Lesur's work was quickly forgotten, and, until 1836, European literature makes no further mention of the prophetic document. A comparison of certain passages in Villemain's 'Souvenirs Contemporains,' in Count Mollien's 'Memoirs,' in the 'Message to the Senate,' and the 'Memorials of St. Helena,' convinced Berkholtz that the author of the *Summary*, which Gaillardet slightly modified and converted into a *Will*, was no other than Napoleon I.² I will only add one word. In the course of the discussion as to the authenticity of the document, the existence of any copy,—whether furnished by D'Eon himself, or otherwise,—at the Quai d'Orsay, has been strenuously denied.³ This is a mistake. Such a copy does exist, but its position, and its external appearance, render any misapprehension as to its date and origin quite impossible. It is contemporary with the Second Empire, and the Crimean Campaign.

The importance of this discussion is, I am quite willing to admit, very secondary. It has a certain interest, in so far as it concerns Peter's personal characteristics, but it is utterly valueless, as regards the arguments it furnishes, from the more general point of view of Russian power and policy. Peter never wrote one line of the document which has grown famous under his name. That point seems to me, historically speaking, absolutely clear. But he did more and

¹ *Private Diary*, vol. i. p. 258. London, 1861.

² *Napoléon I. Auteur du Testament de Pierre le Grand*, Brussels, 1863. See also on the same subject *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 1865, Nos. 225-227.

³ *Les Auteurs du Testament du Pierre le Grand*, Paris, 1877 (anonymous).

better. The first eleven paragraphs of the *Summary* published in 1811, have been generally accepted as a fairly exact statement of the policy followed by Russia, and the progress of her power, from 1725 onwards. This is the great man's real Will,—a Will not hidden in secret archives, but written in the open day, graven on the face of the contemporary world, with all Europe for its witness. His Will was in his work, and on that work I must now cast a final and comprehensive glance.

III

I do not address myself to this closing portion of my task without a certain feeling of apprehension. At the foot of the mausoleum placed on the spot where, on the day of his burial, the remains of the most unresting man who ever trod this earth, were rested for a space, an ingenious inspiration has set the symbolic image of a sculptor, beside the unfinished figure his tool has chiselled in the marble. The Latin inscription adds its own commentary, instinct with simple sincerity: 'Let the ancient heroes hold their peace; Let Alexander and Caesar bow before him! Victory was easy to men who led heroes, and commanded invincible troops, but he, who never rested till his death, had subjects who were not men, greedy of glory, skilful in the arts of war, and fearless of death, but brutes, scarce worthy of the name of man. He made them civilised beings, though they had been like the bears of their own country, and though they refused to be taught and governed by him.'¹

Ten years later, this first judgment of posterity was reversed at the tribunal of a judge whom we must acknowledge competent. The future Frederick the Great, then Prince Royal of Prussia, thus wrote to Voltaire:—'Lucky circumstances, favourable events, and foreign ignorance, have turned the Tsar into a phantom hero. A wise historian, who witnessed part of his life, mercilessly lifts the veil and shows us this Prince as possessing all the faults of man, and few of his virtues. He is no longer that being of universal mind who knows everything, and desires to sift all things; he is a man, governed by whims sufficiently novel to give them a certain glamour, and dazzle the onlooker. He is

¹ Galitzin, *Memoirs*, p. 118.

no longer that intrepid warrior who neither feared danger, nor recognised it, but a mean-spirited and timid prince, whose very brutality forsook him in seasons of peril—cruel in peace, feeble in war.¹

I will quote no further. The eternal quarrel which snatches the mighty dead from the peace of the tomb began early, round Peter's august memory, and travelled far. In foreign countries, in England, and even in Germany, and notably in France, opinion, as expressed by Burnett and Rousseau, Frederick and Condillac, De Maistre and Custine, and down to Leroy-Beaulieu, has been unfriendly to the Tsar. In Russia, public opinion, and historical criticism,—which, more or less, followed in its wake,—have taken various directions. At first, with the feeling of sudden reaction, came a passionate glorification of that past the Reform had doomed. This is clearly indicated in Boltin's work. The reign of Elizabeth, and more especially that of Catherine II., cut this short, and Golikof's book echoes the concert of enthusiasm evoked by the great Empress's continuation of the reforms of Peter's reign. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the reactionary instinct once more ruled, under the double influence of the French Revolution, and the Napoleonic Hegemony. All revolutionary enterprises were viewed with horror; the national sentiment woke in Russia, as in Germany, and the Slavophile party rose in one country, just as the Germanophile party rose in the other. Peter and his work were both censured. Then there was another sudden change. Opinions began to condense. Certain representatives of the Slavophile school went so far as to modify and diminish the severity of their disapprobation. Peter was no longer held guilty of having turned Russia away from her natural and happiest destiny, by casting her into the arms of a corrupt and foreign civilisation. His fault was held to be, that the precipitation and violence which he himself had rendered necessary, had hurried on, and thus vitiated the nature of an evolution which would have been more slowly, and more healthily, accomplished, without his interference. This is very much the position taken up by Karamzin in his later years. If Peter had not burst on his country like a whirlwind, pitilessly snatching every indigenous seed of culture out of his native soil, and replacing

¹ Remusberg, 13th November 1737. Voltaire's *Works*, vol. x. p. 45.

them by siftings brought together indiscriminately from all the corners of Europe,—fragments of European speech,—rags of European clothing,—remnants of European institutions,—scraps of European customs,—and crumbs from European feasts,—his work would have carried neither fear nor displeasure to any Russian heart. But his unthinking violence, his brutality and cynicism, his attempt to civilise his people by dint of blows from his heavy *doubina*, inspired no one—save an occasional individual here and there—with any desire of instruction, or love of learning. The rest were only terrified and stunned, and remained, for many a year, in motionless stupor and alarm.

At a relatively recent period, a highly-placed Russian official took it into his head to reward the excellent conduct of his peasants by giving them a school. The building remained perfectly empty. And the founder's attempts to enforce attendance, only resulted in driving his dependants to wait upon him in a body, and sue for mercy. 'Master, we have always done our duty, why will you punish us?'

This was the idea of civilisation imparted by Peter to his *Moujiks*!¹

Reduced to these limits, the Slavophile theory closely approaches the view pretty generally adopted by Western criticism. I should be disposed to acknowledge its truth, while denying Peter's personal responsibility, or reducing it, at all events, to the position of a partial constituent. And even as regards this partial responsibility he should, as I think, be granted the benefit of extenuating circumstances. The idea of the Man of Providence, or the Man of Fate, who exercises an arbitrary and decisive action on the march of human events, and the natural development of nations, appears to me pretty generally abandoned, now-a-days, by historical science, and relegated to the rank of romantic fiction. The modern mind has become convinced of the reality of the collective forces, which surround the great protagonists of the drama of human life, and carry them forward. This reality is very evident in the career, and in the work, of Peter the Great. His programme of reform was not his own. Did he stand alone in its execution? I see him brought into power, in the first place, by a party, and then I see him surrounded by a group of men, such as Lefort and

¹ Mamonof, Russian Archives (1873), p. 2503.

Vinnius, who inspired and directed his earliest actions. He did not even fetch these foreigners himself, out of Switzerland and Holland; he found them under his hand, ready to play a part appropriate to their origin and their natural tendency, waiting for their cue. And then all his helpers were not foreigners. Kourbatof, Menshikof, and Demidof were all Russians. But, some will say, how about the Northern War, and its influence on the advance of the reforming movement? I have already recognised it, and I have also been forced to recognise that in this case also, Peter followed a previous current. Long before his time, there had been a Russian movement towards the Baltic. Before his time, too, Tsars had taken up arms. Surely this must have been done because they meant to fight? But, again, how about the personal character and education of the great man? I have also taken these elements into account, but I have tried at the same time to indicate their origin. I have pointed to the *Sloboda*, where the young Tsar received his earliest teaching. Was it Peter who set the Faubourg there, on the very threshold of his ancient capital? I have called my readers' attention to the depths of rugged fierceness, and savage energy, so rooted in the physical and moral nature of the nation from which the great man sprang. And he did not come into existence all alone. Did not Menshikof's character, in more than one feature, closely resemble his? It was almost the story of Sosia over again! And the others,—Romodanovski with his fits of sanguinary rage, and Shérémétief, with his heroic tenacity of purpose! But for the sake of argument, I will suppose Peter to have been a unique and solitary being, bursting upon the world like an isolated phenomenon, falling out of the sky like an aerolite, carrying all the surrounding elements with the rapidity of its fall and the weight of its huge mass. I should still ascribe it to the genius of the people capable of producing such phenomena; I would call up the whole of the national past, and on it I would cast the original responsibility of the catastrophe. But nothing in the history of the community in question, proves it so easily moved, or led, in a direction which it has no desire to seek. Russia has been ruled, since Peter's time, by two madmen, or something very like it. The country did nothing mad. It scarcely wandered from its path. *That* path was traced

but before Peter's time, and its direction has not changed since his departure. The Reformer's work did not cease with the earthly course of his existence. It has continued to develop, in spite of the insignificance, and the occasional unworthiness, of its direct inheritors. It has never altered in character; it is still violent, excessive and superficial. Is any other proof necessary, to make me recognise its origin and descent, and proclaim it the child of the whole Russian nation?

Peter, too, was the man of his own people, and of his own time. He came at his appointed hour. One of the popular songs of that period, relates the melancholy sensations of an obscure hero, suffering from the excess of strength he feels within him, which overwhelms him, and which he does not know how to employ. This is the picture, and the plaint, of a whole nation. The Russia of those days was overflowing with just such a superfluity of physical and moral energy, all of it condemned, by the emptiness of public life, to lie in idleness. The heroic days had gone by, but the heroes still lived. Peter came, to give them the work they longed for. Violent and brutal he certainly was, but let us not forget that he had to do with very different temperaments from those with which we are accustomed to deal, with men whose vigour and power of endurance are almost inconceivable to us. When Bergholz was at Moscow in 1722, he went to see the execution of three robbers, who had been condemned to be broken on the wheel. The eldest had died, after five or six hours of torture, but the two others, who were younger, were still alive, and one of them painfully raised his broken arm to pass the back of his sleeve across his nose,—then, seeing he had spilt a few drops of blood on the wheel to which he was fastened, he lifted his mutilated arm again, to wipe them off!¹ A man served by men of this stamp could do many things, and might rule them to a great extent, but any attempt to run counter to their natural inclinations, instincts or prejudices, by gentle means, was, evidently, not likely to be crowned with success.

Peter was a cynic and a debauchee. That mixture of native savagery and Western corruption so severely blamed by the detractors of his work was most especially evident in his own person. Whence did this come? He was affected

¹ *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xx. p. 540.

by it, long before his first visit to foreign countries. Eudoxia's conjugal misfortunes, and the triumphs of Anna Mons, all date before his great journey. A step across a rivulet, at the very doors of the old Moscow Kreml, brought the young man within the gates of the German Faubourg, where unfortunate fusion of foreign elements was already more than half accomplished. It was aggravated, I will admit, in his own person, but, on the other hand, has not the example of his splendid virtues given his people the means of raising themselves, as he raised himself, above its level?

To conclude, Peter was impatient and passionately violent. In this respect, I am convinced, he was merely the expression, in intellect, character and temperament, of a collective condition of mind. His sudden, fiery, and feverish activity was a manifestation of a generally existing phenomenon. There is nothing astonishing about the fact that he himself did not exactly realise that he was a wave in a rising tide, drawing other waves after him, but himself borne forward by the flood, driven by distant and incalculable forces. This mistake of his has been shared by many illustrious imitators. Even the most clear-sighted of contemporary witnesses may often be deceived. It is far easier to grasp things from a distance. Then the flowing tide, and the march of events, are clearly and visibly defined. This onward course is, to my eyes, clearly marked through several centuries. It is long delayed, and then hurried forward by a variety of causes, completely independent of the will either of one or of several men; and, for this reason, it appears to me, individual and generic responsibility should hardly be allowed to enter into our discussion.

The sudden character taken on by the work of evolution which, after long years of preparation, carried Russia—or, rather, brought her back—into the European family, was the inevitable outcome of the historical conditions of the country. In the thirteenth century, the work of civilisation was suddenly cut short. } It was not till the end of the seventeenth that circumstances smiled on the recommencement of the process, and then, finding the road open, the stream naturally hurried its course, and, naturally also, followed the outlets open before it, without any attempt to form new and special channels. The well-known phenomenon of the harbour bar precisely typifies this event.

What thus occurred in Russia, in moral matters, happens there constantly in the material world. Everything in that country, comes to pass suddenly. The period of active vegetation is much shorter than in neighbouring countries, and this fact has affected the national methods of cultivation. No plough can turn the soil till the May sun has shone upon it, and, less than three months afterwards, the harvest must be gathered in.

The same reason accounts for the violence of the moral evolution to which I refer. The suddenness of any movement, whether the bursting of a dyke by the triumphant flood, or the fall of an avalanche from the mountain side, must always cause a considerable shock. The last reforms—those accomplished in Russia during the current century—possessed, though in a minor degree, the same characteristic. In certain portions of the Empire, the abolition of serfdom took on the appearance of a social cataclysm. Those countries which have been permitted to arrive at a state of superior civilisation without any great shock, or external intervention, by means of a slow internal process, and a peaceful advance along the road of progress, are specially privileged spots on the surface of the globe. In America the process has been a very hurried one. There is little chance of its being carried out in Asia, or in Africa, without a certain amount of violence.

I do not deny that there are certain drawbacks to the system of making forced marches, in the attempt to get abreast of more favoured neighbours. But there are also some objections to being born a Kaffir or a Polynesian, savage.

A highly-gifted writer, who has made a study of the consequences brought on Russia by Peter's hasty procedure, has charged his work with four great faults, moral, intellectual, social, and political.¹ I cannot make myself responsible for the correctness of the calculation, but I am willing to grant that, when the Reformer brought the coarseness of ancient Muscovy into such sudden contact with the sceptical licence of Western countries, he gave birth to a condition of cynicism, which was as revolting to the old Russians as to their European neighbours; that the violence done his subjects by the severity of his laws, the indiscretion

¹ Leroy Beaulieu, *L'Empire des Tsars* (Paris, 1890), vol. i. p. 270, etc.

of his regulations, and the cruelty of his punishments, ended by teaching them hypocrisy and meanness, and that, when he trampled with such utter disdain on the traditions, the institutions, and even the prejudices of his country, he brought about a mental condition which was the not unnatural forerunner of modern Nihilism. This is the moral drawback of his work. Further, I am willing to admit that the too rapid and excessive development of the faculties of assimilation may, from the intellectual point of view, have strengthened that lack of individuality and personality which were rooted in the nature and history of the Tsar's subjects, and quite wiped out any power of initiative they may have possessed. I will admit too, that, as regards social matters, the necessarily superficial nature of such forced cultivation may have produced a dangerous division between the upper and the lower classes of society, the former becoming impregnated with those Western habits and ideas, to which the latter remained obstinately impervious. And finally, from the political point of view, I will confess that the sudden introduction of a foreign form of Government may have prevented the organisation thus imposed on the country from harmonising with the natural tendencies and aspirations of the nation. All this, and a great deal more, I am willing to concede. I will go so far as to say, with Custine—who, in this respect, has the exceptional good fortune of agreeing with a Russian writer, the poet and historian Soumarokof, whose later days brought a revulsion against his original and optimistic view—that it was no very brilliant victory to 'convert men who did not wear powder into brutes covered with flour,' and to turn 'bears into monkeys!'¹ I will say, with Levesque, that the idea of endeavouring to reconcile industrial, commercial, and intellectual progress, with the aggravation of the serf system, was most unfortunate. Joseph de Maistre has declared, 'that men must crawl to knowledge, it cannot be attained by flight.' I will grant this too. Numa, the philosopher further observes, never dreamt of cutting the skirts of the Roman toga, and no mistake can be greater than to attempt to reform a people by means which betray a lack of the respect due to it. To this I am ready to agree. Kostomarof himself, in spite of his enthusiasm, confesses that

¹ Custine, *La Russie*, Paris, 1843, vol. iii. p. 382. Soumarokof, *Der Erste Aufstand der Strelitzen* (Riga, 1772), p. 15.

the method whereby the national hero sought to force his reforms upon his people—the lash, the axe, the tearing out of nostrils—was not that best fitted to arouse, in the hearts and minds of his subjects, those feelings and ideas, that civic courage, and honour, and sense of duty, most likely to aid in acclimatising his work in Russia. And here again, I side with Kostomarof, and against Peter.

But, does not all this amount, in fact, to an assertion that it would have been better for Russia if there had been no Tartar invasion in the thirteenth century, and if the country had been left free, during those which followed, to work out its own civilisation, quietly and undisturbed?

As for those 'seeds of original culture' which Peter's reform is held by those who condemn him to have overlooked, and even destroyed, this question is much like that of Russian art, as seen in the buildings of the Russian Kreml. All discussion, archæological and æsthetic, is checked by the difficulty of discovering any original architectural or ornamental features, side by side with those numerous instances in which form and decoration have been more or less evidently borrowed from Byzantine or Roman Art, from that of Ancient Greece, of the German Middle Ages, or of the Italian Renaissance. I do not believe that the Reformer can be accused of any considerable waste of any very precious material. A certain historian blames Peter severely for having done away with Ordin Nashtchokin's system of administrative autonomy.¹ But was this autonomy—which was, moreover, exceedingly restricted and ephemeral in its application and existence—a very *Russian* product? Was not Ordin Nashtchokin himself, even in those early days, a lover of the West? And further, how can Peter fairly be accused of having repudiated this legacy from a period which had only just elapsed? He began by making it the cornerstone of his own building! He may not, perhaps, have derived every desirable benefit from its use, but was that likely? Nashtchokin's experience does not lead us to that conviction. And putting that aside, what essential point can he be said to have slighted or suppressed? He never disturbed the *Samodierjavié*, and the only change he made in his *Tchinovniks* was to dress them in European garb.

It has been said that the net cost of his reforms greatly

¹ Goltsef, *Laws and Customs*, St. Petersburg, 1896, addenda, p. 22.

exceeded their value. They did indeed cost dear. In a country where the usual rate of payment did not exceed four copecks a day—twelve roubles a year—the yearly tax suddenly rose to one rouble per head for the whole population. And this money tax was the lightest of the burdens the people had to bear. In 1708, 40,000 men were sent to the building work at St. Petersburg. Every one, or almost every one, seems to have perished at the task, for, in the following year, a fresh and equally numerous levy of labourers was called for. In 1710, only 3000 fresh workmen were demanded, but, in 1711, a first levy of 6000 men became necessary: this was followed by another of 40,000, and, in 1713, this last levy was again repeated. These labourers, until they disappeared into the pestilential marshes which lay all round the new capital, each received half a rouble a month. They lived on the country, some of them by begging, and others by absolute robbery. Meanwhile, the army swallowed up a goodly number of human lives. In 1701, all insolvent debtors were delivered over to the recruiting officers—creditors might lose their money, but the country gained soldiers. In 1703, all peasants, who were owned by officials or merchants, were ordered to send every *fifth* man to the army. In 1705, in the month of January, one recruit was levied on every twenty houses; the same thing took place in the month of February. There was another levy again in the month of December, besides a levy of dragoons on the relations of the Chancery officials. To sum it up, taxation rose, in the course of the great reign, in the proportion of three to one, and the diminution of the population was calculated at twenty per cent.¹ This does not allow for the terrible holocaust offered up on the altar of civilisation, in the prisons and torture-chambers of Préobrajenskoïe, on the Red Square at Moscow, and in the dungeons of the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul.

But Russia has paid the price, and what Russian, looking at the results acquired, would now desire to cancel the sanguinary bargain and convention, between his ancestors and their terrible despot? The country paid, and, in 1725, it was none the poorer. For forty years, until the accession of Catherine II., the great Spendthrift's successors lived on

¹ Milioukof, p. 244, etc.

his inheritance, and Peter III.'s widow found means, out of the residue, to make a figure in Europe which will not be swiftly forgotten.

Again,—and this, of all the criticisms on Peter's work, is the one which moves me most.—That work may have been conceived, I will admit it, from an exclusively utilitarian point of view, without due respect to the other and nobler elements of culture and civilisation. The Russia of Peter the Great is a factory and a camp,—she is not the focus of light and heat, whence the noblest discoveries, and the most brilliant researches, in science and art, beam on the world, shedding those noble influences which do honour to the history of other nations, and are their greatest claims to glory. And I think that the pessimistic view of the Slavophile party has been prompted by this consideration, suggested, in 1764, to Betski, who collaborated with Catherine in artistic matters, and pondered over, in later days, by Shtcherbatof. Peter made his Russians a nation of officials, of labourers and of soldiers; not, in any sense, a nation of thinkers and of artists. Practical and matter-of-fact as he himself was, in the most eminent degree, he taught, or tried to teach them, the use of the improved weapons he gave them; he taught them to read and count, but he never attempted to inspire them with splendid impulses of heart or mind, with the pursuit of any humanitarian ideal, of the worship of beauty, nor even with instincts of kindness or of pity. But this, on reflection, may possibly appear natural, and consequently justifiable. Those historical, geographical, and climatic conditions to which I have previously referred, as having surrounded the birth and development of Russia, have made her existence one perpetual warfare. Without natural frontier, and under a most inclement sky, the country has struggled, and does still struggle, with a special coalition of hostile elements, with men and things, with neighbouring nations, and with great Nature herself, for the defence of her soil, and the security of her daily bread. The development thus attained, by the most petty of all instincts, that of self-preservation and the preponderance acquired by material cares, may easily be understood. To this has been added a tendency to physical indolence and mental torpor, followed by sudden fits of fierce combativeness, the natural result of long periods of unavoidable inactivity. In this mould Peter and his work

were cast. In his own way he was a great idealist. He sacrificed everything else, to his dream of a Russia not only capable of defending and increasing her material patrimony, but worthy, some day, to claim the intellectual inheritance of Italy and Greece. It was only a dream. Reality soon forced him back into the original mould, into the fight for existence,—and a fighter he remained,—his chief and inevitable anxiety, to provide himself and his people with muscles and weapons, for work and warfare.

Will this mould be ever broken? The most clear-sighted prophets have so frequently failed to forecast the destiny of the great Empire, that I will not attempt to follow their example. Europe, so far, is neither Republican nor Cossack. Before that comes about, modern Russia may perchance have realised the desire of her great creator, and borrowed the only real and indestructible elements of European power and greatness.

June 14th, 1896.

THE END